

God's Salvation Plan

Through the ages God has progressively revealed his salvation plan: first in the Old Testament, then in the New; and then through later messengers. "This is what the LORD says ... See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:16,19). Each scriptural messenger declared the insight God gave him/her as they understood it, within their language, time and culture; and God blessed and used their efforts. Yet not one of them received all of the plan; just the facet or facets God gave them.

Although God has always had, and still has, only one salvation plan, we have many: Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, and on through the alphabet! From the beginning, God intended his messengers to proclaim his message, not just to their own people group, but to others as well.

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

—Genesis 12:1-3

The apostle John, quoting Jesus in John 4:14 said: "*whoever* drinks the water I give him will never thirst; and the apostle Paul wrote: "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that *one died for all* ... (2 Corinthians 5:14). So the Scriptures are clear: God's Salvation Plan is for all.

Yet, before the New Testament closed, different ideas began to divide God's people over what his plan required; such as the difference between the Apostles Peter and Paul over whether God's message applied only to one's own group, or was to be shared with others. Until Peter became convinced that Paul was right in sharing the Gospel with Gentiles, he felt it was the exclusive right of his people. Then such differences multiplied as the Early Church struggled to decide which books claiming divine origin were to be included in the Canon; with no single set being accepted by all of God's people to this day!

Another significant facet at the root of this problem of divisiveness among God's people, is the tendency for God's messengers to take the insight revealed to them to such an extreme that it destroys the balance inherent in God's Salvation Plan. Such errors, as in the cases of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and others, are dealt with in our article, "Balanced Insights"; available on our Home Page listed below.

Now, however, a new day has dawned: God's Salvation Plan has been finally and fully revealed! Does this sound like an audacious claim? Yes, and the only way to prove or disprove this seemingly audacious claim for these insights is to follow the example of the Bereans. Acts 17:11 says they "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true;" but let me explain.

Before outlining the plan, let me explain how the Lord revealed this plan to this writer. After years of service in other ministries, I became the Secretary for the American Bible Society and the British and Foreign Bible Society in eight Bible Land countries. There I enjoyed such good cooperation and fellowship with Christians from across the spectrum of churches, despite our different, even conflicting doctrines, that I determined to search the Scriptures for an explanation; and when time permitted began my search.

It was then that God made his plan clear to me, and I saw that it applies to everyone, not just to us "Christians." Otherwise, there would be no place in the Kingdom for those like the Wise Men, the Samaritan woman, the Roman Centurion, and others in the New Testament, who trusted Christ but never became Jewish proselytes,

God then miraculously opened the way for me and some colleagues to establish this In Christ Fellowship ministry that is designed to challenge all to hear God's message for us all today. The following challenge occurs seven times in Revelation chapters 2 and 3: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." If this plan is just our words, so what! But if they are what the Spirit is saying to all of us, we dare not refuse to hear—and obey!

The Church has been much more active when its various traditions have been in competition; so it is understandable that God has allowed traditions to compete through all these years. But now it is surely time for these divisions to be abridged; and we believe that anyone "in Christ" can adjust to these insights without altering any biblically-sound element of their currently-held tradition. What a tragedy it would be for your tradition or mine to not have a part in sharing these marvelous insights into God's Salvation Plan!

Jesus referred to this plan as the "message" in his Upper Room Prayer when he prayed that his followers would proclaim it so "*the world may believe that you have sent me*" (John 17:20–21); and Paul, in Ephesians 4:11-13, called this message "*unity in the faith*," and predicted that we would see this day.

If you would like to follow the Berean's example, we suggest one of two ways: first, read the very brief, summarized version of the plan provided on our Home Page entitled, "Good News!—Final Edition Is Finally Here!"; or you may, of course, continue reading/studying this article which contains all the insights in the plan, with scriptural passages quoted supporting each aspect of it. Either way, we believe you will also find the much briefer article, "You Can Be "In Christ" helpful.

We have also included among the articles on our website one entitled, "Bible-study Fellowships," that will no doubt be of interest and a real help if you plan to take the insights in this Plan seriously enough to share them with others; as we hope you will.

Salvation Terms

Because many of the doctrinal differences between groups are based on different ideas on the meanings of the terms "sin," "faith," and "grace," we deal with biblical re-definitions of these terms before outlining the plan. A list that defines other, related terms, is provided in our article entitled, "Biblical Terms."

Sin: Some refer to sin as just *hamartia* (in Greek)—"missing the mark" or "coming short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Others refer to sin as two-fold; adding to *hamartia* John Wesley's "voluntary transgressions against a known law of God"; but the Bible teaches that sin is three-fold!

1. The essence of sin is self-centeredness: being "concerned solely with one's own desires, needs, or interests" (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition). In the two great commandments, Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27).

These call for a proper self-respect; but placing self-interest ahead of God's will is the idolatry of self-worship which we have inherited. "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalms 51:5); and "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Sin is expressed in recognized sins, the second aspect of the sin problem.

2. Recognized expressions of the sin nature are:

- (a) sins of commission; not only in "word, thought, and deed," as commonly taught; but also in "feelings" and "attitudes" that may not rise to the level of these other

expressions; and

- (b) sins of omission; failing to express right feelings, attitudes, thoughts, words and deeds.

Paul gives a broad list of recognized sins of commission:

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

—Romans 1:29-31

Then John is clear on the sinfulness of recognized sins of omission—failures to do what is right: “Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; neither is anyone who does not love his brother” (John 3:10).

3. Unrecognized effects of the sin nature, the third aspect of the sin problem, are also by commission and omission. Addressed to Christ’s followers, 1 John 5:16 reads: “If anyone sees his *brother* commit a *sin* that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life”; and in Hebrews 9:7 we read that annually the Old Testament High Priest offered a sacrifice “for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.” Then in Leviticus 4:27-28 we read: “If a member of the community *sins unintentionally ... he is guilty*. When he is made aware of the *sin* he committed, he must bring [an] offering for the *sin* he committed.”

Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, “who had no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21), sacrificed himself for us, and intercedes with the Father for our sins of ignorance; for “he has a permanent priesthood. So he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (Hebrews 7:24-25). He covers these sins of ignorance until the Holy Spirit reveals to us that we have sinned. These sins, now recognized, must be confessed and forsaken, and God must be trusted to cleanse what he has mercifully covered until then.

There is a tremendous difference between the recognized expressions and the unrecognized effects of sin. Numbers 15:30 reads: “But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the LORD, and that person must be cut off from his people.” God does not tolerate deliberate sin among angels or men. This is in direct contrast to his mercy in covering our sins of ignorance.

There is also a tremendous difference in how each of these types of sin is to be dealt with. For recognized expressions, we are to “stop doing wrong, learn to do right!” (Isaiah 1:16-17); but God’s mercy doesn’t demand this until by grace we see that our sins of ignorance are wrong.

Faith: As with “sin”, “faith” needs to be more biblically re-defined. Because faith “is the gift of God,” and Hebrews 12:2 reads: “Jesus [is] the author and perfecter of our faith,” some deny man’s personal responsibility for exercising faith. But the New Testament speaks of “our faith” 3 times, “their faith” 13 times, and “your faith” 39 times.

Unless electrical current flows through an instrument, back to the power source, no power flows. Just so, unless our faith allows the grace of God to flow through us, back to him for his glory, no grace flows. God is the source of grace: our faith controls the switch. Salvation involves action by both God and man!

Some think faith is merely intellectual belief. James refutes that idea: “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder” (James 2:19). A biblical understanding of “faith” recognizes that it is three-fold; requiring intellect, emotions, and will. Reliance on only one or two of these aspects of faith falls short of the biblical standard.

Faith requires doctrine (intellectual belief), and a personal relationship with God (an emotional experience), we are “raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, [so that] we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:4). And unless this belief and experience enable us to live this new life of obedience to the known will of God, we have no saving relationship with the Lord. James 2:20 reads: “You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless.”

Faith in Christ opens the flow of grace that enables us to believe, makes possible our fellowship with God; and our obedience to his known will; so that we can not only be acceptable in his sight when he returns; but can share in his glory even now: “He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Matthew 5:45).

The belief, trust, and obedience of scriptural faith for salvation are as inseparably linked in God’s plan of salvation as are the doubt, distrust, and disobedience of sin. We now outline the works of grace in God’s Salvation Plan.

Grace: It’s usually defined as the “prevenient, unmerited favor of God”; meaning that it is available before any action on our part. While that is true of grace, it is also true of the love of God, of his mercy, and of his providence; so this is not an adequately precise definition of “grace.”

These other manifestations are available regardless of our response. Jesus said: “Your Father in heaven ... sends his rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”; (Hebrews 2:4); but “grace” is different! It requires a response of faith in Jesus Christ; and in contrast to these other blessings, grace is specifically for salvation. The Greek word for “grace,” *charis*, means “favor” and “action”; so grace means not only God’s favor; but his actions in providing our salvation!

This grace is applied, not in one work, nor in two; but in three; each work solving one aspect of the sin problem. As more fully outlined later, first he makes us new creations in Christ, forgiving us and giving us victory over the expressions of sin; then he makes us “holy and blameless” when we are freed from the defilement and presence of the Evil One within; then he transforms us into “God’s Image” when we see the Lord.

Those who depend for salvation on membership, rituals, assent to creeds, and/or any other such “works” miss their need for grace; those who believe that once we are “in Christ” we are eternally secure, greatly underestimate the exceeding sinfulness of sin; and those who rely on being fully sanctified, without “pressing on” toward the third work of grace, also underestimate sin’s power, for they still commit sins of ignorance.

Then, those who teach “tongues-speaking” as the “third work of grace,” miss the scriptural truth that God’s gifts are “gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (2 Thessalonians 2:14). This truth is also made clear in 1 Corinthians 12:11, where, also referring to God’s gifts, we read: “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines”; whereas every work of grace is available to all.

Each of the three “works of grace” taught in the Scriptures involves several “acts of grace”; some being continuing processes, others culminating in crises. This biblically-sound understanding of grace as “crises-in-process,” rather than as just crises or just process, solves long-standing, unnecessary, non-biblical differences in the traditions among and within Bible-believing groups.

In Christ

The term “new birth” occurs only once in the Bible, and “born again” only three times. These terms refer to the crisis act but not to the other elements of this experience. The term “in Christ,” occurring ninety-three times, is more inclusive and indicates that this experience is to be a current reality, not just a past event—an important, much needed distinction! Notice how current it is to be “in Christ,” as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in *Christ*, he is a new *creation*; the old has gone, the new has come!”

This experience is gained through a series of “crises-in-process” acts, which are: Conviction, Repentance, Confession, Forgiveness, Conversion, Regeneration, Adoption, Initial Sanctification, Justification, Righteousness, Witness of the Spirit, and Growth in Grace. The sinner who responds in faith to God in Christ is prepared for and enabled to experience each of these acts.

Conviction: Awareness of our sins is made possible by the Holy Spirit focusing Christ’s light upon us. John said of Jesus, “The true light that gives light to *every man* was coming into the world” (John 1:9). and Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8).

Conviction was also experienced in the Old Testament. The Psalmist wrote: “You know my folly, O God; my guilt is not hidden from you” (Psalms 69:5); and Isaiah wrote: “Woe to me! ” I cried.“ I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty” (Isaiah 6:5).

Repentance: Sorrow for our sins. John the Baptist and Jesus both preached: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near”;(Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17); and in the Old Testament we read: “If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me” (Jeremiah 15:19). Also we read in Ezekiel 18:30-32:

Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

Repentance is based on our awareness of the awfulness of sin. Paul recognized that his sin was “utterly sinful” (Romans 7:13). Conviction is general; but repentance is for particular, recognized sins.

Confession: The Psalmist confessed, “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Psalms 51:3-4); and, 1 John 1:9 reads: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

In confession we have access to God the Father through Jesus his Son: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”;(1 Timothy 2:5); and this confession is made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit, who brings to mind now our known sins; will bring the others to mind later; and will enable us to deal with them as we continue to walk in the light.

James 5:16 teaches us to “confess your sins to each other”; which certainly should be sins of ignorance, now recognized. The word “confess” is also used in another sense: witnessing to our faith in Christ: “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved ... ” (Romans 10:9-10).

Forgiveness: The passage quoted just above under “Confession” also applies to forgiveness: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all

unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9); and Hebrews 8:12 reads: “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

We feel guilt only for recognized sins, and it is these sins that are forgiven and for which guilt is removed. Our unrecognized sins of ignorance are covered by God’s mercy, and it is only after we are made aware of them, then confess and forsake them, that we can trust God to forgive them.

Being forgiven, we are to forgive others. Jesus said: “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:14-15). Later he further warned: “Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (Matthew 12:32). What a warning!

Conversion: This is the turning point in our relationship with God. The preceding elements are preparatory, the following ones are fulfillment. The previous elements can only be experienced when by our firm resolve, enabled by the Holy Spirit, we decide to make the change in life’s direction that God has always required.

Joshua wrote: “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD”; (Joshua 24:15). Peter said, “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19); and Paul said, in Acts 26:20

“I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds” “Turn,” then, is the key to conversion, where it means reverse direction completely!

Regeneration: It’s our birth-moment as new creations. John 3:3 reads: “I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Our first parents doubted, distrusted, and disobeyed God—and spiritually died. Now, by believing, trusting, and obeying his Word, God gives us a new life.

This is not, as some teach, by water baptism; which is an important act of obedience and witness; but is not always possible. The thief on the Cross, and those who foresee their death just in time for repentance will be saved; so baptism is not required for salvation; nor is it the means of our regeneration.

Adoption: “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). Also,

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

—Romans 8:17

In Luke 15:25-32 the elder brother was furious that the father welcomed the Prodigal home; but what a contrast is our acceptance by Christ our Elder Brother! He welcomes us home, and In Matthew 6:9 taught us to pray “Our Father”!

Initial Sanctification: To “sanctify” is “to set apart to a sacred purpose,” and “to free from sin” (Merriam, op. cit.). Paul wrote: “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord” (2 Corinthians. 6:16-17). This call is to a separate life-style, not to isolation from others. That would contradict the Lord’s command to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Making disciples requires contact.

Sanctification sets us free in two ways: cleansing us from defilement, and freeing us from bondage. Cleansing is a major Old Testament theme, and Jesus said to his disciples even before Pentecost, “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you” (John 15:3). Also,

we have freedom from the bondage of sin now, as Paul wrote: “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life” (Romans 6:22).

This marvelous cleansing from the guilt of sin’s expressions through Christ’s word, and this wonderful freedom from bondage to the Evil One, are forerunners of the deeper cleansing and greater freedom that are performed at Pentecost.

Justification: “The act, process, or state of being justified by God” (Merriam, op. cit.); and to be “just” is “to prove or show to be just, right, or reasonable” (Merriam, op. cit.). Justification, therefore, is the judicial decision by God to accept the sacrifice of Jesus as satisfaction for the penalty for sin on behalf of those with faith in Christ. Paul wrote about this to the Galatians and to the Romans: “The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham ... ” (Galatians 3:8), and “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... ” (Romans 5:1).

Righteousness: Being made “righteous,” that is being made capable of “acting in accord with divine or moral law; free from guilt or sin” (Merriam, op. cit.). After dealing with the sinfulness of man outside of grace, Paul wrote, in Romans 3:21:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the law and prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

A dangerous, widely-held error is based on Romans 3:10 that reads: “There is no one righteous, not even one.” By quoting this verse out of context, it is applied to all men, directly contradicting this testimony by Paul, and the many biblical passages that speak of righteous people! By reading this verse in its immediate context, verses 9–12, it can be seen that these words refer to persons in their unredeemed state, outside of grace,

We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.

This error also makes our Lord’s words in Matthew 5:45 meaningless. There we read that God sends rain “on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

A related error centers on whether righteousness is imparted (actual), or imputed (ascribed to us). It is both: those in Christ are actually righteous; but are mercifully covered by grace in those areas that are to be made actual in the second and third works of grace.

Witness of the Spirit: Depending on personality, previous experiences of grace, and cultural factors, this witness may not be sensed immediately. As one writer put it: “Some seekers are ‘waiters,’ others ‘diggers,’ and still others are ‘takers’ of this assurance.” It comes when faith “takes hold” of God’s promise. “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Romans 8:16). so “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith ...” (Hebrews 10:22).

Growth in Grace: Peter urged this in 2 Peter 3:18: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.” This growth is seen in:

- our changed life; for “as Christ was raised from the dead ... we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:4).
- the maturing of the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).
- our progressive victories over formerly unrecognized sins of ignorance; and our oral testimony: “They overcame him [the accuser] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (Revelation 12:11).

But these evidences are impeded by the remaining sin nature and more unrecognized sins; causing:

- unintentional failure to always let our light shine as we should;
- slowness in the maturation of the fruit of the Spirit;
- dullness in awareness of some unrecognized sins; and
- unintentional failure to testify or witness at times.

These hindrances require discipline, time, and further works of grace. If there is no growth in grace, a prayerful application of this passage is in order: “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves ... ” (2 Corinthians 13:5). The Psalmist, feeling his need for help, prayed: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalms 139:23-24).

We do well to follow his example!

Holy and Blameless

In 1 Thessalonians 2:10 Paul wrote: “You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.” Many have difficulty in believing that we can be “holy” and “righteous,” but Paul’s witness here and elsewhere clearly indicates that this is possible. Others have taken their claim to this experience too far; claiming that it makes them “sinless,” whereas Paul says “blameless”—a tremendous difference!

A careful study of the first letter to the Thessalonians should remove any doubt about this experience being a second, distinct work of grace. In verse 1:3 Paul wrote: “We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

They sure were “in Christ,” weren’t they! He then mentions having heard that they had faced some trials, and wrote in verse 3:5: “I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.” How can some people say that once you are saved, you can’t be lost? Paul thought these believers could be lost!

Then he continued: “But Timothy has just come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love” (3:6); so he wrote (3:10): “Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.” This sounds like they need another work of grace! Then he proceeds to explain what he is praying for:

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

In the next chapter he explains further in these words: “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thessalonians. 4:7); and in the next chapter he explains this even more fully: “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be *kept blameless* at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it (1 Thessalonians. 5:23-24).

The only way to be “kept blameless” at the Lord’s coming is to have been made blameless before then! This prayer also agrees with the following passage, which makes it clear that this experience is not a recommendation, but a command of God!

Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed [for the third work]. As obedient children [now], do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

John also speaks of this holy life in 1 John 1:7: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” The word “walk” indicates continuous action; the Greek tense for the word “purifies” specifies a present and continuing activity; and the word “all” in this context refers to all of the sin nature; so this passage clearly and definitely refers to God’s “crises-in-process” grace that enables us to live a holy and blameless life.

Those walking in the light include those who have not received light on this second work of grace when death occurs, or Christ comes. Like the penitent thief on the Cross, they will have holiness sovereignly imparted; for “without holiness no one will see the Lord” ... ” (Hebrews 12:14).

This does not make this a choice between a “higher” or “lower” road; but makes the experience of heart holiness a divine imperative! It is amazing that so many “in Christ” do not seek this experience that God’s grace imparts when we yield ourselves to him as “instruments of righteousness!” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Psalms 76:10 (KJV) can give comfort to the loved ones of those who had even seconds to repent before dying in accidents, wars, or other so-called “natural disasters.” It reads: “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee.” In such cases, as well as in man-made “terrorist acts,” they, and children who are not yet morally accountable, and those who are incapable of making moral choices will no doubt praise God forever for his sovereign grace; because they would probably have been lost had they not faced such a crisis, lived to adulthood, or not been so handicapped.

It staggers the mind to wonder how many of these will greet us in heaven! Their number could be multiplied millions! Such redemptive acts are well within the range of God’s marvelous grace; but it could be disastrous for anyone to count on time to repent on such occasions, and put off their decision to call on the Lord; for “now is the day of salvation” (Romans 6:13).

God’s grace continues for those “in Christ,” enabling us to press on toward our goal of full Christ-likeness in this second work of grace when we choose to seek deliverance from “the law of sin” (Romans 7:23). It involves Self-surrender, Holy Spirit Baptism, Heart Holiness, Perfect Love, Christ Enthronement, Witness Empowerment, and Christ-like Maturity.

Self-surrender: This is the Holy Spirit-led process of “dying out” to self-centeredness by a full surrender to the complete, known will of God—the “known bundle”; and to the “unknown bundle”—what lies ahead. Paul wrote: “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may

increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Romans 6:1-2). And again in verse 6:6 he wrote: "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless ... "; then later:

I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

—Romans 12:1-2

Our Lord prayed in Gethsemane: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). The cost of this surrender is made clearer by reading John 1:1 in connection with it. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." The last phrase can be read "face to face with God," meaning that the Father, who had looked with approval on the Son "face to face" from all eternity, was about to look away—"forsake" him—as he became our "sin offering." It was surely this separation, not just death that caused Jesus to pray this heart-rending prayer of self-surrender.

Holy Spirit Baptism: This is the experience received by the disciples at Pentecost;

When the day of Pentecost came, they [the disciples] were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues [languages] as the Spirit enabled them.

—Acts 2:1-4

Because some use "Pentecostal" and the words "Baptism with the Holy Spirit," to refer to speaking in a "tongue" requiring interpretation, many hesitate to use these terms in their biblical sense. The "tongues" spoken at Pentecost were understood by everyone present; with no need for an interpreter. So, using these terms for a Corinthian-like experience is not biblical; nor is the claim that "tongues speaking" is an evidence of grace. The biblical evidence is love!

Heart Holiness: This is the result of the Holy Spirit Baptism. We are still dealing here with the meaning of the word "sanctify" as being "set apart for a sacred purpose" and being made "free from sin," as we did under the heading "Initial Sanctification" above.

Changing the wording of this act invites resistance that misses this Writer's intention, which is to retain every aspect of this marvelous act of grace that is biblically valid, while ridding it of the connotation that it makes us "sinless"; which has understandably deterred many from seeking this wonderful experience.

In making the heart holy, God's grace not only entirely cleanses it; but frees it from the presence and dominion of Satan. An infectious disease often impairs bodily functions. When that disease is cured, some of these effects may remain—less than perfect vision, a limp, etc. This doesn't mean that the infection remains; but that these effects must be dealt with for one to regain as many functions as possible.

Just so, we must deal with the effects of sin that remain after our hearts have been fully cleansed and we have been set free from the presence of the Evil One within. Despite the purity of our intention, and what grace has wrought in us, we all do come short of the glory of God, and do need the imputed righteousness of God to cover these shortcomings.

This situation is not unlike a man working under a blazing sun, who sees his young daughter bringing him a glass of cold water. He sees however what she does not: that her dirty fingers are

not just around the glass but in it. Does he refuse the water? By no means! Instead he lovingly rewards her intention by accepting the drink; knowing that as she matures and learns about germs, her performance will improve. Hopefully our knowledge and performance are improving as well!

Some stress these shortcomings and, in spite of the passages quoted above supporting the availability of being “holy and blameless” now, quote 1 John 1:8 as proof that this is not so. That verse reads. “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” Reading verses 7 and 8 together shows the fallacy of quoting verse 8 out of context. This makes it clear that if we claim we don’t need to be purified, as verse 7 says we can be, we are terribly mistaken—to put it mildly:

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin [have no need for such cleansing], we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

These verses do not deny the possibility of holiness now; but indicate that we have a nature that needs cleansing. The word “purifies” is in the “present” tense, indicating a “crisis-in-process” cleansing of the sin nature; then of sins of ignorance when we are made aware of them and deal with them.

The fact that the Baptism with the Holy Spirit does “purify” is also strongly supported by Peter’s comparison of the disciples’ experience in Caesarea to the Jerusalem Pentecost. He said: “God ... made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:8-9); so the sin nature is now actually cleansed; though sins of ignorance, the “unknown bundle,” still remain and are provisionally covered by our Lord’s sacrifice and intercession.

In addition to this cleansing we are set free from bondage to the Evil One; he has been cast out, enabling us to obey the will of God without inner conflict. “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

To know God’s will is now to do God’s will, so we can say with the Psalmist: “Oh, how I love your law!” (Psalms 119:97). Both the cleansing and the freedom granted in this crisis act continue as we press on toward the permanent removal of even these limitations in a third work of grace when our Lord returns.

Perfect Love: This wonderful aspect of grace is imparted to us by God; and is expressed by obedience: “This is love for God: to obey his commands” (1 John 5:3). These words come after the following reference to God as “love” by John in the previous chapter:

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear [of the day of judgment].

—John 4:16-18

The words “made complete” here make it clear that we are to be as “perfect” as we are now capable of being. This is the love that enables us to obey our Lord’s two greatest commands: to love the Lord our God, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. It is the “most excellent way” Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing [verses 1-3].

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres [verses 4-7].

Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love [verse 12].

Who among us would dare to claim the ability to love like this on our own? The complete fulfillment of this passage awaits the next work of grace; but this is the love God commands and provides grace for us now! This should strip all pride from our life of humble holiness so that we can honestly say with Charles Wesley, “Hangs my helpless soul on Thee!”

Christ Enthronement: Each person of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is always present everywhere. Jeremiah 23:24 reads: “Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?” declares the LORD. “Do not I fill heaven and earth?” declares the LORD.” So references to the location of the Godhead as individuals at a given time are figures of speech. Jesus, who is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27), and is “at the right hand of God” (Romans 8:34), said: “If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). So when we “opened” the “door” of our “hearts,” Jesus came in as Savior of our still self-centered lives. Now, being fully surrendered to him, he is the Lord of our Christ-centered lives, by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit within.

Witness Empowerment: This is the power to effectively witness, fulfilling the Lord’s promise: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses ... ” (Acts 1:8). Being his witness involves being an oral witness; but it involves more. When Jesus sent his disciples out to witness two by two, they witnessed orally; but reported: “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name” (Luke 10:17). God worked through their oral witness to accomplish more than verbal results.

After Pentecost the disciples were even more effectively empowered to witness orally and to perform acts of service, as in the crippled beggar’s healing in Acts 3:1-10; but Witness Empowerment is not just for apostles. Conditioned by personality, talents, calling and spheres of influence, we are all called to be witnesses, and his power is available for us to fulfill our calling!

Christ-like Maturity: By the removal of the sin nature’s hindrance to spiritual fruit-bearing, more maturation of these fruits is made possible; so Christ is more clearly reflected in our more victorious lives. We are also more sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s revelation of remaining sins of ignorance, making possible more Christ-likeness, until all sins of ignorance are fully cleansed when we see Christ! “Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God.” (Hebrews 6:1).

To briefly summarize the foregoing, we now have:

- removal of guilt for the expressions of sin by being “in Christ”;
- removal of the essence of sin by the Holy Spirit’s baptism; and
- covering of unrecognized sins — their cleansing can only follow our awareness of them.

Our full surrender to Christ in heart holiness is a “once-for-all” crisis decision; but as we are led on by the Holy Spirit, new challenges arise and new vistas open that require renewed application of this decision in ever-developing situations. One of the most subtle destroyers of faith is for us to

take our “ease in Zion,” relying on past experiences with God. Our life “in Christ” is not, must not be, cannot be static!

We are ready now to outline the third work of grace in God’s Salvation Plan.

Speaking of the days just before his Second Coming, Jesus said,

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

—Matthew 24:37-39

In God’s Image

This third work of grace is the culmination of the process that grace has been performing in our lives. “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). Paul also referred to this event when he wrote: “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). And Peter urged: “Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:13).

This crisis is usually linked with “death,” and as something that occurs in the “next life”; but Paul wrote: “We who are still alive, who are left to the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep” (1 Timothy 4:15). This can only mean that whatever preparation is needed for this event has to have been made in this life before death, or before the crisis moment of our Lord’s appearance.

This event is usually called the “Rapture,” or referred to as “Glorification”; though these terms are not found in the Bible. Man was created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27), and we will be restored to that image when our Lord returns: “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

The acts of God in this third work of grace are; Christ’s Return, Our Bodily Transformation, Christ-likeness, Christ’s Wedding, Wedding Supper, and Our Home in Heaven. As grace preceded and enabled the first two works of grace, it does so in this third work of grace.

Christ’s Return: We do not know when Christ will return from heaven to take those “in him” up there with him, but our Lord will return!

They [the disciples] were looking intently up into the sky as he [Christ] was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

—Acts 1:10-11

Again, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 Paul writes:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

Bodily Transformation: It’s the long-awaited victory over our last enemy—death.

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

—1 Corinthians 15:54-55

The belief that the Lord will meet each of us and give us a personally-guided tour of the city, as mentioned often in sermon and song, is not scriptural. Paul says: "We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him" (1 Thessalonians 4:14). They are not within sight of him now; though some have had visions of him coming for them; but they are now asleep; for their bodies have not been transformed as they will be when they are awakened, see Jesus, and go with him.

This transformation into bodies like our resurrected Lord's shows that God didn't create our marvelous bodies to have them destroyed by sin; but will restore them for his original purpose—personal fellowship with Him, and sacrificial service to others, for His glory!

Christ-likeness: We reflect Christ when we are "in Christ," are more like him when we are made "Holy and Blameless," but not until we see him will we be fully restored to the "image of God" in which man was created. All that grace has done for us to this point has moved toward this goal: we are to be fully like Him at last!

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

—Ephesians 5:25-27

Christ's Wedding: The first event in heaven.

Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. [Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.]

—Revelation 19:6-8).

After the wedding, there will be a supper. "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9). We know that those "in Christ" are the bride, but we wonder who the guests will be, unless they will be the angels and seraphim.

After a message in Beirut, Lebanon, this Writer was challenged for saying he expected to be one of the Lord's Bride. The challenger was convinced that only those in his group would be the Bride. When asked what he thought the Lord would do with those of us who also claim him as Savior and Lord, he seemed to be quite satisfied and generous in saying: "Oh, there will be guests at the wedding!" According to Revelation 7:9, his narrow view is a bit short-sighted!

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

Our Home in Heaven: In John 14:2-3, we learn that the Lord is making housing arrangements for his bride:

In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

But this home will not be the Bride's eternal abode; for Revelation 21:1 reads: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea."

Future Events

This Writer's claim to God-given insights into God's Salvation Plan does not include those described in this section. Jesus said of his next return, "No one knows about that day or ` , not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36). So the views expressed here are just the result of sincere Bible study by this Writer.

For those "in Christ" who are ready when Christ returns to take them home with him to heaven, the victory has been won and even more marvelous prospects lie ahead! But for those left behind, the prospect is bleak, but we believe not entirely hopeless! God's Salvation Plan for this age has been completed; but time and his salvation plan are not over for those who remain on earth.

In the parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25:1-13, the possession of oil is a type of having the Holy Spirit; and the fact that both groups light lamps, indicates that they are "in Christ." The wise virgin's adequate supply of oil must indicate that they were "holy and blameless," so they are ready for the Lord. The situation with the foolish virgins is not so clear. Had their oil held out, they could have been a type of those "in Christ" who were not in the second work of grace but were walking in the light. Now they realize their lamps are about to go out and the risk seems too great for them to wait; so they go for oil.

Some teach that the Holy Spirit will be withdrawn when the Lord takes his Bride home; but the Scriptures do not support that idea. The foolish virgins were able to get the needed oil (a type of the Holy Spirit) even though the Lord had come and `gone before they returned. This can only mean that the Holy Spirit will still be available to meet the need of those left behind. What a wonderful truth!

The angel that led the rebellion against God is named "Lucifer" in the KJV, but "morning star" in the NIV (Isaiah 14:12). Other names for him in the Bible are "Satan" (48 times), "devil" (35 times), and "evil one" (14 times), as well as other names which may refer to him. He is here called the "antichrist" and his is a horrible reign.

Those who missed the bodily transformation, but now have an adequate supply of oil, are now in a completely different environment. They will certainly need the filling of the Holy Spirit for the dreadful days that lie ahead for it seems that they will be those whom John saw who were martyred for their faith during this period.

I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"

—Revelation 6:9-10

These also seem to be the ones mentioned later in Revelation 7:14: "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation."

We hope and pray that no one reading this article will be among that number; but if your are still here then, we firmly believe that you can still enter into a saving relationship "in Christ" by following the pattern outlined in our article *You Can Be "In Christ!"* In doing this you will be following the words of Isaiah 55:6: "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near"; and that you will do just that!

Tribulation: This Writer believes that Christ's next return to earth, his second, will come before the Tribulation, a seven year period during which the Antichrist will reign. Others believe that the Lord will return half-way through this seven-year period, and still others believe that this return will be after this period.

Only John uses the word "antichrist"; and that only four times in 1 John, and once in 2 John; saying primarily that anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ is an "antichrist." His clearest reference to a specific person, the coming Antichrist, is in 1 John 2:18, where he says that "the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come."

It seems that during this Tribulation period the Jews as a people will accept the Antichrist as their Messiah; for Jesus said to them in John 5:43: "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him." This seems to indicate that the Antichrist will be a Jew, or will convince the Jews that he is one. Those who have proposed the many non-Jewish antichrists through the years have ignored this passage.

Also, those who believe that the return of Jews to the Holy Land in our day is this event are a bit ahead of time. It is no doubt a forerunner of this biblical event; but the present State of Israel is by no means a part of the "Israel of God."

After the Jews acceptance of the Antichrist, something happens that causes a great number of the physical offspring of Abraham to realize their error and finally accept Jesus as their Messiah, as Paul foretold:

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham.

—Romans 4:16

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

—Romans 11:25-26

The words "all Israel will be saved" cannot possibly mean, as some seem to think, that all Jews will be saved. The term can only mean those who have the "faith of Abraham"; for God passed judgment on great numbers of the physical offspring of Abraham in the Old Testament, and multitudes have died since while refusing to accept Christ; but the day predicted will come! To facilitate this turn to Christ, the angels are ordered to hold back God's wrath long enough for the "sealing" of the 144,000, 12,000 from each tribe, to keep them from suffering the coming destruction (Revelation 7:1-8).

Speaking of this group, Revelation 14:4 says, "These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure," making it awkward to identify them with the entire nation. It is possible however, that the omission of reference to women and children may reflect the fact that the Old Testament often refers to God's people in predominately masculine terms.

Harvest of the Earth: In Revelation 14, John records his vision of the Lord and angels conducting a "harvest of the earth" (verse 15). In it the enemies of God are harvested like grapes—thrown "into the great winepress of God's wrath" (verse 19). "... and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1600 stadia" [c. 180 miles or 300 kilometers]. (verse 20).

We usually picture angels as gentle beings; but here we get quite a different picture— angels in battle armor, marching in formation, devastating the earth. Later, in Revelation 16:16, again in dealing with God’s wrath, John wrote, “Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.”

In the next chapter John seems to repeat somewhat his vision of God’s forces on earth, under the leadership of Christ, winning the battle over the evil forces that have been arrayed against him in these words: “They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers” (Revelation 17:14).

Later, in Revelation 19:19-21, John writes again of this event:

Then I saw the beast and the kings of earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse [Christ] and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword.

Only those prepared for our Lord’s second coming saw him then, but here in this third coming, as predicted in Revelation 1:7, “every eye will see him.” After this coming our Lord will remain on earth as long as it lasts.

This battle seems to occur at the end of the Tribulation period and just before the millennial reign. This much is certain, the Lord will return to earth—his third coming—to do battle with the forces of evil.

Millennial Reign: Speaking of those whom Christ had purchased with his blood, John had earlier written: “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:10) In Chapter 20 he picks up that theme again. Some scholars have difficulty in believing in a one thousand-year period; but we let the biblical record speak for itself:

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations any more until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. [The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.] This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

—Revelation 20:1-6

So now the Lord and those who have been redeemed up to this time are no longer pilgrims and strangers on earth; but are fully in charge. The Bride of Christ is not mentioned here; but they are obviously there, and some of them must be on the thrones mentioned and share in their Lord’s reign; but the only group specifically mentioned are those martyred during the Tribulation who have now been resurrected.

There are obviously many persons still alive to be ruled who are not of the Bride, nor of this resurrected group of martyrs. They would be those who did not take on the mark of the beast due to their young age, residence in a remote location, or another such reason. They will now live without the presence of Satan within them; but will still have their inherited sin nature, and still be capable of receiving or rejecting God's Salvation Plan.

God and Satan have been engaged in a war since before our creation. Satan lost the first battle: "How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star [Satan], son of the dawn" (Isaiah 14:12)! Satan won the next battle in the Garden of Eden; and enjoyed centuries as "the prince of this world", as Jesus called him in John 12:32; where he predicted that "he will be cast out." Satan climaxed his reign on earth during the Tribulation period; but now our Lord's prophecy is to be fulfilled. The Lord and angels end Satan's rule on earth; but as we shall see, he will be allowed to return after the Millennium. Our Lord paid the awful price for final victory on the Cross; and now one of the final phases of this lengthy battle is about to begin.

Day of the Lord:

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—God and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

—Revelation 20:7-10

Peter foresaw this event. His words speak of such destruction that they can't refer to our Lord's second coming; or there would be no earth for the Tribulation period to take place; and they can't refer to his third coming to overthrow the Antichrist; or there would be no earth for the Millennial Reign to take place.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

—2 Peter 3:10-14

Be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

—2 Peter 3:17-18

The first of these passages refers to this event, both of them apply to us as well as to those experiencing that awesome event. Both present further proof that one's soul is at stake for failure to grow in grace; and that we do not have any of the false securities that some traditions offer.

Christ's Judgment Seat: Paul predicted this event in 2 Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the *judgment seat of Christ*, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done

while in the body, whether good or bad”; and John’s account follows in the very next verse after his description above of the Day of the Lord:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

—Revelation 20:11-15

Those in “the books” are all those from creation on who died unprepared to meet God in peace. In their judgment we see the absolute justice of God and the full consequences of their sin. Not until this event could these persons be judged; but now all the evidence is in; including not only their sins, but the influence of their sins on their own and succeeding generations!

Our Lord’s Bride will be there, as will be the redeemed Martyrs, and any who found peace with God during the Millennial Reign; but their names will be in the “book of life.” They too will be “judged”; but in terms of their reward as mentioned later in Revelation 22:12: “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.”

Final Abode:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

—Revelation 21:1-4

Addenda: Songwriters have often penned beautiful verses that express sound theological truths as well as theologians, as do these stanzas that reflect the three works of God’s Salvation Grace:

Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound!
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now I’m found;
Was blind, but now I see.

—John Newton

Called unto holiness,” Church of our God,
Purchase of Jesus, redeemed by His blood;
Called from the world and its idols to flee,
Called from the bondage of sin to be free.

—Lelia N. Morris

And it's all because of God's Amazing Grace!
Because on Calv'ry's mountain he took my place!
And some day, some glorious morning
I shall see him face to face,
All because of God's Amazing Grace!

—Stephen R. Adams

The foregoing plan contains some insights that are new to us, and we have been constantly aware of the solemn warning stated in this next-to-last paragraph of the Bible, Revelation 22:18-20; and hope you will give prayerful consideration of your tradition in its light:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

The term “prophecy” here must certainly mean both proclamation (forth-telling) of things as they really are, and “foretelling,” of things yet to come; and as such these truths cannot be logically and must not be assigned solely to a record of past events, or denied their relevance for us today.

In Acts 20: 27 the Apostle Paul wrote: “For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.” We have earnestly tried to add nothing to or take anything away from the teachings of “this book” and believe that this plan is the very core of the “whole will of God.”

We believe that this plan is what Paul called “sound doctrine” in Titus 2:1, and wrote of in Titus 2:11-14, where he indicates the three-fold aspects of grace we have outlined [with bracketed numbers inserted by this Writer]:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us [1] to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and [2] to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we [3] wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

So our three-fold God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—created a three-fold universe of solids, liquids, and gasses in which he placed man, a three-fold creation in God's own image—being body, mind, and spirit—with whom he could share fellowship, service, and his glory. But man tragically sinned in a three-fold manner of disbelief, distrust, and disobedience! Yet God, in an incalculable sacrifice of his Son, made possible man's forgiveness, re-creation, and full restoration by his grace through faith in Christ. This three-fold “crises-in-process” plan is God's Salvation Plan!

Yes, this article is another view, but one which attempts to avoid “private interpretation” by staying as close to the actual, written word of the Lord as possible for every insight; to make no attempt to become another “denomination”; or to condemn those who sincerely believe otherwise. The goal is an attempt to relate these events in God's Salvation Plan, in order to encourage oneness among those “in Christ”; not division.

If you feel God is challenging you through the truth presented in this article, we invite you to visit our website below for additional articles. We also invite you to contact us at: Support@InChristFellowship.org to share your reaction to this article, pray with you on these matters, help you incorporate its truth into your life, and/or to suggest ways for you to join or form a fellowship group among your peers or others within your sphere of influence.

We close, as does the Bible, with this expression of hope:

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.
The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

—Revelation 22:18-21

Yours, "in Christ,"

Brother Jim

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Note: You can learn more about this ministry at www.InChristFellowship.org. We encourage you to contact us at Support@InChristFellowship.org if you have questions or need help in applying these truths in your own life. We do not maintain a "membership roll," nor do we solicit monetary contributions; yet, we also encourage you to contact us if you feel led of the Lord, to participate in our efforts in some way.

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