

A New Look at

God's *True* Plan of Salvation!

What are the requirements for salvation? Why is there so much difference between various "Christian" groups and Churches on beliefs, doctrines, and teachings? How can we KNOW whether we truly belong to God? Who will receive a "BETTER resurrection"? Who are the "FIRST-FRUIT" and the 144,000 of Revelation? What is God's plan for the great number of "GOOD" people, who don't understand or know or follow the commandments of God? Is there more than one way of salvation? CONFUSION abounds on these subjects! Just what is the "bottom line"? What is the PLAN God is working out here below?

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August 12, at 3:05 pm, my brother Bob died at a nursing home in Omak, Washington. Robert Evan Dankenbring, age 65, born January 8, 1942, was given military honors at his graveside funeral by the American Legion #97, with soldiers firing four volleys of rifle shots, and another soldier, across the field, playing taps -- a beautiful tribute to a wonderful, loving, caring husband and man of integrity, humor, and a gentle spirit.

Bob was always willing to help out or lend a hand, for no personal reward. He also had quite a sense of humor. But was he a true Christian? Just what is a "true" Christian, anyway?

Bob always had a good story, based on his life's experiences. He was a subscriber to Prophecy Flash, and on occasion we discussed prophecy and world events.

The minister who conducted Bob's funeral on Wednesday, this past week, said that if we "believe" on Christ, then we go to heaven when we die. He declared, "I asked Bob if he believed in Christ, and if he knew he was going to heaven." He said, "Bob told me, I think so." The minister intoned, "Bob, since you believe in Christ, I assure you that you are going to heaven." He then cast his eyes around the group at the graveside service and asked, "What about you? Do you believe? Are you saved? Will you go to heaven when you die?"

Is that all it takes to be "saved"? Just mere acceptance of Christ? Just what is all this about "salvation," anyway?

What is the truth? If you merely "confess Christ," are you "saved"? Must you understand and obey ALL the laws of God and believe all true doctrine to be "saved"? Are all who don't understand or obey a certain point of truth, condemned and doomed?

Just what is the PLAN God is working out here below? What about people like Bob, who was not really religious in the common sense, but was a very good person, and did what he knew or thought was good, who fought many battles over the years, with alcohol, and overcame that problem, but had a terrible time overcoming the smoking habit, until his final cancer took him away?

Just What Is Required for Salvation?

In a similar way, a prisoner recently wrote and asked me how various Christians can be in such total disagreement on salvation issues. He wrote, "The Holy Spirit won't teach us different things to different people. So how can Christians say 'nobody is wrong' when everybody believes differently and lives differently? Somebody has to be wrong! Everybody can't believe differently and everybody be right!"

This man also asked just what the "salvation issues" really are. "What are the requirements that everyone must meet to be on the road to salvation?"

These are very good questions. What is the TRUTH? I have heard people say that unless you belong to THEIR CHURCH, you are doomed to hell! I have heard ministers say from the pulpit, "God only hears the prayers of OUR members – members of this church!" Others have exclaimed in sermons and articles, "unless you keep the weekly seventh day Sabbath, you cannot be saved – your are not converted – you are on the road to Hell!"

Interestingly, during World War II, Serbian Roman Catholics massacred Russian Orthodox church members, and tortured them, and piled up their eye balls in buckets. Why? Because of slight

variations in teachings. In the Great Inquisition, Roman Catholics burned Protestants at the stake, drowned them in rivers, tied their arms and legs to horses, and then drove the horses apart in different directions, causing the victims to be pulled apart in agonizing death. Yet both sides claimed to follow “Christ” and justified their actions in the “name of Christ”!

All this – in the “name of religion”!

Is God’s true religion a matter of technical knowledge? Is it a matter of which “church” congregation you belong to? Is it a matter of minute matters of belief? Or as some would say, is mere belief and confession of Christ, even a “death-bed repentance,” enough to be “saved” and inherit the kingdom of God?

Let’s get to the bottom of this mystery! What is the real “bottom line” of truth!

Christ and the Torah

God has one standard of spiritual truth and conduct. That is the Word of God. Jesus Christ, the Messiah, said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God’” (Luke 4:4).

The apostle Paul declared, “ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of GOD, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be COMPLETE” (II Tim.3:16-17).

The Word of God contains the teachings of the Law or Torah of God. In fact, the very word “Torah” in Hebrew simply means “teaching.”

Contrary to what many have been erroneously taught, in their churches, the Torah (Law) of God has not been abolished. Jesus Christ, the true Messiah, did not come to do away with the Torah or Laws of God. He Himself declared in unequivocal language, “Do NOT think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill [fill up to the brim]. For assuredly, I say to you, TILL HEAVEN AND EARTH PASS AWAY, *one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the LAW till ALL is fulfilled.* Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them shall be called GREAT in the kingdom of heaven” (Mat.5:17-19).

God’s Law is ETERNAL! David wrote, “All His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness” (Psalm 111:7-8). He declared, “So shall I keep Your law continually, forever and ever” (Psalm 119:44). He further asserted, “And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love” (v.47).

God's Law is eternal and binding upon all mankind. As we look around us today, we see that the physical Temple of God no longer exists. Therefore, the Levitical priesthood is temporarily suspended because there is no Temple. This means the ritual aspects of the Torah are not in force today – the sacrifices, and all that pertained to the Temple rituals (see Heb.9:10). But even if it were in existence, the apostle Paul explained, “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin” (Heb.10:4). The physical Temple was merely a teaching device, patterned after the Temple of God in heaven (Heb.8:1-5).

So what really does matter? What are the true “salvation issues”?

What Does God Require?

When asked what one must do to inherit eternal life, Christ answered, “Keep the commandments” (Matt.19:17). He went on to list some of the commandments from the Torah, including “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (verse 19). Paul wrote definitively that all the commandments are “summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore *love is* the fulfilling of the law” (Rom.13:9-10).

Micah the prophet put it this way: “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy [lovingkindness], and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

In a parable, Christ spoke about the coming judgment of His servants. He said, “Let your waists be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he returns and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them to sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. . . Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Luke 12:35-40).

Christ then went on to say, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? [Who are going to be the kings and priests in the World Tomorrow, God's coming Kingdom?] Blessed is that servant whom his master will find *so doing when he comes*. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.

“But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will *cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers*.

“And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. *For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more*” (Luke 12:42-48).

What does God require of us? Micah the prophet put it this way: “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to DO justly, to LOVE MERCY, and to WALK HUMBLY with your God” (Micah 6:8).

Solomon summarized it by saying, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep *His commandments*, for this is man’s all” (Eccl.12:13).

There is going to be an accounting – by every human being. Those who really serve God during this life, who are given the understanding of God’s Word and purpose and knowledge of salvation, will be judged at the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ!

As Peter wrote, “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begin with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and sinner appear?” (I Pet.4:17-18).

But what about those who don’t understand all God’s commandments? What about those who have been deceived, misled, and don’t understand the commandments of God? How will they be judged?

Let’s understand the answer to this serious question!

A Special, Unique Calling

Many preachers claim that this is the ONLY day of salvation – that if you don’t believe and accept Christ right now, before you die, you will burn in Hell forever! But is this true? If it is, then the Devil has WON the war to capture men’s souls, because many more people are NOT Christian, than there are Christians, on this planet!

Let’s understand this!

God is not calling everyone to His Truth at this time. As Christ put it, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day . . . Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me” (John 6:44-45).

He repeated this truth in verse 65: “Therefore have I said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.” After this, many disciples became offended at His words, and “went back and walked with Him no more” (v.66).

It is all a matter of calling. Some are called of God now, to be His servants, and to be among the “first fruits” of God’s Kingdom. They will receive their reward when Christ comes, on the day of His return to earth (I Cor.15:50-52; I Thess.4:14-17).

For those who are called NOW, during this Age, they, in order to be saved, must repent from the heart of sin, which is transgressing God’s law, disobedience to God, accept Christ as Savior, be baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit as a gift, and then continue faithful till the day they die (see Acts 2:38; 3:19; 4:12; 5:32; Matt.24:13; Luke 9:62).

The apostle John declared, of Christ’s second coming, “The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should REWARD YOUR SERVANTS the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great” (Rev.11:18).

Paul wrote of those who are called now, who suffer and even die for Christ, giving their lives for Him, giving up everything for Him, “Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a BETTER resurrection” (Heb.11:35).

Two Tiers of Salvation

Those called to serve God during this Age, who understand and obey God, will receive “a BETTER resurrection”! Christ says of them, “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him will I give POWER OVER THE NATIONS – He shall RULE them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like a potter’s vessels – as I also have received of My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev.2:26-29).

They are the ones who will say to Christ, “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have REDEEMED US to God out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have MADE US KINGS AND PRIESTS to our God; and we shall REIGN ON THE EARTH” (Rev.5:9-10).

Those called and chosen and faithful NOW will reign over the nations, under Christ, as kings and priests in the World Tomorrow – the Olam HaBa!

Those in the first resurrection are truly blessed! John declares, “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” (Rev.20:6).

These are the “first-fruits” of God’s harvest!

The First-fruits of the Harvest

Those who are called of God now are the FIRST-FRUITS of the Kingdom of God. *Those of us who receive God's Spirit during this present age are the “first-fruits” of God.* They are typified by the “wave sheaf offering” of the “first-fruits” of the spring harvest in ancient Israel.

God declared to ancient Israel, “When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a SHEAF OF THE FIRST-FRUITS of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf” (Lev..23:10-11).

This “sheaf” is composed of MANY grains of barley. It represents the CHURCH, which is God’s first-fruits of salvation.

As the apostle James wrote, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of FIRST-FRUITS of all he created” (James 1:18). Also, the apostle Paul wrote of true Christians, “but ourselves also, which have the FIRST-FRUITS of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves” (Rom.8:23).

Those of us in God’s spiritual Church, from the apostles till now, including the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, are God’s “first-fruits.” All who have a part in the first resurrection when Christ returns, are “first-fruits.” We are compared in the Scriptures to the “wave sheaf offering” of the barley harvest in the spring. Its acceptance by God guaranteed the future acceptance of the WHOLE FUTURE HARVEST! Its acceptance is the KEY to the acceptance of the REST of the harvest!

True followers of Messiah are likened to the wave sheaf or “omer” which was offered every day at the Temple between Passover and Pentecost. Each day about 5.1 pints of barley grain was offered in the Temple, with three fourths of a pint of olive oil, and a handful of frankincense (Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, page 205). Our salvation paves the way for the salvation of the rest of mankind, in the future!

Those of us who receive God's Spirit during this present age are the "first-fruits" of God. The rest of the salvation of all mankind depends on US! As Paul declared, “For if the first-fruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches” (Rom.11:16). This truth was foreshadowed by the wave sheaf offering of the first-fruits of barley.

The Jewish rabbis in the oral law tell us God said the reason for the sacrifice of the “omer” was “so that the grain in the fields will be blessed for you (Rosh Hashanah 16a)” (quoted in *The Three Festivals: Ideas and Insights of the Sfas Emes*, p.75). In other words, by lifting up the omer, the first

produce of the new year, we demonstrate our belief that “all material abundance is really His gift” (p.77).

The waving of the omer teaches us that “our daily bread is a miraculous gift from Hashem” (p.78). It reveals to us that the HARVEST itself that follows is the gift of God! But if the first-fruits are not blessed and accepted by God, then the rest of the harvest will also not be accepted or received by God. Therefore, in a sense, ALL FUTURE SALVATION IS DEPENDANT UPON THE SALVATION, FIRST OF ALL, OF THE FIRST-FRUIT!

Without the “first-fruits,” the Messiah would have no qualified “kings and priests” to help Him RULE in the Kingdom of God! The “omer” or “wave sheaf” offering is speaking of the TRUE CHURCH OF GOD, down through the Ages, from Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, the apostles, and the saints of God, down to this END time generation!

144,000

John describes those of this present Age who will be saved and join Christ when He returns in Revelation, chapter 14. Notice carefully!

“Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and *his Father’s name written on their foreheads*. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been *REDEEMED* from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women [a symbol representing the false churches of the world, “Babylon” the great “whore” church and her “daughter” churches – see Revelation 17:3-5], for they kept themselves pure. They *follow the Lamb wherever he goes*. They were purchased from among men and offered as *FIRST-FRUIT*s to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless” (Rev.14:1-5).

Notice that these 144,000 will be with Christ at His coming. They will stand with Him on Mount Zion, at the south eastern tip of Jerusalem. They are called “first-fruits.”

There will be only 144,000 “first-fruits” in the FIRST resurrection! This means that only about 1,000 will be saved out of every generation (of about 40 years). Or, this means that out of 6,000 years of mankind on the earth, there will be saved and in the first resurrection *only about 24 for every single year!*

Truly, as Christ declared, “So the last shall be first, and the first last. For many are called, but *FEW are chosen*” (Matt.20:16). In fact, He said this TWICE – “For many are called, but *FEW are chosen*” (Matt.22:14).

Truly, as He also said, “Fear not, LITTLE flock” (Luke 12:32) – the church of true saints of God is very, very small – the Greek word for “little” here is *micros*, from which we get “microscope,” “microcosm,” “microbe.” It means “least, less, little, small”, “small (in size, quantity, number or (fig.) dignity)” (Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, #3398).

Interestingly, there were six days in Creation week (Genesis 1), and there are 24 hours in a day, from evening to evening. If we multiply 6 days X 24 hours we get 144. A “day” also equals “1,000 years” (II Pet.3:8). Therefore, 144 hours X 1000 = 144,000 – the number “saved” during the 6000 years of mankind up until the second coming of the Messiah! To put it another way, the six days of Creation represent the 6,000 years, multiply that by 24 hours in a day, and voila – 144,000!

It is fascinating to observe that this group who constitute the “first-fruits” – that is, those who will be in the first resurrection – from the time of Adam to now – number precisely 144,000 men and women! That is, from Adam till now there have been 150 generations of mankind (40 years to a generation *divided* into 6,000 years = 150 generations). Thus when all is said and done, God has been saving roughly 1,000 individuals out of each generation since Adam – that is all – who will be in the first resurrection! In some generations there have been far fewer than that! In the days of Noah, only his immediate family were spared drowning in the Flood (II Pet.2:5). In the first century, after the Church began, thousands were saved – and tens of thousands were converted, the apostle James tells us (Acts 21:20). But before the end of that century, most of them had apostatized, and fallen away – had become deceived by the false ministers of Satan the devil (compare II Cor.11:1-4, 13-15; Acts 20:28-31; Gal.1:6-9; II Thess.2:7; II Tim.4:3-4, 10-11; II Tim.1:15; II Pet.2:1-4; I John 4:3; II John 7; Jude 4).

How truly blessed it is to be one of the “first-fruits” to God, during this time – one of the truly called, and “chosen” few! The vast, overwhelming majority of “Christians” have been deceived and seduced and misled by the minions and ministers of Satan the devil, who disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness!

We ought to truly pray that we might be counted worthy to be among this special group who are the “first-fruits” to the Lamb, those who will reign with Him, from Mount Zion!

Most Blinded Now

However, the vast majority of mankind will not be saved until AFTER the Messiah returns. They are compared to the great “fall harvest” which is celebrated by the Feast of Tabernacles, also called the “Harvest Festival.” It represents the salvation of the whole world, during the Millennial Reign of Christ, and the Great White Throne Judgment – the salvation of everyone who has ever lived, billions upon billions and billions of people – from the time of Adam and Eve, who never understood the true gospel or plan of salvation!

The vast majority of people, however, even most “believers,” do not understand this fundamental truth! Many do not know much of the gospel, or the laws of God, many “profess”

Christ, even in sincerity, but don't live by His Laws and Commandments, as revealed in the Scriptures. They are not truly "called" or "chosen" to serve God during this Age – God has another Plan for them, and the vast majority of mankind!

Those of us who are called NOW have a special calling of God, in this life, to be His servants, to preach and proclaim His Word, the true Gospel of the Kingdom of God. For God's own reasons, we have been chosen to know His truth and serve Him. The vast majority, however, have not yet been called or chosen. The multitudes who do not know Christ and died never having heard the gospel, and those who don't really understand what it means to serve God and follow Christ, during this Age, will all be judged later, on a different scale of judgment. Notice!

His disciples asked Christ, one time, "Why do You speak to them [the multitudes] in parables?" (Matt.13:10). Christ explained to His disciples, "Because *it has been given to YOU to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has NOT BEEN GIVEN.* For whosoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whosoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and will not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, LEST they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, LEST *they should understand with their hearts and turn*, so that I should heal them'" (Matt.13:11-15).

Some have been or are being called of God to understand and to serve Him now. Others are in a sort of 'holding pattern' – they do not perceive the truth, they do not understand, their knowledge is limited, partial, incomplete. They will be judged later, in a different day of judgment, AFTER the thousand year reign of Christ and the saints who are called now and who serve Him during this present life.

The apostle Paul declared, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ ALL shall be made alive. But *each one in his own order.* Christ the first-fruits, afterward those who are Christ's *at His coming.* Then comes the END, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and authority and power" (I Cor.15:22-24).

The Great White Throne Judgment

John writes of this final day of judgment, "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the heavens and earth fled away. And there was found no place for them. *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 written in the books" (Rev.20:11-12).

At this time, God will review the lives of all these people, and search the records, and scrutinize their "life story," and judge them based on THEIR WORKS IN THIS LIFE – WHAT THEY DID – whether they were basically "good" people, who did good and cared for their neighbors, or whether

they were “bad” people who trod down their neighbors, mistreated their employees, beat their fellow men, or led lives of evil, wantonness, wickedness, and selfish cruelty. The judgment will be fair. “And they were judged, *EACH ONE ACCORDING TO HIS WORKS . . . And anyone not found written in the BOOK OF LIFE was cast into the lake of fire*” (Rev.20:13-15).

How God Will Judge Those Without the Law

Paul explains how God will judge all these people. In the book of Romans, he writes, “For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned [committed evil] without law [knowledge of God’s law] will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law [Jews and those who know God’s law, who were taught it] will be judged **BY THE LAW**” (Rom.2:11-12). “For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the **DOERS** of the law will be justified” (v.13).

Paul goes on explaining, “For when Gentiles, who do not have [or understand] the law, **BY NATURE** do the things in the law, these although not having the [knowledge of the] law, are a law to themselves, *who show the works of the law written in their hearts, their CONSCIENCE also bearing witness . . . in the day when God will JUDGE the secrets of men by Jesus Christ*” (Rom.2:14-16).

Every man is born with a conscience, an internal moral compass, if you will, of the basic difference between right and wrong. Every one knows by nature that it is wrong to steal, or to commit murder, or to commit adultery with another man’s wife, or to covet the belongings of another person. These concepts are written into our conscience as we grow up from birth, as children. We learn what is fair and not fair, what is good and not good. Even those without the teachings of God’s Law know the basic difference between good and evil, right and wrong, loving and caring for your neighbor, the suffering of others, and mercy and compassion on the weak and helpless.

Those who do **GOOD** in their lives, showing love and concern for their neighbors, will be judged accordingly. Those who selfishly take advantage of their neighbor, and cheat, steal, swindle, abuse, or mistreat them, will suffer the judgment and wrath of God for their actions, and be cast into the lake of fire!

Christ Himself put it this way: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first commandment. And the second is like it: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* On **THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS HANG ALL THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS**” (Matt.22:37-40).

Those who by nature listen to their conscience, and do what is right, and show love and compassion for their neighbor, are considered and accounted as obedient to the Law of God!

I can just hear some people say, “But wait a minute! You have to believe and accept Christ to be saved!” Yes, that is **TRUE** – for those who are in the **FIRST** resurrection. Indeed, Peter declared, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). But what does that really mean?

Many have misinterpreted Peter's words. Truly, no one can be saved apart from Christ and His power and authority. No one can be saved in the name of the Pope, or Buddha, or Allah, or Mohammed, or any other religious leader on earth or anywhere else!

What this Scripture SAYS is that Christ is the ultimate authority and dispenser of salvation – NO ONE ELSE. But it does NOT say exactly what 'Christ's criteria are going to be for His final "judging" of mankind, or individuals!

As we have already seen, everyone is going to be judged "according to THEIR WORKS" – THEIR DEEDS – how they lived their lives! This Scripture tells us WHO is going to be making the final decisions concerning salvation – not HOW He is going to make those decisions!

Religious Deception

The devil has truly confused multitudes of people, including most "Christians." He has his ministers who tell them that your WORKS have nothing to do with salvation – that all you have to do is "profess Christ," or "accept Him as Saviour." Once you do this, they claim, you are on a one-way train trip to Heaven!

But that is an out-and-out LIE – a diabolical deception! We will ALL be judged "BY OUR WORKS"! Solomon wrote, in the book of Ecclesiastes, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter." After all his wisdom and life's great experiences, he summed up the meaning of life and its true purpose, saying, "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring EVERY WORK INTO JUDGMENT, including every secret thing, *whether good or evil*" (Eccl.12:13-14).

Truly, the devil is that old serpent who "deceives the WHOLE WORLD" (Rev.12:9).

Because of Satan's lies and carefully crafted and calculated deceptions, the world – even most "Christians" – are deceived, and don't really know or understand the truth of God.

As a result, we see so much gross disagreement, great controversy, and even lack of love, and fierceness and hatred among "Christian" professing people. We see in history, great religious persecutions, bloodbaths, torture and mayhem, often committed by those professing Christ against those who belong to a different church – such as the horrendous Roman Catholic inquisition of the Middle Ages.

I put the word "Christian" in quotes, because not everyone who says he is a Christian is a bona fide Christian. There are many impostors, pretenders, frauds and fakes – known as hypocrites. And false teachers and false prophets (Jude, II Peter 2). There are many who profess belief but who are truly "anti-Christ" (I John 4:1-3; II John 7). There are many who masquerade as ministers of God but who really serve the Devil.

The apostle Paul explained this amazing anomaly, saying, “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if HIS MINISTERS also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose END will be *according to their works*” (II Cor.11:13-15).

Christ said, “You will know them BY THEIR FRUITS” – unbiblical teachings and ungodly actions (Matt.7:20).

So much of the disagreement and controversy is due to the devil “stirring the pot” and infiltrating the church at large and slipping his agents into the ministry, who often take over whole churches (compare III John 9-10). We must always be wary of those who come teaching errors. Even those who are sincere are often sincerely wrong, in error, and did not properly check out their beliefs, but made false assumptions somewhere along the way.

In my article on “The 7 Churches of Revelation,” I point out that even true churches of God can be beset by sin, and have false doctrines, even observe pagan festivals, “sacrifice to idols,” etc. (Rev.2:14, 20). It is free of charge to all who would like to receive it.

The Definition of “SIN”

What is “sin” anyway? How do we know whether we are a “sinner” or not? The world today doesn’t think it matters. “Sin” to most is an archaic, antiquated concept with no real significance in the modern world.

But God’s Word declares, “Whoever commits sin commits lawlessness, and SIN IS LAWLESSNESS” – that is disobedience to GOD’s Law (I John 3:4). Or as the King James Version has it, “SIN IS [BY DEFINITION] THE *TRANSGRESSION OF THE LAW*” – *the Law of God!*

And, “the wages of SIN is DEATH” (Rom.6:23). And, “ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom.3:23). “There is NONE righteous, no, not one” (Rom.3:10).

Therefore we must ALL, at some point, be forgiven of our sins, and have them washed in the blood of Christ, who died for our sins. As Paul wrote in Hebrews, “But with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb.9:12). This includes the first-fruits, who will be resurrected at His coming, and all those who are blinded to the knowledge of Christ, who will be given their opportunity of salvation at the second resurrection!

The Real Salvation Issues

In the final analysis, we will all be judged according to what we DO with what we KNOW. The apostle James declared, “To him that knows to do good. But does it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). Also, the apostle Paul wrote, “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom.14:23).

The priests and Pharisees of Yeshua’s time kept God’s law minutely – but they missed the spirit of the law. Merely observing the letter of the law leads to death, but observing the spirit of the law leads to LIFE (II Cor.3:6).

Ultimately, what are the true “salvation issues”? Christ illustrated them this way. A lawyer asked Him what was necessary for eternal life. He answered that one must “love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). Then the lawyer asked him, “And who is my neighbor?”

He then spoke the parable of the good Samaritan, saying that a Samaritan, who did not worship the God of Israel, but was deceived much in doctrine, nevertheless showed love and compassion to a downtrodden victim of a thief and marauder (Luke 10:33-35), whereas a law-abiding, knowledge filled worshipper of the God of Israel, such as a priest and a Levite, did not do so (verses 30-32), but ignored the poor man’s injuries and calamity.

He told those listening to Him, “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among thieves?” The answer? The SAMARITAN! He was justified, rather than the others!

So says your Bible! Notice! This man “fulfilled the Law.” Christ Himself, the One who will pass judgment on all mankind, says the Samaritan, despite his ignorance, is the one who fulfilled God’s Law and will receive salvation!

To whom much knowledge is given, of him much is required. To those to whom less is given, of them God requires less. The bottom line is everyone will be judged according to what he DOES with what he has been given (Luke 19:12-26).

What are the “salvation issues”? There is no strict, ironclad “list” of such issues. The matter depends on the person and what they have been GIVEN, whether or not God has truly OPENED THEIR MIND to understand, and how much He has opened their mind.

All Who Ever Lived

In the same vein, after Christ returns, at the end of the Millennium, all mankind will be gathered before Him to be judged (Rev.20:12-15). All who ever lived will be resurrected as flesh and blood human beings (see Ezek.37). At that time they will be judged according to their “works.”

Matthew continues the judgment scenario: “All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides His sheep from the goats” (Mat.25:31-32). Read the whole account (verses 31-46). What is the CRITERIA OF JUDGEMENT that Christ will use to determine who will be SAVED, and enter His Kingdom, and who will be CAST into GEHENNA?

The ones who fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, visited the sick, and those in prison, will be told: “COME, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (verse 34). They will continue to live and be taught the full truth of God – the things they did NOT know or understand in their previous life! They will learn the FULL TRUTH of God, and will accept it and obey it, and when God’s time comes, they will become immortal spirit sons of God, like those of the first resurrection.

Among these will be the ancient citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah, who did not understand (Matt.10:15). Small children who died, never really having had a chance for salvation. Perhaps even children who had been aborted by their parents, who would have been viable human beings, if given a chance to live. All these who did not deliberately, presumptuously, willfully REBEL against God, knowingly, but who lived the best they could, overall, according to their conscience, will be given a true opportunity for salvation!

This would include the Thief on the Cross who said to Christ, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). Christ said to him, “I say to you, today [referring to the day He said it], you will be with Me in Paradise” (verse 43). In other words, he will come up in this Great White Throne Judgment, and be among the sheep, who will be resurrected back to mortal life, in the Kingdom of God, Paradise, and will be taught the truths of God and the way of salvation, and be allowed to live out their lives, at the end of which they will be translated into immortal, glorified sons of God.

Isaiah says of that time, at the end of the millennial reign of Christ, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

“No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed” (Isa.65:17-20). Isaiah continues of that halcyonic, tranquil, day of salvation – “They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands” (verses 21-22).

But to those who did NOT DO these acts of compassion and mercy on their neighbor, those who deliberately lived lives of EVIL, wickedness, cruelty and brutality to their neighbor – who were guilty of deliberately, premeditatedly lying, stealing, rape, murder, and gross iniquity – He will say to them: “DEPART from Me, you CURSED, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his

angels” (Matt.25:41). When they remonstrate, saying they were innocent, they never failed to do these things to HIM, He will answer them: “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the *least* of these, you did not do it to Me” (v.45).

“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the RIGHTEOUS into eternal life” (verse 46).

True Righteousness = True Love of Neighbor

What is the conclusion of the matter? “Righteousness,” in God’s sight, is, by definition keeping God’s commandments. David wrote, “All Your commandments are righteousness” (Psalm 119:172). Those who love God, and who love their neighbor, and show it by their deeds, are RIGHTEOUS in spirit, even if they are ignorant of technicalities or other legal aspects of the Law.

The apostle Paul declared this clearly. He wrote, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

“Love suffers long, and is kind; does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil [keeps no accounts of evil]; does not rejoice in iniquity [lawlessness], but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” (I Cor.13:1-8).

Or, as Paul told the Romans, “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another HAS FULFILLED THE LAW. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, ALL ARE SUMMED UP IN THIS SAYING, namely, ‘*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore LOVE IS THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW” (Romans 13:8-10).

The Day of Judgment

Loving your neighbor is the REAL “SALVATION ISSUE.” Those who know THE LAWS OF GOD, of course, should obey ALL of them – all that God has revealed to them. To fail to do so would be SIN and REBELLION against God! Those who know God’s commandments, and still disobey, and fail to keep them will be judged accordingly! As Christ said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the Kingdom of heaven, but he who does the WILL of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not PROPHESED [PREACHED] in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will

declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice LAWLESSNESS’” (Matt.7:21-23).

So in the end, a “salvation issue” would be continual and deliberate DISOBEDIENCE to God, or presumptuous REJECTION of truth, knowingly. It is the sin of being confronted with the truth, understanding it, and then deliberately rejecting it and refusing to repent and change and accept God’s jurisdiction and authority over your life. It is also known as the “unpardonable sin” (write for our article on this subject).

This is not something to take lightly, but nor is it something in which we should attempt to judge others. Only God knows the hearts and minds and inner motives and thoughts of people (Heb.4:12). But as the apostle Paul wrote: “For it is impossible for those who were once ENLIGHTENED, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, IF THEY FALL AWAY, *to renew them to repentance*, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame . . . whose end is to be burned” (Heb.6:4-8).

Paul also wrote, “For if we sin WILFULLY after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Heb.10:26-29).

The Bottom Line

For all of those being called of God now, who understand His Word, who have been given the knowledge of God, the requirements of salvation are clear. As Peter put it, “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). “REPENT therefore and BE CONVERTED, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19).

The keys to eternal life, therefore, are to believe on Christ as the Messiah, and to follow His steps in all ways (I Pet.2:21) – to obey His every Word (I John 2:3-6). To strive to live by and obey “every word of God” (Matt.4:4; Luke 4:4).

But the “bottom line” for ALL people, even those who are not called now, is to LOVE your neighbor – for if you don’t do this, then all the rest is nothing but vanity and hypocrisy – empty air and foolishness!

You can keep ALL the commandments – the weekly Sabbath, the annual Holy Days, avoid unclean meats, abjure Christmas, Easter, Halloween, and all the other PAGAN holidays; you can wear

fringes on your garments (Num.15:37-41; Deut.22:12), you even give your life as a martyr, but unless you have LOVE for your neighbor, it would ALL BE IN VAIN – just a VAIN SHOW – NOTHING BUT VANITY!

In truth, Yeshua summed it ALL up when He said, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, *do also to them, for THIS IS the Law and the Prophets*” (Matt.7:12). All the rest, you might say, is “commentary.”