

CHURCH UNION AND THE ANTICHRIST

Preface

Worldwide church union is a subject about which people may be emotional, indifferent, cautious, or curious. Therefore, any single treatment of the issue cannot satisfy the needs of all readers. The subject is complex and, if treated exhaustively, would fill a large volume—not a section such as this. It is, therefore, important to state from the outset that this section is merely an outline—a summary. Its purpose is to present to the honest truth-seeker the findings of a century of Bible study on this subject as gleaned, collected, and recognized as valid by Bible students all over the world. Additionally, it is the purpose of this section to relate the subject of church union to God's plans and purposes over a large span of time. This sort of broad spectrum view often leads to clearer thinking and investigation on any subject. The views presented herein are not the views of a single author, but the views of hundreds of consecrated Christians whose lives have been totally devoted to the harmonization of the Word of God—both Old and New Testaments. This being the case, it is obvious that this section cannot be the most detailed study available. It does, however, reflect detailed study, and it is the desire of those distributing it that any reader may feel free to contact the distributors for further details. If the reader seeks truth, he must be willing to pursue truth in full honesty of heart—and then it shall be given to him even as it is written: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

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The Other Half of the Gospel

Why did God create the earth and mankind? What is God doing in the earth today? What is the Gospel? What is the Church? What is the ultimate purpose of the Church? Are all outside the Church forever lost? What about the Jew? These questions and their answers lay the necessary groundwork for an examination of the subject of church union. Without comprehending God's overall plan for His creation, the study of a subject like the ecumenical movement certainly can bear little fruit. Because of this we devote our first chapter to a consideration of the Gospel—the "good news" of the Bible. The title of this chapter, "The Other Half of the Gospel," suggests that what we regularly hear preached as the Gospel is incomplete—and this is indeed the case! An examination of the Scriptural definition of the Gospel will prove that the Gospel is actually "good news" in a fuller sense than most Christians have ever dreamed. In

Gal 3:8 the Apostle Paul makes an interesting statement. He claims that the Gospel was preached to Abraham! This is a concept not generally appreciated—that the Gospel can be found in the Old Testament! Abraham and his descendants believed God and His promises, and the belief at the core of traditional Judaism is based upon the Gospel which God preached to Abraham. What is this belief? It is basically this: Messiah would come and bless everyone on earth through the agency of Abraham's children (or seed). This blessing would include those who had died by resurrecting them from the dead. (It was because of his faith in the resurrection that Abraham was willing to offer his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice to God.) Paul summed up all of this belief in the words spoken to Abraham, "in thee shall all nations be blessed." Remember, Paul called this very promise the Gospel! It is a beautiful Gospel, too! It promises that all mankind would be blessed. (See the original promise in Genesis 22:15-18.) Christianity generally does not define the Gospel in quite the same manner. The teaching of Christendom regarding the Gospel has been basically this: Faithful believers in Christ will go to heaven when they die.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO:

Judaism: Messiah will bless all on earth through Abraham's seed and will even raise those who have died to enjoy the blessings.

Christendom: Faithful Christians go to heaven after death.

On the surface Judaism seems better, doesn't it? After all, it includes all men in the blessing, whereas Christendom excludes all—except Christians! But our examination of the matter is not complete. As we look into it more, remember that we cannot immediately judge either of these definitions of the Gospel as being wrong. Judaism got its belief from God's own prophets; we would indeed be presumptuous to ignore that testimony! And Jesus, who was a Jew, never disputed the Gospel as preached to Abraham. But we must acknowledge that the Bible also teaches that faithful Christians will go to heaven. These two versions of the Gospel are not inharmonious. By accepting them both, we learn the full Gospel. We have found that the Gospel is summarized in God's promise to Abraham that "In thy seed shall all nations be blessed." What does this mean? Notice that it involves two distinct and separate parts: 1. Abraham's seed 2. All nations of earth Abraham's seed is not totally as Abraham might have expected, for the Apostle informs us in Gal 3:29 that "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." This is a key to our understanding. It says that faithful Christians are counted by God as being Abraham's seed or children. It also says that because of this they become "heirs" according to the "promise." What promise? The promise was that the seed would bless everyone else. Now we are at the crux of the matter! If true Christians are the seed, we see God's eventual purpose for them—the blessing of all the nations of the earth, and the resurrecting of all those who have died, just as Abraham expected, so that they too could be blessed. Now our chart is harmonious. Those who go to heaven will bless those here on

earth!

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO:

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But this is harmonious only if we retain the "other half of the Gospel" — the part Judaism believes. And that is that not only will the "seed" be saved, but so will the rest of mankind! This is actually saying that there are two salvations. First, the seed (true Christians) are saved; and secondly, they (the seed) save and bless everyone else! Yes, the complete Gospel is really GOOD NEWS! The New Testament informs us that there will be two kinds of resurrection, one in heaven for the true seed (the "first resurrection") and one on earth for all the rest of mankind. This is the whole Gospel. Christendom and Judaism have both been incomplete and wrong in themselves. Each had one half of the Gospel! But now we see that those who will go to heaven in the first resurrection will not go to float on clouds and play harps, but rather to participate with Christ in the rulership of his kingdom which will bless all the families here on earth. Christ's kingdom will have two parts: heavenly and earthly. If this were not so, how could the Lord have taught the disciples to pray "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done in earth"? (Matthew 6:10) Or how could the angels have predicted "peace on earth, goodwill toward men"? (Luke 2:12-14) Paul also mentions these two salvations in 1 Timothy 4:19 where he says "we trust in the living God who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe." It is clear that Paul still had in mind the seed and all men as being the two parts of the Gospel because he says that salvation is: 1. for all men and 2. specially for those that believe. The "special" salvation is, of course, the salvation of the "first resurrection" (the heavenly resurrection—Re 20:6). It is the salvation of true Christians, those whom God recognizes as His own true Church—"the seed of Abraham." Understanding this matter of the two salvations, earthly and heavenly (or the two parts to the Gospel), answers many questions about certain scriptures. For instance, Matthew 11:11 tells us what a great man John the Baptist was. Yet in the same verse we have our Lord's own words that John will not be a part of the heavenly resurrection! John instead will be a part of all the nations of the earth who will be raised and blessed right here on the earth by "the seed" —the Church raised to heavenly glory. So then, in short, the Gospel is the beautiful promise that all men will be resurrected and be given an opportunity to have a perfect, everlasting life on the earth. The exception to this will be those who faithfully serve the Lord during this present life; they will live in heaven as spirit beings, and their job will be to bless the race of men on earth. The true Gospel is a combination of the basic expectations of both Jews and Christians. We began this chapter with a list of seven questions basic to an understanding of God's plan (and hence to an understanding of details of prophecy such as the ecumenical movement). To close this chapter, we will ask the same seven

questions—this time with concise answers to cement our understanding and memory before we proceed to our principal topic.

1. Why did God create the earth and mankind? He created because He has love as one of His primary attributes, and true love must give. Therefore he formed the earth "to be inhabited" (Isaiah 45:18) by perfect human beings who would love and serve Him freely and to whom He would freely give blessing and life. This creation was "not in vain."

2. What is God doing in the earth today? He is doing several things So that his purpose as stated above will be accomplished—so that His word will "not return unto Him void but it shall accomplish that which He pleases, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto He sent it." (Isaiah 55:11) The Lord is permitting evil to have full sway in the earth So that man will be able fully to see its results. (Ecclesiasties 1:13; 3:10) Therefore, in the Kingdom reign of righteousness, mankind will be able to make a free and intelligent choice between good and evil after having experienced both. But God is doing more. He is choosing "a people for His name" (Acts 15:14), which we will discuss in a coming question.

3. What is the Gospel? As we have just seen, the Gospel is God's good news to man that His original plan has not failed—that man will be made alive and receive God's blessings eternally on a perfected earth. This is all to be done by a promised "seed."

4. & 5. What is the Church? and What is the ultimate purpose for the Church? The true Church of the Bible is that promised seed just mentioned, and its ultimate purpose is, by God's grace, to participate in God's own work of accomplishing His original design for the earth and its inhabitants. One of the main things that God is doing in the earth today is choosing that Church—one member here, one there. As Acts 15:14 declares, God, having found too few Jews faithful at the first advent to constitute this Church, is "visiting the Gentiles" also—not to bless or save them all now, but to take out from their midst "a people for His name." This "people for His name" will be those who have been called of God and who have faithfully suffered with Christ. The Greek word for church (ekklesia) literally means "a calling out." These called out ones are the true Church. They will receive the first or heavenly resurrection. Then they will be "priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years." (Revelation 20:6) This reigning will be for the purpose of blessing all the nations of the earth. What a prospect! This is the very reason that James says God is taking a people for His name: that "after this ... the residue of men might seek after the Lord." (Acts 15:13-18)

6. Are all outside the Church forever lost? Of course not! The absurdity of this position should now be clear to us all! The whole purpose of the Church is to bless all those who are outside of the Church! God isn't even dealing with the world in general now. He is merely choosing out from among them those who will become members of the Church. After the Church is completely chosen and she becomes the bride of Christ at

his second advent, then "the Spirit (of Christ) and the bride (the Church) say Come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Revelation 22:17)

7. What about the Jew? Israel as a nation has forever lost the opportunity of becoming the Church (Romans 11:25); but Israel too shall be saved. (Romans 11:26) It is through the natural seed of Abraham, the Jew, that God purposes to give His New Covenant to mankind. (Je 31:31-34) Israel is now reestablished as a nation. God put her there. She will be the nation from whom the blessings will flow worldwide, for it is written that "Many nations shall come and say; Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths, for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord form Jerusalem." (Micah 4:2-4) Likewise it is said, "Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to pray before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold (out of all languages of the nations), even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." (Zechariah 8:22, 23)

A Note Before Continuing:

It is probably that many reading this section consider themselves "New Testament Christians." Hence it has probably been noticed that we are using Old Testament texts as liberally as New Testament texts. It is, therefore, timely to point out from the New Testament that the Old Testament is as valid to us as the New, and that anyone rejecting its testimony cannot hope to understand what the Lord is doing. The Old Testament is not yet fulfilled entirely, and many of its prophecies are finding their fulfillment before our eyes today. First, note the following New Testament texts which commend the study of the "Scriptures" remembering that the only Scriptures then in existence were the books of the Old Testament prophets: Acts 17:2,3, 10-13; 18:24-28; Romans 1:1,2; Romans 16:25-27; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Peter 3:15-18; Matthew 22:28-30; Galatians 3:8; 4:28-31; 1 Timothy 5:18; James 2:8; 4:5; 1 Peter 2:5,6. Additionally, we have the strong testimony of Paul (Rom. 15:4) that the Old Testament is for "our learning." And Peter twice supports this view. In 1 Peter 1:10-12 he explains that the prophets did not minister to themselves, but to us, Christians. In 2 Peter 1:16-21 he points out that the Old Testament prophecies are a "more sure" authority to us than was Peter's own experience on the mount of transfiguration! And he says we should listen to them "until the day dawn" —that is, they are valuable to us even up to the time of the Lord's second coming. If, therefore, we accept the authority of the Apostles (the New Testament), we cannot reject the Old Testament's testimony and authority.

"Say ye not a confederacy..."

Our Lord's parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30) forms

an excellent basis with which to begin a consideration of church union. This parable predicts the history of Christianity for nearly two thousand years. The parable explains that Jesus would sow the Gospel message followed by Satan's sowing a counterfeit message. Thus the true Church was founded, but the apostate church also grew very quickly. The Lord's servants inquired about the wisdom of separating the two groups, but the Lord cautioned that such separation would do more harm than good until it was the proper time for separation. The fact that the gathering out of the tares would have rooted up the wheat also shows prophetically that the false church (tares) would probably outnumber the true Church (wheat). This is in harmony with Jesus' statements that "many are called but few are chosen," and with His naming His true Church a "little flock." Just So it has been. The message of the Lord and the Apostles was soon corrupted. The ambition of early churchmen placed power above truth, and the great Roman Church ruled the world. Some did attempt reforms, but the spirit of Satan infiltrated these reform movements So that they too became tare- infested and formed their own denominational tare collections—each, however, containing some wheat. The parable ends with a very important message for us. It says that the day would come when it would be proper to separate the wheat from the tares. This would be in the time of the "harvest," which our Lord elsewhere explains is the end of the age—the end of the call of the Church—the time of His return. We are now living in the harvest of the age. Therefore the Lord looks over his field to see what fruit it has borne. He considers the tares (false church) worthless for his purpose (which is to bless the world), and So he determines their destruction—as institutions, not as people! Remember that the Lord did very much the same thing at his first advent. He looked over the Jewish church to see if it had borne the proper fruit. When he saw it had not, he determined their destruction—again, as a nation, not as individuals. But those Jews who were faithful—those who were "wheat" —he separated and gave them the opportunity of being the first members of the Church. (Compare Matthew 23:37-39 with John 1:11,12.)

Mt 13:30, therefore, becomes a touchstone for our study of what is happening in the ecclesiastical world. Note just what it says: "Gather ... the tares and bind them in bundles."

Here it is! The ecumenical drive for unity is here stated with such simplicity! (For a more detailed discussion, see *Thy Kingdom Come*, page 142 207870) [See Appendix A page "7" for more on the current ecumenical movement.] The Lord is here predicting that prevailing forces which he would maneuver would actually cause the "bundling" together. Of course, the denominations think that unity is for their benefit and strength; but the parable states otherwise. It points out that they are being bundled to be burned (destroyed as institutions). The wheat, however, which is the true Church, is being gathered out from denominationalism to be gathered together with Jesus to reign with him to bless all the families of the earth. (And, by the way, those who were the tares will be among those who will be blessed!) It becomes clear, then, that those who would be faithfully following the Lord at this time

(the wheat) could never participate in the church union (tare) movement. Instead, the true wheat will recognize the ecumenical movement as a sign of the nearness of the kingdom. They will be content to lean on the Lord and his wisdom rather than on the organizational stratagems of the so-called churches. The true Church will stand separate (and informed), neither joining nor fighting the ecumenical movement. Other Scriptures state the same lesson. A brief consideration of an Old Testament prophecy will be a help. It is found in Isaiah 8. For brevity we shall consider only Isaiah 8:9-13: "Associate yourselves, O people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear all of ye far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us. For the Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not a confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A Confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread." In Isaiah 8:9 we find the forecast that the people will want to associate themselves. It also states that they would "gird" themselves. Gird means bind. It is clearly the same binding in bundles to which our Lord refers in the parable. But the Lord declares through the prophet that all their attempts would ultimately meet with destruction. Ultimately they would be "broken in pieces," and their counseling would not produce the ends they desired. And why not? Because God would not be with them! He would be with "us" (Isaiah 8:10) —the true Church. In Isaiah 8:12-13 the Lord counsels the true Church as to what its position should be: "Say ye not a confederacy" — don't participate in the union. "Neither fear ye their fear or be afraid." What is the fear of denominationalism? Their fear is that their influence is waning; their fear is that they are losing the support of the people; their fear is that society is collapsing. Indeed, their fears are well founded! But they know not that the Lord has decreed the destruction of the denominations and even the social order itself So that He can establish His righteous kingdom on earth in the place of the present corrupt order of things. The true Church, understanding what the Lord is doing, does not fear. It rejoices to see the evidences of the nearness of the kingdom. (Psalms 97:8)

How Can Unity Be Bad?

Very often the advocates of church union quote from our Lord's prayer as recorded in John 17. Here Jesus prays for his Church and asks the Father that "they all may be one." (John 17:21) Jesus' desire for the unity of the Church, however, could only refer to the true Church, the wheat. If he desired unity for all now, why would he have said that he would separate the wheat from the tares? Jesus' prayer does have an answer, however. The true Church is united—and it is united in the way which Jesus wanted: by the Truth. That is what he requested in John 17:17. Notice that Jesus asks that they be "sanctified" by the truth. Sanctified means separated! The true Church (wheat) is to be separated (sanctified) from the false church (tares) by the truth. It is not to be united to the false

church just for an outward show of unity! The desire for unity in the ecumenical movement is a desire based on error—on misinformation. The so-called churches, not understanding the true and whole Gospel, want everyone in harmony now, thinking this to be God's way to improve the world. But God's way to improve the world is the kingdom on earth which will do away with all error. This kingdom cannot function fully until the true Church (Abraham's seed) have all been separated and glorified. Then they will bless all the nations of earth even as God himself promised to Abraham So many years ago. God never breaks a promise.

The Fall of Babylon

As we look more closely at the question of the separation of the true Church from the false church at this end of the age, it becomes important to understand what is meant by various Biblical symbolisms. Among these is the term "Babylon." There was, of course, a real city by this name. Strangely, however, the name of this city of Babylon meant different things to different people. In the language of the Jews, who were God's people, the name came from a root word meaning "confusion." But to the Babylonians, the word meant "the gate of God." How interesting that one word could have two meanings So opposite! But it is not difficult to see how this came about. The city derived its name from the original tower of Babel built by Nimrod. To Nimrod and his followers this tower was meant to be a gateway to heaven. But God was angered by their presumptuous attitude and stopped their progress by confusing their language; and hence the idea of confusion was introduced into the name Babel. The meaning that was favored, of course, depended upon whether the person using the word was a friend of God or a friend of Nimrod! When we come to the book of Revelation, however, we find the Apostle John still prophesying about Babylon even though it had gone out of existence centuries before John was born. But this time it is mystic Babylon, or as John says, "Mystery, Babylon the Great." (Revelation 17:5) God often used Old Testament people and events to picture something that would come later but be very similar in some important aspects. This is the case with "Babylon." Now we must inquire, just what is Babylon in the mystic sense? Babylon refers to the so-called churches which have sprung up since our Master's first advent. This is quite a claim! Yet it meets the facts. Note the words of Jeremiah 51:7, "Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand." How interesting is this statement! It is saying that there was a time when the Lord favored this mystic Babylon; He worked with it and He had enough interest in it that He wanted to keep it spiritually healthy. Jeremiah 51:9 states this: "We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed." These words sound So familiar in concept! They are the same thoughts as the Lord expressed in the parable of wheat and tares. There too, the Lord was pleased to work with the field as it was—wheat and tares mixed. By the truths of the Reformation he even attempted to heal the spiritual sickness that had developed. But Babylon would not be healed. She continued to produce more tares than wheat. Remember the final result: separate them. Jeremiah 51:9 states this separation of wheat from

tares So clearly: "Forsake her (Babylon), and let us (wheat) go every one into his own country, for her judgment reacheth unto heaven." But the "churches" are unaware of this. They are still Babylon (confusion) although they see themselves as the gateway to God— as man's only hope for salvation. How does this relate to church union? Babylon (the denominations) is the same as the tares. As the tares were bundled, So will the denominations bundle themselves together to protect their position in society. Why do they find this necessary? Because they are under attack! Their doctrines no longer satisfy reasoning minds, So they must resort to a "social Gospel." They cannot attract sufficient loyalty or excite sufficient zeal to stay alive as institutions. The wheat leaves them because the Lord directs them to leave. Notice His directions to His true Church as found in both the Old and New Testaments. Jeremiah 51:6 says: "Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity, for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance. He will render unto her a recompence." And Revelation 18:4 echoes this advice: "Come out of her (Babylon) my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." The Lord will plague Babylon to her destruction. This is what Jesus foresaw when he said the tares would be bundled for the purpose of burning them. The picture in the Scriptures is even more inclusive. The Scriptures declare that this uniting spirit would be not only in the churches, but even among the institutions, businesses, and nations of the world. They are all to become interdependent on each other. Hence we see mergers, affiliations, holding companies, trusts, leagues, treaties, and even the "United Nations" and the "European Economic Union." The spirit is everywhere! But to the true Church, the Lord explains the matter. He tells what He is doing and why. Notice Zeph 3:8,9: "Wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour out upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth (society) shall be devoured with the fire (destruction) of my jealousy. for then will I turn to the people a pure language that they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve Him with one consent." Rejoice in what this text tells us! It first assures us that the Lord is fully aware of the gathering, assembling, and uniting that is going on. Indeed, He is helping it come about! But He explains why. He says that when they are united, they will fall harder. He united them in order to pour out his anger upon them all at once! The anger is expressed as "fire" which is a Scriptural symbol for destruction; but it cannot mean that He destroys the people because it says immediately that He will bless the people with a pure message (no more error). It means, rather, that He will destroy the symbolic "earth," and the earth symbolizes the social order. And notice too that these people He blesses must not have known even who He was because he blesses them So that they can serve Him—showing that they didn't serve Him before. All of this is in harmony with the Gospel. God is collecting the last members of the seed of Abraham. Then he will destroy man's selfish society in order to let the seed of Abraham bless mankind with a perfect society: "Peace on earth, good will toward men." We therefore need have no fear when we see Babylon unite for its ultimate great fall. (Revelation 18:21)

What of the Antichrist, the Man of Sin?

We have now seen a summary of what is to be expected in the ecumenical movement and what its ultimate result will be. Now it is important to ask, "Is there any basis for fear?" Many writers on the subject of ecumenism say that the uniting churches will form the great beast or false prophet of Revelation. Others claim that the federated religious systems will work with some powerful deceiver who will be the "man of sin" or the "antichrist." Some of these warnings have validity; others are totally inaccurate. Let us first consider those which are not Scripturally justifiable. We have learned that the seed of Abraham is to be composed of all faithful Christians. This was lost sight of by Judaism who expected that Messiah would be only one individual. But Paul points out that Messiah or Christ is not one individual, but many! In 1 Corinthians 12:12, Ephesians 1:22,23; 4:15,16 and in other places, it is made clear that Christ is not one but many members. In short, the seed of Abraham is considered by God to be The Christ. (Galatians 3:27-29) This being so, we find that the Scriptures show the same mystery exists regarding the Antichrist. It is, likewise, not one person, but many. As a matter of fact, the antichrist is the same as the tares of our Lord's parable. The antichrist is the false church—not only the great Roman apostate church, but also all of the denominations which have separated from her. John explains that Babylon was a "mother" church, and that her "daughters" were also unclean in the Lord's sight. (Revelation 17:4,5) We may therefore conclude that the federated churches will not work with an antichrist since they are themselves all a part of the one great antichrist system. It is well to note that Martin Luther and the other reformers identified papacy as the antichrist. (For a more detailed discussion, see *The Time is at Hand*, page 267 207622) The concept of a literal person being the antichrist crept in during the last century. Most evangelicals are unaware of this divergency from their historical Protestant roots. The term "man of sin" must also be considered. It is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-13. In these verses we find much that helps to explain the matter. In verse 7, Paul calls the man of sin by the name "mystery of iniquity" and says that it was already at work in his day! From this we immediately perceive that this could not literally be a man. He would be nearly two thousand years old now! Who, then, is the man of sin? Paul says that the Lord's second advent couldn't accomplish its work until the man of sin would be revealed or exposed. Well, he has been exposed! The man of sin is the papacy—not the pope himself, but the papal arrangement, the arrangement by which a man claims to be head of Christ's Church. Notice that in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 Paul explains that before the man of sin could have control, a "falling away" must occur. The Greek word translated "falling away" is apostasy. Until Christians fell away from the truth, as expressed by the Apostles, no man would dare claim to be head of the Church. But the spirit of this error was already working (2 Thessalonians 2:7) in Paul's day in that prominent bishops were gaining ambition and usurping authority from the individual members of the Church. The apostate church was already beginning. The tares were being sown! 2 Thessalonians 2:4 tells what

tremendous authority the apostate church would exercise. And it has been fulfilled. Note the words of Roman Catholic churchmen themselves: St. Bernard wrote that "none except God is like the pope, either in heaven or on earth." Pope Nicholas I wrote that the Emperor Constantine had "conferred the appellation of God on the pope, who, therefore, being God, cannot be judged by man." Pope Innocent III said, "The pope holds the place of the true God." The canon law, in the gloss, denominates the pope "our Lord God." Is that enough? The popes themselves have condemned and identified themselves by their own words. The papacy is the man of sin. Therefore, again, we see that it would be improper for us to look for a literal man of sin to deceive the whole world in our day. Papacy, the Scriptural man of sin, has already deceived the whole world during its infamous reign which historians now call the dark ages! (See Appendix B page "8") Thus the views which expect an antichrist or a man of sin to appear as a literal person in conjunction with the ecumenical uniting are incorrect. However, the Lord does warn the wheat class concerning difficulties it will have due to church confederation. One example is in the highly symbolic language of Revelation 16:13. This verse describes the efforts of the Roman church (beast), the federated Protestants (false prophet), and the civil government (dragon) to attempt to hold together the social order as it now exists. While their efforts may seem for a while to succeed, they are doomed to ultimate failure and destruction. It is here, however, that the true Church must take note. It is the Scriptural testimony that the true Church will somehow be persecuted by this unholy alliance.

The "Beast" and the "Image of the Beast"

The Revelator gives another view of this matter in the 13th chapter of Revelation. In this chapter we have summarized for us centuries of church history. The first ten verses show the development of the great Roman apostate church—a beast of ten horns. (Horns represent supporting powers—an apt symbol since the power of natural beasts is often demonstrated by their lowering of their horn to gore their victims.) The Roman church has generally had the political support of the ten European powers (nations) which are fragmentations of the old "Holy Roman Empire." Even the Reformation is mentioned in this account as a "wound" (Revelation 13:3) from which the beast recovers. In Revelation 13:10-14 we see the rise of another beast. Note: This two-horned beast appears on the scene during or after the Reformation "wound." Further, this beast exercises "all the power of the first beast." This is a reference to authority. The non-Protestant churches (Anglican and Greek Orthodox) claim their authority through "apostolic succession." With this much information, plus the fact that the second beast has two horns or supporting powers (Revelation 13:11), we can reasonably identify this beast historically as the Church of England and Ireland (the two horns). Now we have before us the two great non-Protestant forces of the ecclesiastical world—Rome and England. Both claim authority to teach through direct succession of bishops from the days of the Apostles. No Protestant church makes this claim. This is important. The historical weakness of the "Evangelical Alliance" (See Appendix C page "9") and

the federated churches was that the churches which constituted them lacked apostolic succession. Revelation 13, however, points out the future of the matter. The alliance—the mergers, confederacies, and cooperations—of the Protestant denominations will indeed receive a spark of life-giving power (Revelation 13:15). This ecumenical church union of Protestants will be an "image of the beast." It will in this sense exercise all the power of the first two beasts—claiming apostolic authority to teach. It will, when vitalized, become the "false prophet" of later chapters of Revelation. From this prophecy, therefore, we can well expect that recognition of ecumenical federations will be coming one of these days from the Church of England—probably recognition in the form of the granting of apostolic succession to the Protestant churches! The result, as shown in Revelation 13:15-17, will be a religious intolerance of all who will not conform to the new ecumenical church. The faith of the saints will then be severely tested. But their victory of faith will be the moment the world has so long unknowingly awaited. The last member of the true Church will be changed from flesh to spirit—or, as the Lord said, the wheat will be gathered into his barn. Then they will bless all of the families of the earth! How we pray, "Thy kingdom come!"

A Brief History of Ecumenism's Development

The wheat and the tares grew together with relatively little disturbance until the great Reformation. While the turbulence of the Reformation made great strides in the search for truths lost since the first advent, the wounds it caused were rather readily healed and denominationalism was the victor. The wheat could not yet stand alone, but were planted in one or another denomination containing mostly tares. The beginning of the nineteenth century, however, saw something unusual happening. In 1799, in the sight of all the world, Napoleon took the pope prisoner and carried him to France where he died. The psychological effect of this action was tremendous. All could see that the pope's power was inferior to Napoleon's, and the pope began from that point to lose his hold over the minds of the religious world. Papacy has always been one of the most fervent opponents of the spread of the Bible, and even the Protestant world up to that time often frowned on widespread reading and interpretation of God's Word. But with papacy's humiliation, Bible societies sprang into existence almost overnight, and translations of the Bible in nearly all languages quickly were distributed worldwide. Honest searchers for truth began studying the Scriptures and began separating themselves from the various errors of Christendom. A new era had begun! The fractioning of the denominations became rapid and commonplace. This trend was a threat to the established authority of Babylon, and so she tried to do something about it. In 1846 the major Protestant denominations formed the Evangelical Alliance. (See Appendix C page "9") It was an attempt to state to the world that "if you agree with us, you are acceptable; you are orthodox." Here was the beginning of the church union movement which is climaxing so rapidly in our day. The battle has been the same ever since: "orthodoxy" versus the spirit of free inquiry into the word of God. The matter is rarely stated

that bluntly, but that is, in fact, the motivating force. Babylon is trying desperately to survive. It is the old spirit of "either we hang together or we will all hang alone." It is union based on fear. It is union based on a quest for power—not a quest for truth. It is not of God. It is of Satan. Thus we see that the present church union movement has its roots in historical events of well over a century ago. And the prophetic warnings about it have been circulated for nearly that long also—although many think that discussion on the matter is of recent origin. As a result of the fragmentation of the denominations, a small number of (completely) independent students of the Bible have been in existence since the middle of the nineteenth century. They have no organization except the Scriptural one which is that each little group of true Christians is autonomous in itself, giving its allegiance to its one and only head, Christ Jesus. Many of these who strive to follow Jesus closely have published the Biblical truths on many subjects, church union included. Some of these individuals obtained prominence in the public's eye; others were known by practically no one. This was to be expected as the Lord promised that all in His Church would have different functions—some quite humble in station, and a very few that He would use as special servants or messengers to the Church. We will here quote some of the forecasts regarding church union as published by these Bible students between the years of 1885 and 1912. This is done to show by this sampling that great understanding and foreknowledge of the ecumenical movement was available to all who searched the Scriptures daily as the Bereans of old. Our Lord asked that His Church be sanctified or set separate by the truth. The Father has and continues to honor that prayer.

Samplings of Ecumenical Warnings of Long Ago:

1. "Christian union is a hobby with many at the present time (1885). It is the pass-word to the very inner temple of self-styled 'orthodoxy.' Men will talk of a 'sweet union of loving hearts' when there is not a principle of true union with them. We think that this is well calculated to fulfill prophecy by securing union of action on certain popular points where there is no union in principle."
2. "... we find in Revelation 13:14-18 a prophecy of a special combination of influence by which Protestant denominations will be unified and, though separate, yet be brought into cooperation with papacy in a manner that will give both increased powers and deceive many into supposing that the new combination will be God's instrumentality for doing the work predicted of Messiah—and that it is thus his representative."
3. "While the world and the nominal church declare this to be a time of union and confederacy, God declares it to be a time of separating."
4. "In Revelation 16:13 we find mention of the False Prophet, another representation of the Image—the vitalized product of the Evangelical Alliance, which has taken the form of church federation and has today a great deal of vitality. (1912) Whether we can expect it to have more

remains to be seen. The Scriptures clearly indicate that the Image of the Beast is to get So great power that it will do the same thing that the Roman Catholic Church did in the past; and that the two systems, Catholic and Protestant, will rule the civilized world with a high hand through the civil power—the Dragon."

5. "The ... necessity for restricting liberty on political and social questions will probably be supposed to apply equally to freedom of expression on religious questions, which really lie at the foundation of all liberty. It would not be surprising if a 'strong government' ... would someday replace this present Great Republic; and it is entirely probable that one common standard of religious belief will be deemed expedient and will be promulgated, to teach outside of which will be treated and punished as a political offense."

6. "The Church Federation which the Scriptures distinctly show will be effected, will include various classes. ... But in the Federation, the Moralists and Higher Critics will be dominant forces. The saintly will less than ever be in evidence and appreciated. The outward and apparent success of the Federation will seem wonderful for a moment, but the results will be disastrous."

Concluding Thoughts

In this section we have reviewed the importance of the ecumenical movement as related to the true Gospel message of Jesus and the apostles and the writings of God's Holy Prophets. We have seen that God's general purpose for the earth and its inhabitants is to bless them. We have seen that He also purposes a special blessing for a few who will be His Church. We have seen that the ecumenical movement is the product of a false church system and not of God's true Church. The result of ecumenism will indeed try the faith of the true Church! But the presence of this movement for the union of denominationalism is a good sign to those who understand it, for it signals that we stand historically at the threshold of God's kingdom on earth— peace and blessing for all! It is for this reason that the subject is of special interest. If you would like to look further into the harmonious and breath-takingly beautiful truths of God's Word as they have been promised to be made plain at the Time of the End (Daniel 12:4), we invite you to ask for more. The Bible student who supplied you with this section would find it a pleasure to discuss with you the things concerning God's plan for mankind. Or, if you would like to read more please view The Divine Plan of the Ages. This section is perhaps the finest work ever written to lead you into your own personal and eye- opening understanding of the Bible.

Appendix A

In religious circles generally, the word "ecumenical" means world-wide in influence. An ecumenical council is one which represents an entire church. The ecumenical movement among non-Catholic churches are

striving for union of Protestant churches and a closer relationship to the two great Catholic ecclesiastical organizations, The Roman and Greek Catholic churches.

The late Archbishop William Temple described the church unity movement as the twentieth century's most significant development. Many ecclesiastical leaders now speak of "the ecumenical age." The ecumenical movement, crystallized in the National Council and World Council of Churches, has achieved spectacular growth; it has stimulated the rise of competitive structures and given ecumenical impetus as well to Roman Catholicism and even to non-Christian faiths. Ecumenism seems prone to become a monolithic movement with new centers of ecclesiastical power and vast potential for propaganda.

Christianity Today Jan. 29, 1965 page 12 "The modern impulse toward ecumenism began, significantly, with church leaders who today would be called conservative evangelicals. In 1846 a conference of such men held in London led to the organization of the World Evangelical Alliance. For fifty years, this alliance performed a valuable service to the cause of unity among Christians."

"Then came the time near the turn of the century when liberalism began to have a serious effect on the Christian churches. A small group of leaders tried to shape the World Evangelical Alliance into an instrument of liberalism but met majority opposition and so withdrew from the alliance. In 1894 this group created the Open Church League, which was superseded in 1900 by the National Federation of Churches and Christian Workers. This in turn gave way in 1905 to the Federal Council of Churches, which in 1950 became the National Council of Churches" and was formally organized in Cleveland, Ohio. The strength and influence of the National Council of Churches overshadows that of any other cooperative religious agency in the United States. With 31 denominations 41 million church members, 144,000 churches, and 110,000 clergymen it is of gigantic proportions, and its voice is bound to be listened to by all segments of the American people."

The World Council of Churches is made up of 306 churches of the Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, and Old Catholic confessions, from more than eighty countries. It began in August 1948, with an assembly in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Principal authority is vested in an assembly of delegates, which meets every six or seven years.

Appendix B

Prior to 1799 the Pope crowned and uncrowned the kings of Europe, except those in countries which had adopted Protestant church-state systems of government. But this was suddenly brought to an end by Napoleon, who took the Pope a prisoner to France; and thus broke the back of Papacy. Throughout the ages, religion has played an important role in controlling the people of all nations, but we are particularly concerned with what has occurred within professed Christian nations.

And here Papacy has by far been the most dominant influence. As a result of its humiliation at the hands of Napoleon the damage done to its prestige among the nations and entering the time of the end which began in 1799, the first council of the Roman Catholic Church, designated Vatican I was held in 1869 and 1870. The 774 bishops who met at this council succeeded in declaring the infallibility of the pope. The council was cut short in 1870 by the Franco- Prussian War and Vatican II called by the late Pope John xxiii opened in Rome on Oct. 11, 1962. This brought together 2,500 religious leaders of 550 million people under the direction of Pope John. The purpose was to update or modernize the Catholic Churches eccl. machinery and to meet the challenge and threat of Communism.

After the death of Pope John, Pope Paul reconvened the Vatican II council in late 1964. As a result in the document called "De Ecclesia," the Council declares that the pope and the bishops share the supreme authority to govern the church and expound its teachings. "Collegiality," a word unused a decade ago but on the lips of everyone now at the Vatican Council, does not diminish the primacy of the pope or affect his infallibility on faith and morals; what it does do is make the bishops co-responsible for the church with the pope. The majority of the Catholic bishops have been dissatisfied with the results of the council because the Pope used his authority to side with the minority on a number of issues. Another history making event was the meeting of Pope Paul VI with Patriarch Athenagoras I, spiritual leader of Orthodoxy when they met in Jerusalem in 1964, breaking a silence between the two churches that had lasted for centuries. In 1054 the pope excommunicated the patriarch of Constantinople, and the patriarch excommunicated the pope. A fifteenth century effort to reunite the church, undertaken at the Council of Florence, collapsed.

Just this year (1998), according to a report from the Religious News Service, entitled "Orthodox want Vatican in WCC (World Council of Churches)". It reads "Patriarch Bartholomew I, the spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, has called on the Roman Catholic Church to join the World Council of Churches in time for the international ecumenical body's 50th anniversary next year."

Appendix C

In the 1960's the book, Religion in Action, said, one of the gifts or riches the church of England offers is Apostolic succession. The other churches stated that if they accepted this it would mean confessing that in the past their preaching was vain.

This is still a conflict today. A 1996 article from the "Religious News Service" reads, "The Church of England has ended the biennial meeting of its general synod by affirming the so-called Porvoo Declaration as an 'act of synod,' the most solemn affirmation the Anglican denomination can make. The Porvoo Declaration takes its name from the Finnish city where it was signed and calls for allowing intercommunion among

Anglicans and Lutherans of the participating churches as well as the mutual recognition and full interchangeability of priests and ministers between the Anglican churches of Britain and Ireland and the Lutheran Churches of Scandinavia and the Baltic countries."

However, the Oct. 6, 1997 "Christianity Today" brings out a different result by the Lutherans in the U.S. On page 81 it reads, "On a vote of 640 to 397, Lutherans balked at closer relations with the Episcopal Church, falling six votes shy of the necessary two-thirds required for passage.

"Debate centered on the doctrine of apostolic succession. This principle, supported by Catholics, Orthodox, and Anglicans, established bishops as the heirs of Christ's twelve apostles. "Opponents within the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) believed the denominations would have relinquished too much theological ground if it approved the concordat. Under the concordat, the Episcopal Church would recognize the ordinations of all current Lutheran pastors. Future ordinations would require that both a Lutheran and Episcopal bishop be present. Also, all future Episcopal and Lutheran bishops would be jointly consecrated for life. Yet, Lutherans would retain their bishops in office for a six-year term as they presently do. Episcopal bishops do not serve a set term of office in a diocese. And after they retire, Episcopal bishops keep their seats in the denominations's House of Bishops.

"Lutheran objections to the idea of bishops for life was strongest from Lutherans suspicious of church hierarchy."

However at the same meeting by the Lutherans they did vote to "link to 3 churches." In a Waterbury Republican Newspaper article from Aug. 19, 1997 it said, "The nation's largest Lutheran church voted Monday (Aug. 18th) to establish closer ties with three other major Protestant denominations in a sweeping plan that allows for the exchange of clergy and communion.

"However, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America also opened new ecumenical wounds by rejecting a similar plan for closer ties with the Episcopal Church. "Healing divisions of more than 450 years, dating to the Reformation, delegates to the ...biennial Church-wide Assembly voted 839-193 to approve a unity plan with the Presbyterian Church (USA) the United Church of Christ and the Reformed Church in America.

"Today is an occasion for profound gratitude to God for persistently calling us to overcome divisions that have separated Lutheran and Reformed Churches in North America," leaders of the four churches, with a membership of 10 million, said.

..."Under the unity pact, the four denominations will be able to share clergy and members of the congregations can take communion in each other's churches. The agreement affects 5.2 million members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church; 2.7 million members of the Presbyterian

Church (USA); 400,000 members of the Reformed Church in America and 1.5 million members of the United Church of Christ."

However many are troubled by the rejection of the alliance with the Episcopal Church. The same article says "After the vote, somber delegates sang the hymn 'The Church's One Foundation.' Some supporters of the plan wept and held hands.

"Lutheran Presiding Bishop H. George Anderson told the assembly late Monday he hoped the church could come up with a new plan to present to the Episcopal Church... 'the ecumenical opportunity of the century has been lost,' said the Rev. Robert Wright of General Theological Seminary in New York."

On the same point the Christianity Today article reads "The nation's largest Lutheran group has embraced greater unity with several Protestant denominations and has taken a step toward theological reconciliation with Roman Catholics. But the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA was unable to muster a two-thirds majority for closer relations with the Episcopal Church, in part because of differing theological views over the office of bishop. Nevertheless, the ELCA voted to keep conversations going with the Episcopalians and discuss the matter in 1999."

A short time before he relinquished his position as Archbishop of Canterbury, head of the established Church of England, Dr. Fisher paid a visit to the late Pope John. This was the first get together of the heads of these two great ecclesiastical systems mentioned in Revelation 13. Dr. Fisher urged greater unity between Protestants and Catholics when he visited Rome, and pointed out that he used the word "unity", not "union" deliberately. By this he apparently meant cooperation between differing elements of Christian thought without loss of identity and doctrinal authority. This bears out Nah 1:9,10 of both end of a scroll coming together, the one side Catholic, the other Protestant, opposed and yet connected—each side united and federated to the best of its ability. Revelation 16:13, 14. The Bible points out that as a result the nominal church systems will rise to great prominence again in connection with the civil powers. But the Bible declares that this reign as a queen will be a short one, and that the fall of Babylon will be tremendous—like a great millstone cast into the Sea. Revelation 18:21.