



PLYMOUTH ALLIANCE CHURCH

About our Statement of Faith

1. There is one God, who is infinitely perfect, existing eternally in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The first four words of the Bible, "In the beginning God," are a profound statement about the Eternal Being responsible for our material universe and the creatures that inhabit it. Neither there nor elsewhere does the Bible attempt to prove God's existence. Rather, the Bible affirms His existence or else assumes it. Those opening words of Genesis underscore the priority of God. "In the beginning"-as far back as our fi-nite minds can push the frontier of vents or knowledge-in the *-beginning*, God was already there. And in that beginning, "God cre-ed the heavens and the earth." God made everything-the heaven, the earth, light, sky, land, seas, vegetation, sun, moon, stars, marine life, birds, animals and --climactically -man, "a living being" (Genesis 2:7) made in God's own image 1:26). No honest person can deny that it *is*. *The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.* (Psalm 19:1-2) He who would attempt to say there God is a "fool" (Psalm 14:1). The evidence is overwhelming in favor -of a personal God. God is eternal: "From everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Psalm 30:2). He is everywhere present: *Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.* (Psalm 139:7-10)

We gladly accept the other information our Source Book says about God: that He is Spirit (John 4:24), that He is light (I John 1:5), that He is love (I John 4:8,16), that He is holy (Psalm 99:9), that He is unchanging (Malachi 3:6). The Mighty God (Isa-iah 9:6), He is nevertheless compassionate (Psalm 116:5). At the same time He is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). Impenetrable mystery surrounds God. The Scriptures declare Him to be one: "The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4). Yet God says, "Let *us* make man in *our* image" (Genesis 1:26, *italics mine*), and He speaks of His Son, whom He loves (Matthew 3:17) and of His Spirit, whom He will "pour out ... on all people" (Joel 2:28). These same "three persons" (think of them as three faces of God-Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are set forth unmistakably in Paul's benediction upon the Corinthians (see 2 Co-rinthians 13:14). And this God of might and majesty is infinitely perfect. From our personal standpoint as God's creations, our wonder is not His three "persons" or His eternity or His infinitude. Our wonder is that He should be inclined toward us. We, who in time past denied His sovereignty and walked contrary to His commands, are the objects of His patience and mercy. Listen to what God says in Jeremiah 9:23-24: *"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight.*" To loving concern like this our response can be nothing other than that of the Elders in

Revelation 4: *"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.*

2. Jesus Christ is true God and true man. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He died upon the cross, the Just for the unjust, as a substitutionary sacrifice, and all who believe in Him are justified on the ground of His shed blood. He arose from the dead according to the Scriptures. He is now at the right hand of the Majesty on high as our great High Priest. He will come again to establish His kingdom of righteousness and peace."

Central to our rescue from the long tentacles of sin and our ultimate eternal salvation is Jesus Christ. Mystery surrounds the entry of this God Person into the stream of humanity. The angel Gabriel told Mary, "'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God'" (Luke 1:35*). His mother was the virgin Mary. His only Father was God. Inquisitive minds must reverently leave it there; Scripture provides no other detail.

Mystery likewise surrounds Jesus' death. Not the *details* of His arrest, trial and crucifixion. Each of the evangelists-Matthew, Mark, Luke and John-gives generous pace to elaborating those traumatic fifteen hours between Jesus' midnight arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane until He "gave up his spirit" (Matthew 27:50) after six excruciating hours on the cross. But how could One who was God die? If we cannot imagine how God could be compressed into a developing fetus in Mary's womb, we certainly cannot imagine how He could die upon a Roman cross.

But He did And the Scriptures testify that He died for our sins (I Corinthians 15:3) "Substitutionary sacrifice," the theologians term it. Because Jesus was true man, He could identify with us. Because He was true God, His sacrifice could apply infinitely. Jesus was uniquely able to die for us. Thankfully, He was also willing. And it is through faith in Jesus Christ that we make His sacrifice personally effective: "God presented [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood" (Romans 3:25). We are justified by His blood (Romans 5:9).

If Jesus' advent as the God-Man and His Calvary death are shrouded in mystery, there is no wonder concerning His resurrection from the dead. Being God He had to rise. The grave cannot contain Deity. He was "declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). For "a period of forty days" Jesus "gave many convincing proofs that he was alive" (Acts 1:3). His resurrection, like His death, is well attested. A person must willfully close his mind to prima facie evidence to doubt that Jesus rose from the dead.

Two other facts are important to round out the life and ministry of Jesus. One is His ascension to God the Father. The other is His promised return to earth. His ascension bears very directly on our spiritual well-being. Jesus told His disciples, "'It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you'" (John 16:7). Jesus'

ascent to the Father made possible the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost with all His attendant blessing to those He indwells. Jesus' ascension had another important purpose. At God's right hand He prays for us (Romans 8:34). It is precisely for that reason that our salvation is assured: "He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:25). Jesus' return to earth is forecast frequently by New Testament writers (I Thessalonians 3:13; Hebrews 9:28; James 5:7-8; 1 John 2:28; Revelation 22:20). When He comes He will usher in God's righteous rule and ultimately restore what sin and Satan have ravished.

May His intervention come soon!

3. The Holy Spirit is a divine person, sent to indwell, guide, teach, empower the believer, and convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment."

The Holy Spirit, distributed upon the waiting believers at Pentecost, was Jesus' ascension gift to the church. Jesus had told His disciples: "It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7*).

The Scriptures are clear that God is a Triune: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. By His language to His disciples, Jesus makes it clear that the coming Counselor, the One He called "the Spirit of truth," is as closely identified with Himself as God the Father is. "You know him," Jesus said, "for he lives with you and will be in you. . . . I will come to you" (John 14:16-18).

This divine Trinity converged at Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:16-17), was named in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) and was invoked in Paul's inspired benediction upon the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 13:14).

The Spirit of God is first mentioned in Genesis 1:2, where He is pictured "hovering over the waters" of the formless, empty earth. He is last mentioned in the gracious invitation of Revelation 22:17. That He is a person is implied from the personal pronouns used in referring to Him. Jesus said, "When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come" (John 16:13). He functions as a person. As the church leaders in Antioch were worshiping and fasting, "the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2). The Spirit divides His gifts "to each man, just as he determines" (I Corinthians 12:11).

In this age of grace He has the special mission of indwelling believers. "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Romans 8:9). "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (I Co-rinthians 3:16). In His indwelling capacity He guides us. Paul says the sons of God are "led by the Spirit of God" (Ro-mans 8:14).

He teaches. Jesus said to His disciples, "The Counselor . . . will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26).

He empowers. "You will receive power," Jesus later promised, "when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:8).

He "convict[s] the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). In Old Testament times the Spirit gave men ability to function beyond their own capacity: for example, Bezalel, artificer of the wilderness Tabernacle and its furnishings (Exo-dus 31:3).

He empowered the youthful Saul, Israel's first king (I Samuel 10:10). He influenced prophets (2 Chronicles 15:1; Ezekiel 11:24). The Holy Spirit had an active role in implanting the divine Seed in Mary (Luke 1:35). We are indebted to Him for the Scriptures, God's revelation in word (2 Peter 1:21). He graciously assists the penitent and bears witness to their adoption as God's children (Romans 8:15-16). He baptizes the believer into union with other believers in Christ's Body, the Church (I Corinthians 12:13).

He is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17), the Spirit of glory (I Peter 4:14), the Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10:29), the Spirit of wisdom and understanding and counsel and power and knowledge and the fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2). Best of all, He is God with us "forever" (John 14:16), to reveal Jesus, to give us eternal life, to affirm the unity of Father, Son and church (John 14:18-20).

Spirit of God, occupy our hearts!

4. The Old and New Testaments, inerrant as originally given, were verbally inspired by God and are a complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men. They constitute the divine and only rule of Christian faith and practice.

Inerrant as "originally given," "verbally inspired," "a complete revelation," "the only rule of Christian faith and practice." Some Christians feel those words are too strong to describe the Holy Scriptures. Yes, they agree, the Bible is God's authoritative Word. Yes, it is a lamp (Psalm 119:105) and a fire (Jeremiah 5:14). Yes, it gives understanding (Psalm 119:169), it judges (John 12:48), it is at work in those who believe (see I Thessalonians 2:13). *But inerrant? Verbally inspired? A complete revelation? The divine and only rule of Christian faith and practice?* In two places the Bible explains how the Scriptures came to be: "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16*); "Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

Inerrancy is simply the logical extension of what the Bible says about itself. If all of it is "God-breathed," and if, as Jesus stated, God's word is truth (John 17:17), how can it be erroneous? It is clear from the Gospels that Jesus had implicit confidence in the truthfulness of the Old Testament. He quoted it frequently. Not once did He ever hint that any part of it might be in error.

But could there not be some information in the Bible that is not factual some part perhaps added by others and not really part of the "God-breathed" Scriptures? Since we have only copies of copies and our English Bible is necessarily a translation of those we allow for possible human error in the transmittal: "inerrant *as originally given*." But a comparison of manuscripts copied over a wide span of time gives us confidence that our Bible today is essentially what it was in its original form. The copyists and translators have been amazingly faithful.

Conversely, suppose the Bible was not inerrant. Who should be the judge of what was truth and what was error? If God made a mistake in a historical reference, how could we be sure He made no mistake in a doctrinal reference? The position becomes immediately untenable. If the Scriptures are God-breathed, inerrancy is the only viable position.

Like inerrancy, verbal inspiration is a logical inference of the God-breathed quality of the Scriptures. Verbal inspiration is simply the concept that God guided in the very word choices of the human writers, allowing them to use their style while they wrote the exact words He wanted to be written.

Words are encoded thoughts. Thoughts can only be conveyed exactly by exact words. The completeness of the revelation is inferred from the nature of God. If the Bible was still incomplete with the last chapter of Revelation, then God in effect left His creatures to flounder an act contrary to Jesus' promise not to leave His followers Counselorless (John 14:18), and an act contrary to God's loving nature as Heavenly Father.

The Scriptures are enough. Church pronouncements, papal decrees, the writings of a Joseph Smith or a Mary Baker Eddy do not extend or expand the Scriptures. Wherein they run contrary to what the Bible teaches they are blasphemous. The Scriptures are our only divine rule of Christian faith and practice.

God has left us a Guidebook, totally accurate because it is His work and Word and, therefore, totally trustworthy. He has given it to us that we might learn about Christ (John 5:39), that we might be adequately guided (Psalm 119:105), that we might be encouraged (Romans 15:4).

A Book so valuable deserves our undivided attention. Blessed is the preacher who expounds it. Blessed is the Christian, preacher or layman, who meditates in it day and night.

5. Man was originally created in the image and likeness of God: he fell through disobedience, incurring thereby both physical and spiritual death. All men are born with a sinful nature, are separated from the life of God, and can be saved only through the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The portion of the impenitent and unbelieving is existence forever in conscious torment; and that of the believer, in everlasting joy and bliss.

Each of us was born with a Past. We are children of Adam, and he bequeathed us a legacy of sin and death that none of us has been able to disavow. We are not sinners because we have sinned; we are sinners and therefore we have sinned. "The result of one trespass was condemnation for all men. . . . Through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners" (Romans 5:18-19*). David admits: *Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.* (Psalm 51:5)

The inspired Bible writers stretch the human vocabulary to describe our sordid state: "dead in . . . transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2: 1); "foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved" (Titus 3:3); "separated from the life of God" (Ephesians 4:18); "God's enemies" (Romans 5:10). "The heart"- that seat of life and strength- *... is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.*

Who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

"Totally depraved," the theologians term our condition. We may not be as bad as we possibly could be, but we are as *bad off* as we possibly could be.

Adam, the perfect human being, created in God's image (Genesis 1:27), succumbed to Satan's temptation and died (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:16). Spiritual death came first. He found himself alienated from the God with whom he had fellowshiped (Genesis 3:8). He was banished from the Garden of Eden (3:23). Physical death for Adam came some 900 years later (5:5), but long before, sin had been programmed ineradicably into the human genetic code. That, in brief, is our Past. Spiritual death. Alienation from God. And apart from God's intervention that is also our Future. We need do nothing to remain dead and to be eternally alienated from God in the conscious torment Jesus

described in Luke 16:23-24. Without exception we have sinned; we fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). "The soul who sins ... will die" (Ezekiel 18:20). "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

But man also has a Present, and in man's Present lies the possibility of change. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). "As sin reigned in death, so also grace ... reign[s] through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (5-21). Man, created with great promise, blighted by great failure, potentially rescued by a great Savior, he is assured of ultimately great torment or a great salvation, depending on his here-and-now choices.

Our Past is irrevocable. Our Present is given to us that we might alter our Future.

Dead men need more than to turn over a new leaf. They need to be resurrected. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (John 3:7). He went on to declare: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life...."

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (3:16,36).

6. Salvation has been provided through Jesus Christ for all men; and those who repent and believe in Him are born again of the Holy Spirit, receive the gift of eternal life, and become the children of God."

It is no wonder the Bible calls it good news that "salvation has been provided through Jesus Christ for all," to quote from the article of faith reproduced below. Salvation brings life spiritual life in place of our former spiritual deadness "in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2: 1), a divine *quality* of life that Jesus calls "eternal" (John 3:15). Salvation brings peace with God (Romans 5:1) reconciliation with the Creator God whom we had previously opposed. Salvation brings forgiveness of all our sins (Ephesians 1:7). Salvation brings adoption into the family of God (Ephesians 1:5). In a new sense God is our Father and we are His family. Were there only these present benefits, salvation would be a priceless treasure. But there is also the future.

What do the Scriptures have to say about the destiny of those who fail to appropriate God's provision of salvation? Jesus Himself calls their destiny hell. He describes hell as a place of fiery, unremitting torment where the inhabitants would give anything for a drop of water to cool their heat-parched tongues (Luke 16:24). He calls it a place of "outer darkness," where "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:12). Originally designed for Satan and his sinister angels, it will be shared by all who know not God (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

By contrast, those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ, the Savior, may look forward to being with Christ forever (I Thessalonians 4:17). They will enjoy His presence and rest from their labors (Revelation 14:13). Good news indeed! The Child born nearly 2,000 years ago in the Bethlehem stable came to exchange His perfect life for our hopelessly imperfect lives. He "died for us so that . . . we may live together with him" (I Thessalonians 5: 10 NIV). Because of Jesus we can

"repent and believe." But good news is to be shared. Jesus provided this salvation for all: "Whosoever" believes in Jesus will have "everlasting life" (John 3:16); "[Jesus] died for all" (2 Corinthians 5:14). Universal provision implies a universal need. This need as well is underscored in the Scriptures: "Both Jews and Gentiles . . . are all under sin. . . . There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:9-10); "All have sinned" (3:23).

There is also Jesus' own comment: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Were punishment only for those who deliberately reject Jesus Christ, God's Son, our most merciful course would be to stop all witnessing, cancel all missionary work and let as many as possible die in ignorance of Jesus. But in reality the most benighted heathen has not been left without a witness. God has made Himself known through His creation (Romans 1:19-20). In refusing to acknowledge Him or to give Him thanks (1:21), mankind is guilty. Unless man repents, man stands condemned.

Shall we, can we, selfishly keep to ourselves such eminently good tidings, especially knowing the fate of the unrepentant? There are friends and neighbors who have not really understood the alternatives that confront them. There are literally billions of people in the nations of earth who have not heard the good news that a Savior has been born, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:1 1). Reginald Heber, who put feet to the urgency he himself felt and went to India as a pioneer for Christ, expressed the task this way:

Salvation! O Salvation! The joyful sound proclaim, Till earth's remotest station, Has learned Messiah's name.

7. It is the will of God that each believer should be filled with the Holy Spirit and be sanctified wholly, being separated from sin and the world and fully dedicated to the will of God, thereby receiving power for holy living and effective service. This is both a crisis and a progressive experience wrought in the life of the believer subsequent to conversion."

No one can dispute the clear, Biblical basis for the assertion that we are to be "filled with the Holy Spirit and be sanctified wholly," or that this filling with God and being set apart for His use results in "power for holy living and effective service."

"Be filled with the Spirit," the Word commands (Ephesians 5:18*). "May God himself . . . sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless" (I Thessalonians 5:23).

Jesus said to His followers, "'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses'" (Acts 1:8). What is disputed is when all this happens. Some insist it is a process that begins at conversion and follows indefinitely thereafter. Others hold that it is a subsequent crisis experience as definite as conversion itself. We believe it is both.

There are at least three reasons why we say the filling of the Spirit and entire sanctification are "wrought in the life of the believer subsequent to conversion. " First, that seems to be the sequence in Romans, the New Testament's great doctrinal treatise. Salvation through faith in Christ is central to the first five chapters, culminating in the beautiful announcement of 5:1: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Then comes the struggle of chapters 6 and 7 between this new life and the sin still so evidently in us. "What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. . . . When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.... Who will rescue me?" (7:15,21,24). Chapter 8 brings the answer life in the Spirit: "There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (8:1-2). Second, other New Testament Scriptures bear out this sequence. The Ephesians were already believers when Paul exhorted them to be filled with the Spirit. The Thessalonians were believers when Paul prayed that God would sanctify them through and through. Paul himself was converted to Christ on the Damascus road, but he was filled with the Spirit three days later (Acts 9:17; cp. 9:7). The original dozen believers at Ephesus (Acts 19: 1-6) received the Holy Spirit after they had trusted in Christ and had been baptized.

Only the initial coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) and the "Gentile Pentecost" (Acts 10),, are exceptions, and they each ushered in a special era to Jews and Gentiles respectively. Third, such a sequence is logical. Sanctification involves the dedication of our lives. Before conversion we were "dead in [our] transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2: 1). God wants "living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1).

But although by the very nature of the terminology it is a crisis point in time when we determine to give ourselves wholly to God, it is also a process that should continue. Paul prays for the Philippians that their "love may abound more and, more in knowledge and depth of insight" so that they may be "pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness" (1:9-11). In instructing the Thessalonians "how to live in order to please God," Paul asks and urges them "to do this more and more" (I Thessalonians 4: 1).

Each day can be a deepening experience with God. That is what makes the Spirit-filled life so profound.

8. Provision is made in the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ for the healing of the mortal body. Prayer for the sick and anointing with oil are taught in the Scriptures and are privileges for the Church in this present age."

The redemption provided by God in Christ applies to more than the spiritual dimension of our lives. Paul prays that the Thessalonians' "whole spirit, soul and body will be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thessalonians 5:23*).

Our bodies are of concern to God. There is "provision," as the doctrinal statement words it, "in the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ for the healing of the mortal body." The Scriptures seem convincingly clear about both the provision for healing and the will of God to heal. There is Jesus' *example*. He refused no one. "People brought . . . all who were ill ... and he healed them" (Matthew 4:24). "He healed all their sick" (Matthew 12:15). There is no possible way to read into the four Gospels any reluctance on the part of Jesus Christ to heal those who came to Him with physical disorders. On the contrary, we must conclude that during His earthly ministry Jesus refused no one. He seemed eager to minister to every physical need even that of the Syrian Phoenician woman's child (Mark 7:24-30). This accords with Jesus' work. "He ... carried our diseases" (Matthew 8:17). Matthew, speaking under inspiration, cites an evening when the demon-possessed and the sick were brought to Jesus. Matthew reports, "He drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick" (8:16). Then he comments: "This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet

Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.'" That reference is to one of the best known of the Messianic prophecies: Isaiah's prediction concerning the suffering Servant. Jesus' atonement was to be not only for our sins but for our physical infirmities as well.

We have also Jesus' *word*. A leprous man "knelt before him and said, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean'" (Matthew 8:2). Jesus replied, "I am willing." Unconditional willingness. But all of that happened during the years Jesus lived among us. We could reason that Jesus' ministry of physical healing was for a limited time, to establish His credentials. We could, that is, were it not for three additional texts in the inspired Bible. One is Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." What He was in the flesh

He still is. Another is the discussion of spiritual gifts in First Corinthians 12, and among them "gifts of healing" (12:9,28,30) in the church. The final one is James 5:14-15: "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up."

What about Christians in the Bible who were not healed? Paul apparently suffered from an eye disorder for which he had to draw on Christ's grace (cp. Galatians 4:15 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-9). Timothy frequently was sick (I Timothy 5:23). Trophimus had to be sidelined because of illness (2 Timothy 4:20). Not everyone in Bible times was healed; not everyone today is healed. In Paul's case it was disciplinary, he says, to prevent him from "becoming conceited"(2 Corinthians 12:7). In God's value system our spiritual welfare is more important than our physical welfare.

Still, the offer of healing is there for us. To shun it because some people are not healed is shortsighted and maybe short faithed.

The believer who wants to enter into all that God has for him should welcome this important benefit.

9a. The Church consists of all those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, are redeemed through His blood, and are born again of the Holy Spirit. Christ is the Head of the Body, the Church, which has been commissioned by Him to go into all the world as a witness, preaching the Gospel to all nations.

Church. The word is simple enough. In New Testament Greek it means literally "called out"; hence, an assembly. It is used in that latter sense to describe Israel under Moses in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). Translated "assembly," it occurs in the account of a gathering of townspeople in Ephesus (Acts 19:32,39,41). It is used by the writer to the Hebrews to translate a reference in Psalm 22:22 to the Jewish congregation. All the other 10 uses of the word in the New Testament with two possible exceptions in Matthew 18:17 --refer to the Christian church. Always the reference is to corporate people. Not once-not even in First Timothy 3:15--does it stand for the building in which Christians gather for worship, our most common use of the word today.

Usually *church* denotes a local assembly of believers: "the church . . . in Jerusalem" (Acts 11:22), "the church ... at Antioch" (I 3: 1). Sometimes it seems to refer to the wider body of Christians, as, for instance, when Paul says he "persecuted the church of God" (I Corinthians 15:9). And sometimes, especially in Ephesians, it refers to all the redeemed people who have been given standing with God through their faith in Christ's death on the cross.

Church, then, in the New Testament is a double-duty word. It can refer to the visible, here-and-now assembly or assemblies, comprised hopefully of believers, but possibly also of persons unregenerate there on pretense, having a form of godliness but denying its power. It can also refer to that vast body of redeemed saints, living and dead, their identities known for certain only to God, their names inscribed in His "book of life" (Revelation 20:12,15), Spirit-born, blood-washed, Christ's own Bride.

To distinguish between the two, we use church and Church: the visible, evident local congregation and the universal, spiritual company of all who are Christ's. These latter are the Church with a capital "C": "all those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, are redeemed through His blood, and are born again of the Holy Spirit."

Those requisites for membership in Christ's Body are three aspects one transaction, made possible by our triune God. The Father helps us believe. The Son redeems us through His blood. The Holy Spirit puts new divine life within us.

"Christ is the Head of the Body." That very analogy of Head and Body suggests interdependence. If we can say it respectfully, Christ needs us. He has no hands, no feet but ours. And we need Him; without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). It also suggests interrelatedness among the members. That is why members of the Church, although total strangers, feel an identity, an affinity when they meet. They are related by blood, Christ's blood. It is clear that Christ intended His Church to expand. He said to His followers: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This statement followed His commission to His disciples, noted by Matthew (28:19-20), Mark (16:15), Luke (24:46-48) and John (20:21). On the day of Pentecost 120 disciples became 3,120 (Acts 2:41). And the multiplication continued as "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (2:47).

The expansion continues yet as this Church, not simply the local assembly or a particular denomination, but all who are born again "commissioned by [Christ] to go into all the world as a witness, preach[es] the Gospel to all nations."

9b The local church is a body of believers in Christ who are joined together for the worship of God, for edification through the Word of God, for prayer, fellowship, the proclamation of the Gospel, and observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper."

The New Testament speaks of Church and church. We capitalize the word to denote the universal company of true believers in Jesus Christ. We use the word also for the local assembly or assemblies of professing Christians. Fully 85 percent of the New Testament references to *church* are to these local fellowships. One of the most evident things about New Testament local churches is the relatedness of the members. This bonding is the consequence of having a mutual Head, Christ Jesus.

The local church is a *body of believers in Christ who are joined together*. In that fellowship they worship. Worship was so normal a part of being a New Testament church that there is no ready proof-text to

substantiate it. But dissident Jews accused Paul of "persuading the people to worship" (Acts 18:13*). Paul writes to the Philippians, "We . . . worship by the Spirit of God" (3:3).

It is fair to say that *the worship of God* is a prime purpose of the local church's gatherings. In First Corinthians 12-14, where we learn so much about the customs of the early church, Paul makes it clear that the gatherings were to build up individual members through sound teaching. He says, "In the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue" (14:19). It is clear in the New Testament that the basis of instruction was the Word of God, the Old Testament Scriptures and the inspired words of the writing apostles.

A second purpose of the church is *edification through the Word of God*. The New Testament church moved forward on its knees. During one of Peter's jailings "the church was earnestly praying to God for him" (Acts 12:5). Paul pointedly asked the churches to whom he wrote to pray for him and his ministry (see, for example, Ephesians 6:18-20).

The local church gathers for *prayer*. Most believers find themselves in a spiritually hostile world. The church offers them the spiritual reinforcement of other caring members. That is why the writer to the Hebrews exhorts, "Let us not give up meeting together" (10:25). We are to "spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (10:24); we are to "encourage one another". (10:25)

10. There shall be a bodily resurrection of the just and of the unjust; for the former, a resurrection unto life; for the latter, a resurrection unto judgment."

There shall be a bodily resurrection of the just and of the unjust." Article 10 in the Alliance statement of faith admits of no argument, for it is taken almost verbatim from the Scriptures. Jesus said: "A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [the Son of Man's] voice and come out those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned" (John 5:28-29*). Only those who deny the truthfulness of Christ and the Scriptures can doubt the coming resurrection.

Note how specific Jesus is:

Who? All.

Where? *In their graves*.

What? *Will bear his voice and come out*.

It remains for us to answer only the when and, to the extent possible, the how.

Martha, protesting Jesus' promise that her brother, Lazarus, would rise again, answered the Lord, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24). Jesus did not question the accuracy of her statement. Clearly, then, the resurrection is at the last day-at the consummation of world events. This timetable is borne out in the Revelation, where the resurrection is not mentioned until chapter 20 just before the apostle John's description of the new heaven and the new earth.

In chapter 20 we learn an interesting detail: the resurrection will occur in two stages, separated by a span of 1,000 years. The "first resurrection" is of those faithful to Jesus Christ, who have not worshiped Antichrist or received his mark. Over them the second death has no power. They will reign with Christ for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4-6). "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended" (20:5). They are those who face the "great white throne and him who was seated on it" (20:11). They are those who will be confronted by the open record books and who will be judged by what is in them (20:12). Their end is the "lake of fire, . . . the second death" (20:14). These Scriptures make plain an alarming fact: we do not have to be believers to be resurrected from the dead. Resurrection will happen to all. Physical death is not the end of existence, either for the Christian or the unbelieving sinner. God will have the final word.

But, "How are the dead raised?" (I Corinthians 15:35). The concept of resurrection puzzled the first-century Corinthians; it continues to puzzle people. Bodies return to dust, to be carried in a dozen directions. The molecules become the building blocks of other human bodies. Do not underrate the speaking God. He whose word brought earth and stars into orderly existence will speak once more and "all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out." Just as seed may bear little resemblance to the plant that springs from the soil, "so will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (I Corinthians 15:42-44).

Paul saw the resurrection as a worthwhile goal, and so should we. He declared, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:10-11).

A resurrection is ahead. If ever we strived to be first, it should be for this event. For over those brought to life in the first resurrection death has no further power.

11. The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is imminent and will be personal, visible, and pre-millennial. This is the believer's blessed hope and is a vital truth which is an incentive to holy living and faithful service."

That Jesus will return to earth He Himself confirms. Of that return He says, "They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30*). With the resplendence of heaven at His command, why would Jesus want to return to earth? His return is linked to a long-standing covenant made by God to Israel, and particularly to Israel's great King David: " 'I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, . . . and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Samuel 7:12-13). That promise is tied to still another, uttered by the prophet Isaiah:

To us a child is born. . . . He will reign on David's throne . . . from that time on and forever. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Jesus will establish a righteous kingdom to succeed where Adam and his progeny failed. To do so He must and will return to our earth. That it will be a "personal, visible" return seems clear from the message given the disciples at Jesus' ascension: "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: II). John prophesies: *Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him. (Revelation 1:7)*

Jesus foretells the general scenario as world events rush to a climax: false messiahs (Matthew 24:5), wars and rumors of war (24:6), famines, earthquakes (24:7), deceptive prophets (24:11), increased wickedness (24:12), the universal preaching of the gospel (24:14), the predicted "abomination" in the temple (24:15), unparalleled distress, shortened for the sake of the elect (24:21-22), a darkened sun and moon and falling stars (24:29), His "sign" in the sky, and then His return "on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory" (24:30). With a loud trumpet call His angels will gather His elect "from one end of the heavens to the other" (24:31). Here, on the earth He created and that mankind defiled, Jesus will set up His righteous rule His followers reigning with Him for a thousand years (see Revelation 20:1-6).

When is this to occur? *Imminently*, "Keep watch," Jesus said, "because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. . . . You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matthew 24:42). By definition *imminent* means "ready to take place." Does it imply, in the case of Jesus' return, that no related event must first intervene? Not necessarily. When Jesus spoke the warning to His disciples, a number of events had to take place before He could return: His crucifixion, His resurrection and ascension, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. As it turns out, nearly 2,000 years of world history have had to intervene. And Jesus Himself said, "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). With God's help we are in the process of preaching the gospel worldwide so that Jesus can return.

Our gathering with Christ at His return ushers in the day of rewards at His judgment seat (2 Corinthians 5:10)-"an incentive to holy living" indeed!

So we stand firm, immovable, always giving ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because we know that our labor in the Lord is not in vain (I Corinthians 15:58). He who is coming again says so!