

# **BAPTISM**



**A REQUIREMENT FOR SALVATION?**

This booklet is a free educational service, provided by the "Global Church of God" in the United Kingdom, in collaboration with the "Church of the Eternal God" in the United States of America and the "Church of God, a Christian Fellowship" in Canada. Printed in England 2003. This booklet is not to be sold.

Scriptures in the booklet are quoted from the New King James version ((c)1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc. Publishers) unless otherwise noted.

**Author:** Norbert Link

**Editorial Review Team:** J. Edwin Pope, David Harris, Rene Messier, Brian Gale, Phyllis Bourque, Brad Mitchell, Margaret Adair

**Graphic Design:** Shelly Bruno

*cover image: [www.hemera.com](http://www.hemera.com)*

# Contents

---

The Need For Baptism	1
Faith Is Required	2
Repentance Is Required	2
The Gift of the Holy Spirit	3
Were the Twelve Apostles Baptized?	4
Requirements Prior to Receiving God's Holy Spirit	6
Proper Baptism	6
The Symbolism of Baptism	6
How the Early Church Baptized	7
Counting the Cost	8
True Repentance	9
Ongoing Spiritual Battle	11
What to Repent of . . .	14
Satan's Nature in Us	16
"Re-"Baptism?	17
What to Believe In . . .	19
Believe In the Gospel	21
Believe In Christ	22
When To Be Baptized?	24
Who Should Baptize?	27
Baptism in the Name of Christ	29
Speaking with Tongues	31
Church Members Are Not the Property of a Man	33
Baptism in the Old Testament	34
The Elements of Baptism	35
Baptism in the Name of Christ	36
Laying On Of Hands	37
The Role of the Holy Spirit During Baptism	37
The Role of the Father During Baptism	38
Does Matthew 28:19 Teach a "Baptismal Formula?"	38
Conclusion	43

.....  
**The following booklets are available, upon request:**

Europe in Prophecy: The Unfolding of End-Time Events

The Theory of Evolution—a Fairy Tale for Adults?

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God

Don't Keep Christmas

Is God a Trinity?

Do We Have an Immortal Soul?

The Keys to Happy Marriages and Families

And Lawlessness Will Abound...

The Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord

*God's Commanded Holy Days*

**God Is a Family**  
.....

**United States**

Church of the Eternal God  
PO Box 270519  
San Diego, CA 92198

**Canada**

Church of God, ACF  
Box 1480  
Summerland B.C. V0H 1Z0

**United Kingdom**

Global Church of God  
PO Box 2111  
Derby DE1 1ZR

**S**hould you be baptized? If so, how, and when? Does it matter whether you are baptized as a child or as an adult? Does it matter whether you are placed under water, or whether the minister or priest pours water over your head, or whether you are just sprinkled with a few drops of water? Does it matter whether you understand the symbolic meaning of baptism before you undergo the ordinance? Is baptism *ESSENTIAL* for your salvation?

Many people cannot see the reason to be baptized as an adult, especially if they were baptized as a little baby. Others think it makes no difference for salvation whether a person is baptized or not. All that is required, so they say, is an honest heart and the will to live a good life.

There are, indeed, endless arguments and perceptions of baptism, but in seeking the truth on the subject and dispelling any false opinions, we must go to the source of truth—God’s Word—the Bible. One cannot prove truth based on human opinion. God’s truth is easily available to those who seek it, and truth stands up to scrutiny.

## **THE NEED FOR BAPTISM**

In order to accept the biblical teaching on this matter, which we **MUST** do if we are to be called Christians, we must admit that baptism is a godly ordinance—a command by God Himself. Peter “commanded” the Roman centurion, Cornelius, and his relatives and close friends “to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48). Cornelius was a “devout man and one who feared God with all his household” (Acts 10:2). God showed through a miracle that, although Cornelius was a Gentile, he had been *called* to salvation and God had already opened his mind to understand the truth. Still, Peter commanded that he be baptized. Even Jesus Christ Himself was baptized. Though He had no personal *need* for baptism—He was without sin—He had John baptize Him in order to fulfill all righteousness and to set an example for us to do the same (Matthew 3:13–15).

Yes, God’s Word makes it very clear that we need to be baptized if we expect to attain salvation. Yet, we must fulfill certain requirements *before* we undergo baptism. Let us examine what those requirements are.

## FAITH IS REQUIRED

Jesus Christ commanded His early disciples to baptize those who *believed*. We read in Mark 16:15–16: “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe [and is therefore not baptized] will be condemned [better translated: judged].’”

So, then, before we undergo baptism, we must first believe. Faith is a necessary prerequisite to baptism. Christ said, “Those who believe and are baptized will be saved.” How can one believe unless one is old enough to believe? How can a little baby believe? The answer is, it can’t. A little baby cannot comprehend faith. It does not even realize what is going on when it is “baptized.” That kind of “baptism” is not in accordance with Christ’s express mandate that one “believe and [be] baptized.”

## REPENTANCE IS REQUIRED

In addition to faith, repentance is required prior to baptism. When Peter gave his first inspired sermon after receiving God’s Holy Spirit, his audience was moved with fear. They were, in fact, *shocked*. They came to realize that they were responsible for the death of their Savior. After having been convicted, in their minds, of actually murdering Jesus Christ, they asked, in despair, what they should do. Notice Peter’s answer in Acts 2:37–38: “Now when they heard this, they were **cut to the heart**, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission [forgiveness] of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

So we see that before being baptized, we need to repent of our sins *and* we need to believe in the gospel (Mark 16:15–16). We also need to believe that *the death of Jesus Christ was necessary and that His death is sufficient payment for our sins, thus prompting forgiveness of our sins by God the Father*. We are to be baptized only upon repentance, which must be coupled with faith, and not before then. A little baby has no concept of what to repent of. It does not even know what repentance is. Some say that a baby does not need to repent of anything because it has not committed any sins. If that were true, then why is the baby even being baptized to begin with, given that baptism is an *outward* sign of *inward* repentance?

It is clear from Scripture that a person must be old enough to compre-

hend the meaning of repentance and faith. Baptism, in accordance with biblical teaching, is an outward sign, or symbol, of inner repentance from sin, AND it is a manifestation of our faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By the ordinance of baptism we outwardly express our inward faith in our Savior—our acceptance of His death, burial, and resurrection for us, as well as our repentance of the old life and burial of it, rising to a new life and mindset. This thought process and change of heart is something a baby could never engage in.

## **THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

As Peter pointed out to his stunned audience in Acts 2, upon *proper* baptism we *WILL* receive the *GIFT* of the Holy Spirit. Without baptism based on biblical teaching, we normally would not receive the Holy Spirit and we would not be in a position to look forward to salvation. (An obvious and extremely rare exception to this rule would be, of course, when it is *physically impossible* to baptize someone, because the person is physically *incapable* of being baptized.) We understand, of course, that the situation was different in Old Testament times because God did bestow His Spirit on a few people without prior baptism, so that they could fulfill His specific commission for them.

This is no longer true in New Testament times. We read in Acts 8:16–17 [more fully discussed later in this booklet] that the Holy Spirit was given to people only *AFTER* they were baptized and had hands laid upon them—not before then. There is only one recorded incident since the establishment of the New Testament Church where someone received the Holy Spirit *prior* to baptism, and that is the Gentile Cornelius and his household. This was an exception for a specific purpose—God wanted to make it clear to the disciples that He had called Gentiles into the Church, and indeed, to salvation. Before Cornelius, only Jews had been accepted as Church members. As we noted in our earlier discussion, God still required Cornelius and those who were with him to undergo proper baptism (Acts 10:44–48).

Notable exceptions in New Testament times also include John the Baptist, who received God’s Holy Spirit from birth (compare Luke 1:15), and, of course, Jesus Christ Himself, who was brought forth by the Holy Spirit—possessing the Holy Spirit from birth without measure (compare Luke 1:35; John 3:34, AV). Aside from these specific examples of God’s Spirit being given without prior baptism, we cannot find that any of Christ’s disciples in

the New Testament, and especially since the establishment of the New Testament Church, received the gift of the Holy Spirit without having first been baptized.

When Paul was brought to conversion he had to be baptized *before* receiving the Holy Spirit: “And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road [to Damascus] as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight [since Saul had been blinded after he had seen Christ on his way to Damascus] and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized” (Acts 9:17–18; compare, too, Acts 22:12–16).

Accordingly, when Paul baptized people, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit *after* Paul had baptized them and laid hands on them, as stated in Acts 19:5–6: “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them.”

## **WERE THE TWELVE APOSTLES BAPTIZED?**

Some claim that the twelve apostles received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost without having been baptized first. If so, this would have been another extraordinary exception. The purpose for this exception would have been to prove to the people in attendance that God had, indeed, given His Spirit to His disciples, and that He had now begun to build His Church, thus making it possible for others to enter into the spiritual body of Christ. Now, we know that God *confirmed* the giving of His Holy Spirit to the early apostles on the day of Pentecost through extraordinary signs and wonders, but it does appear that some, if not most, of the apostles had been disciples of John the Baptist and had *already been baptized* by John—a baptism of repentance (compare Mark 1:4).

As we discussed earlier, repentance is *one* of the necessary requirements for receiving God’s Holy Spirit, but it is not the only one. As such, the baptism of John—a baptism of repentance—was **not sufficient** to receive the Holy Spirit. Later, however, Jesus also baptized—through His disciples—as we read in John 3:22: “After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized.” John 4:1–3 adds: “Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had

heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), He left Judea and departed again to Galilee.”

It is safe to assume, then, before Christ’s disciples baptized others, Christ had already baptized them. This is not to say that baptized people received the Holy Spirit at that time. The Holy Spirit was only given to Christ’s disciples on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:15; 2:1–4). However, Scripture indicates that those who received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost had been baptized. This assumption is supported by Christ’s statement to Peter in John 13. During the last Passover meal, prior to His death, Christ began to wash the feet of His disciples, showing them that He loved them and that He was willing to do everything for them, including washing their feet—a menial task that was usually assigned to the lowest servant. When He came to wash Peter’s feet, Peter said to Him: “You shall never wash my feet!” (John 13:8). Christ explained to him that He *had* to wash Peter’s feet or else he would have no part with Christ. Peter then responded by saying: “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” (John 13:8–9). At that moment, Christ replied, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you” (John 13:10).

This conversation is full of meaning and there is much to be gleaned from it. While proper baptism is to be done only once in a person’s life, the foot-washing ceremony at Passover time is to be repeated year by year. Thus we show that we are continuously willing to obtain forgiveness of the sins we commit after baptism, and we show that we are willing to humble ourselves in our desire to help others go the same way toward perfection that we are going. We are not better than others. We are to serve others in whatever way we can.

Christ told Peter that he and the other disciples (except Judas) were *clean*, since they had been bathed. We read in Titus 3:5 that God saves us “through the *washing* of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” We are also told that we are “cleansed” or “made clean” from our old sins (2 Peter 1:9). At baptism, our bodies are “washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22), figuratively “washing away” our sins (Acts 22:16). Christ’s statement to Peter and the other apostles that they had been bathed and were clean (except Judas who would betray Him) strongly implies that they had already been baptized in anticipation of receiving the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (John 20:22; Acts 1:8; Luke 24:49).

## **REQUIREMENTS PRIOR TO RECEIVING GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT**

God has ordained that certain steps be accomplished *before* He shares His Holy Spirit with us. They are, in proper sequence: 1) repentance, 2) belief, and 3) baptism [the elements of baptism are explained later]. After these are accomplished, *THEN*, as it says in Act 2:38, “you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”—*not before*. It is only *after* we have received the gift of God’s Holy Spirit that we are truly His children—belonging to Him—and rightly called “Christians.”

Paul tells us in the book of Romans that we are Christians *ONLY* if the Holy Spirit dwells in us: “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His” (Romans 8:9). Paul goes on to explain that God the Father will raise us from the dead and change us to spirit *ONLY* if the Holy Spirit dwells in us—whether we died having God’s Spirit, or whether we are still alive and have God’s Spirit when Christ returns. He says in Romans 8:11: “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who [better translated: which] dwells in you.”

Biblical baptism, though clearly an outward ritual, is, in fact, an ordinance established by God and IS ESSENTIAL for our salvation.

## **PROPER BAPTISM**

What is the proper, biblical way to be baptized? Do we need to be fully immersed, or is it sufficient to just be sprinkled with water?

The English word “baptism” is derived from the Greek word, “*baptizo*.” The meaning of this Greek word is “to immerse,” “to place completely under [water],” or “to plunge into.” The Bible shows that the New Testament method of baptism was one of immersing the person under water. “Sprinkling” or “pouring” was never used because the symbolism attached to baptism only makes sense with complete immersion (Note that the Greek word for “sprinkle” is “*rantizo*,” while the Greek word for “pour” is “*cheo*”—completely different words NOT used in the Bible when describing baptism).

## **THE SYMBOLISM OF BAPTISM**

Paul explains the symbolism of baptism in Romans 6:3–4, 8, 11: “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through bap-

tism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life... Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him... Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Baptism is likened to burial in a watery grave. Just as Christ died and was laid in a tomb, so we—by analogy—die in baptism, having first repented of our sins and having laid to rest our old habits and our old desires. (As will be fully explained later in this booklet, it is God, of course, who leads us to baptism and who enables us to repent and to change.) Just as God raised Christ from the dead and brought Him out of the tomb, so we are to be brought out of the watery grave, in a figurative sense and, upon receiving God’s Holy Spirit, we begin to live a new way of life. We certainly know that if we were to stay under water long enough, we would literally die of drowning. Baptism by immersion is, therefore, a perfect symbol of the death and burial of our old sinful self.

Notice Paul’s further explanation in Colossians 2:12–13: “[You were] buried with Him [Christ] in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses... He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.”

Sprinkling or pouring with water clearly does not exhibit this important symbolism of being dead and buried in a watery grave, and then being raised to life from the dead out of the watery grave. Only full immersion under water can adequately picture this.

## **HOW THE EARLY CHURCH BAPTIZED**

When the disciples in the New Testament were baptized, it was done so by immersion in water. In John 3:23, we read how John baptized: “Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there.” Much water was needed in order to immerse the body fully under water. If baptism were accomplished by sprinkling, much water wouldn’t be needed.

In Matthew 3:16, we read that Jesus, after His baptism, “came up... from the water.” He was fully under water for a moment, and He came up from under it. John did not just sprinkle Him with a few drops of water, nor did he just pour some water over His head.

We also find baptism by immersion described in Acts 8:36–39: “Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch WENT DOWN INTO the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up OUT OF the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.” Philip placed the eunuch fully under water when he baptized him. He did not just pour some water over his head, nor did he just sprinkle a few drops of water on him.

### **COUNTING THE COST**

We have already seen that a person should not be baptized unless he or she fully understands what this ordinance symbolizes. Jesus Christ admonishes us to “count the cost” before we make important decisions, such as baptism. For instance, we read in Luke 14:25–33 that we must consider the matter and know the consequences before we decide to “follow Christ”:

“Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to Me [when we undergo baptism, we come to Him], and does not hate [love less by comparison] his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me [he needs to be willing to suffer for righteousness’ sake] cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish.” Or what king, going to make war against another king [once we follow Christ, we will be fighting a war against Satan and his demons], does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”

Baptism is not an ordinance to pursue hastily. It requires prior meditation as to the full meaning and symbolism, as well as what all is entailed in becoming a true disciple of Jesus Christ. It requires a “counting of the cost.”

## TRUE REPENTANCE

What is true repentance? People commonly feel sorry when they are caught doing something wrong, but prior to being caught, they had no thought of “repentance.” True repentance is more than just an emotional feeling or a temporary regret that one has done something wrong and must now suffer the consequences.

True repentance means to stop doing what is wrong, and begin doing what is right. True godly repentance will produce a change in a person. The person will cease doing wrong things because the heart and mind of the person is changing. The Greek words for “repent” and “repentance” are mainly “*metanoeo*” and “*metanoia*.” They literally mean, “to have another mind,” and, “a change of mind,” respectively. This kind of godly repentance—a change in the way we think—leads to a new kind of action, and, in fact, brings about obedience to God’s Word. Such change must **ALREADY** be evident in a person’s life **BEFORE** baptism.

When the multitudes came to be baptized by John the Baptist, he refused to do so, because he did not see evidence of repentance in their lives. We read in Luke 3:7–9: “Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, ‘Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear **FRUITS WORTHY OF REPENTANCE**, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father! For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear **GOOD FRUIT** is cut down and thrown into the fire.’”

John expected to see good deeds in those who wanted to be baptized. He looked for fruits worthy of true godly repentance. The multitudes understood what John was talking about. They responded by asking, “What shall we **DO** then?” (verse 10; compare also verses 12 and 14). They began to understand that repentance was a prerequisite of baptism and that it must be **EVIDENCED BY OBEDIENCE TO GOD’S WILL**. As John explained to them, this obedience would become evident in their daily living.

Later, the apostles would explain to the high priest and the Sadducees that God gives His Holy Spirit **ONLY** to those who have already shown, prior to their baptism, that they are *willing* to obey Him. We read in Acts 5:29–32: “But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought

to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And so we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom [better translated: which] God has given to those who obey Him.”

Again, we see a designated order: 1) repentance, 2) forgiveness of sins [as a consequence of repentance and faith], and 3) the giving of the Holy Spirit [as a consequence of baptism].

Repentance must be accompanied by obedience to God’s will. Only then is our repentance true, genuine and godly. Temporary remorse is not true repentance. Paul calls this kind of regret “worldly sorrow,” which is only fleeting. Godly repentance, however, will lead to eternal life. We read in 2 Corinthians 7:9–10: “Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner. . . . For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”

We might think of Judas, in this context, who betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver. When he fully realized what he had done and that he was responsible for Christ’s murder, he “was remorseful.” He “brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood’” (Matthew 27:3–4). So far, so good. He was SORRY for what he had done, and he even DID something relevant—which was right—he gave the “blood money” back, with the hope that this might somehow free Jesus. Of course, the chief priests and the elders were not interested in the least about letting Christ go, so they claimed that they had no responsibility for Judas’ actions. Judas’ further reaction shows that he did not have true godly repentance, but only worldly remorse. He felt so devastated and helpless that he “departed, and went and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:5). By doing this, Judas added to his prior sin of betrayal, the sin of suicide—murdering himself.

Contrast this with Peter’s conduct. He denied Christ three times, but when he realized what he had done, he “went out and wept bitterly” (Matthew 26:75). He was truly repentant of his actions, realizing that he could do nothing to reverse his actions, but, unlike Judas, he did not proceed to add another sin to his previous ones. His repentance led to the gift of the Holy Spirit and ultimately to eternal life.

True repentance does not try to hide wrong actions, nor does it refuse to accept responsibility. True repentance does not blame others for one's sins. True repentance makes us realize how rotten and carnal we are. It lets us break down and cry bitterly at times over our own shortcomings, weaknesses, and failures.

True repentance leads us to make right decisions and to engage in right actions. It motivates us to leave behind what is bad for us. We read a good example in Acts 19:18–19 of right conduct following godly repentance, “And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all.”

They did not want to keep those books, perhaps fearing that they might be enticed later to return to their habit of practicing magic. That is why Christ encourages all of us to break completely with our sinful past. He tells us, “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. . . . And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you” (Matthew 5:29–30). Christ did not mean that we are to apply this literally by actually dismembering ourselves. He was addressing the principle of leaving wrong habits behind. The *Lamsa Bible* explains that these phrases are Aramaic idioms, encouraging the listeners to “stop envying,” and to “stop stealing.”

## **ONGOING SPIRITUAL BATTLE**

True repentance does not stop at the time of baptism. True repentance is an ongoing process, because even after baptism, we will still sin at times. Overcoming sin is a life-long spiritual battle. However, as we will see later in this booklet, upon receiving God's Spirit at baptism, we acquire a new mind and a new heart. Our focus in life will become different. From then on, it will be God's Holy Spirit within us that leads and guides us in a different direction, inspiring us to make right choices and exhibit right actions that are based on God's will instead of our own carnal will. We will fully comprehend that what we did in the past, as well as what we were, was totally wrong, and we will recognize that we need to become a different person. This is not easy. It is an ongoing spiritual battle as the old carnal nature in us keeps trying to dominate our thoughts and actions.

Note the inspired words of Paul, an apostle of Christ, in describing his ongoing fight with sin. Paul actually wrote this many years after his bap-

tism. He says, “I don’t understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I can’t. I do what I don’t want to—what I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience proves that I agree with these laws I am breaking. But I can’t help myself, because I’m no longer doing it. It is sin inside me that is stronger than I am that makes me do these evil things. I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn I can’t make myself do right. I want to but I can’t. When I want to do good, I don’t; and when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. Now if I am doing what I don’t want to, it is plain where the trouble is: sin still has me in its evil grasp.

“It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love to do God’s will so far as my new nature is concerned; but there is something else deep within me, in my lower nature, that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. In my mind I want to be God’s willing servant but instead I find myself still enslaved to sin.

“So you see how it is: my new life tells me to do right, but the old nature that is still inside me loves to sin. Oh, what a terrible predicament I’m in!” (Romans 7:15–24, *Living Bible*).

Paul is describing here the ongoing spiritual battle of a converted person to overcome sin. Some claim that Paul is describing his spiritual fight prior to his conversion. This is not correct. The context shows that he is pointing out his ongoing fight with sin after his baptism. We read in 1 John 1:8 that we deceive ourselves and that the truth is not in us if we say that we have no sin—that we don’t sin—even after baptism. It is true that the realization that we do sin and must repent of sin begins when God calls us and grants us repentance. However, without God’s Spirit in us, it is *IMPOSSIBLE* to overcome sin. Even *WITH* God’s Spirit in us, the fight is still difficult, as our old sinful nature in us does not want to die. Notice that it is Christ *WITHIN US* (through His Spirit in us) who fights our battles *FOR* us. That is why Paul can confidentially exclaim, “Who will free me from my slavery to this deadly lower nature? Thank God! It has been done by Jesus Christ our Lord! He has set me free” (Romans 7:24–25, *Living Bible*).

With God’s Spirit in us, the fight against sin *CAN* be won, since it is Christ who is fighting for us. Still, we must *YIELD* to Christ. We must *LET HIM* fight our battles. We must reject our own carnal selfish nature within

us. Notice James 4:5, 7–8: “Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who [better translated: which] dwells in us yearns jealously’? [God—through His Spirit within us—wants us to submit to Him *and* He wants us to resist our carnal desires.]... Therefore submit to God... Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

We have to be single-minded, having as our focus, a fervent desire to live God’s way of life. We have to continuously repent of following the evil desires of our heart. Yes, we DO have a part to play in the process. We DO have responsibilities. Notice 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, *Living Bible*: “In a race, everyone runs but only one person gets first prize. So run your race to win. To win the contest you must deny yourselves many things that would keep you from doing your best. An athlete goes to all this trouble just to win a blue ribbon or a silver cup, but we do it for a heavenly reward that never disappears. So I run straight to the goal with the purpose in every step. I fight to win. I’m not just shadow-boxing or playing around. Like an athlete I punish [or discipline] my body, treating it roughly, training it to do what it should, not what it wants to. Otherwise I fear that after enlisting others for the race, I myself might be declared unfit and ordered to stand aside.”

We CAN become successful! We CAN conquer sin! How? By following the lead of God’s Spirit that dwells IN US. Otherwise, we CANNOT become victorious! Without God having called us and granted us godly repentance (Acts 5:31; 2 Timothy 2:25; Romans 2:4), we simply COULD NOT overcome. In fact, we WOULD NOT even realize that we must overcome, and we would not even see how rotten and evil our carnal nature really is. The majority of people today do not know that they must repent of wrong thoughts and actions, and make real changes in the way they live. God has not called them yet. He has not opened their minds to that important fact. Christ told the Jews of His time: “Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word... He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God” (John 8:43, 47).

God did not call them at that time (John 6:65: “... no one can come to Me [Christ] unless it has been granted to him by My Father”). Consequently, they are not yet judged for their conduct because they are basically “ignorant” of what they are and what they are doing. Paul reflects on his own carnal conduct prior to his conversion and his subsequent change

in this way: “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent [violently arrogant] man; but I obtained mercy because I did it *ignorantly* in unbelief” (1 Timothy 1:12–13).

Prior to our calling, all of us were ignorant of God’s values and standards. Peter confirms that the murder of Christ was done “*in ignorance*” (Acts 3:17). Still, sin is sin and it needs to be repented of once the realization of wrong conduct sinks in. So then, Peter continues to admonish his listeners: “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

Paul adds this important fact, in Acts 17:30–31, “Truly, these *times of ignorance* God overlooked, but now commands all men [all who have been called, compare Acts 2:39] everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

Most people today are still living in ignorance. Their time of salvation has not come yet. We read in Ephesians 4:17–18, “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the *ignorance* that is in them, because of the *blindness* of their heart.”

Before our calling, we were no different. God has called us OUT OF this lifestyle—not to return to it again. Notice 1 Peter 1:13–15, “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober... as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, *as in your ignorance*; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.”

The time will come when God *WILL* remove from ALL of mankind the ignorance and blindness of their hearts and grant them an understanding of His way. This time has not yet come for most people, but it will, in accordance with God’s great plan and purpose. (Regarding this little-understood aspect of God’s plan for all of mankind, please read our free booklets, “*The Gospel of the Kingdom of God*,” and “*God IS a Family*.”)

## **WHAT TO REPENT OF...**

What, exactly, is it that we need to repent of prior to baptism? Simply

put, we must repent of the sins we have committed. What is sin? The biblical definition is: "...sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, AV). Which law? The law of God's Ten Commandments. James calls it the "royal law according to the Scripture" (James 2:8). It defines our love toward God and our love toward neighbor. When we break even one of the Ten Commandments, we are guilty of having broken them all and have become a transgressor of the law (James 2:10–11). The law of the Ten Commandments is a spiritual law, as Paul explains in Romans 7:14, because it regulates not only our actions, but also the motives and intents of our heart. We sin when we commit adultery (Exodus 20:14), but we also sin when we *desire* or *covet* the wife of another man (Exodus 20:17), or when we look at another woman with the desire to commit adultery with her (Matthew 5:28). Additionally, we sin when we kill someone (Exodus 20:13), but we have already sinned by violating God's spiritual law of the Ten Commandments when we even *hate* another human being (Matthew 5:21–22; 1 John 3:15).

The spiritual intent of the law of the Ten Commandments regulates what is in our heart, subsequently leading to either right or wrong actions. Christ tells us in Matthew 15:19: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."

Sin is the transgression of God's spiritual law of the Ten Commandments. The penalty—the wages (what we earn)—of sin is eternal death (Romans 6:23). Sin begins in our own heart with our own evil desires, then it leads to the actual sin, and ultimately to eternal death (compare James 1:14–15), unless repented of. Godly repentance means to be deeply sorry not only for what we do but *for what we are*. It must be accompanied by a desire to change what we do, how we think, and what we are.

We must come to the realization, prior to our baptism, that we have been living a life contrary to God. God says that we have been His enemies in times past, prior to our conversion (compare Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21). We have been living with hostility toward God's law, perhaps without realizing it. God says that the carnal mind—the unconverted mind—is hostile toward the law of God, and it is *unwilling*, and therefore *unable*, to keep it. (Compare Romans 8:6–7: "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.")

This applies to every human being prior to conversion, whether or not

he or she grew up in a Sabbath-keeping Church of God, even though that Sabbath-keeping Church of God stayed loyal and faithful to the truth. Peter, James and John lived with Jesus Christ for several years, yet Christ had to point out to them that they were under Satan's influence when they wanted to respond to the desires of "their father," the devil. In Matthew 16:23, Christ even called Peter "Satan," because Peter desired at that moment "the things of men," not "the things of God." In Luke 9:55–56, Christ rebuked James and John, the "Sons of Thunder (compare Mark 3:17)," because they followed Satan's spirit when they asked for the destruction of the Samaritans.

### **SATAN'S NATURE IN US**

All of us have acquired, to some degree, Satan's nature. We were all influenced and, in fact, *held captive* by Satan to do his will. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 2:24–26, "And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, *if God perhaps will grant them repentance* so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will."

We all walked at one time "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit [Satan the devil] who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others" (Ephesians 2:2–3). Remember, we all "were once darkness" (Ephesians 5:8). That is exactly *what we were*, having acquired Satan's nature. When God calls us (Romans 8:28–29; 2 Timothy 1:9) to grant us repentance (Romans 2:4), we need to respond to God's calling by repenting of our sins—what we did, what we desired, what we thought, and what we were, and still are to some degree.

At the time of Christ, many of the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes and other "noble people" refused to repent. They didn't think they had anything to repent of. It was very difficult for them to recognize that they were sinners and that they had to repent. On the other hand, "sinners," such as tax collectors and prostitutes, could easily see how badly they had lived their lives. Christ said that they would enter the Kingdom of God before the Pharisees.

The same can be said today. Some have a hard time understanding that they, too, must repent. They think they have led a pretty good life, so what should they repent of? The answer is that ALL must repent, because ALL HAVE SINNED (Romans 3:9–19; 1 John 1:10). All of us have earned the death penalty, and without repentance, there is no forgiveness of sin. We ALL have MUCH to repent of.

Even if we have not engaged in such glaring sins as idolatry, dishonoring parents, drunkenness, fornication, adultery, killing (including war), or Sabbath-breaking, are we not familiar with hot tempers, wrong emotions, feelings of hate, judgmental attitudes, jealousy and envy toward others, or desire for physical things that are harmful for us? Haven't we all lied "a little" at times, "shading the truth" somewhat? Haven't we all spent too much time on wrong thoughts and actions?

Remember, sin is not only what we *do*—it is what we *think* and what we *are*. We all need to acquire a new heart and a new mindset. Even after baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit, we have to continuously let God's Spirit lead us, thus purifying us and making us acceptable to God (Titus 2:14). The "old man" in us (Romans 6:6) does not want to die, and he will try, instigated by Satan, to come back out of the grave where we have buried him in baptism, to creep back into our lives and to take over, like a zombie (compare Romans 7:18–24). All of us must *always* be on guard and not allow that to happen (1 Corinthians 9:27).

## **"RE-"BAPTISM?**

As we have seen, godly repentance is a prerequisite to baptism. A young baby, who has no concept of repentance, or a young child who is not mature enough to make a valid, irreversible decision after first counting the cost, should not be baptized. The same is true for an adult who does not yet know what sin is. If we don't know what sin is, how can we repent of it? How can our baptism reflect the burial of our old nature with its lusts and evil desires—including the natural desire to break God's law—if we don't know how we have been breaking God's law? How can our being raised out of the watery grave reflect our dedication to walk in newness of life and to live obediently to God's law, if we don't even know what God's law requires of us?

People who have been baptized as a baby or as a young child would need to be "re"-baptized, that is, properly baptized for the first time, when

they are called by God to genuinely repent of their sins. The same would be true for adult persons who were baptized without realizing what they were really guilty of and what they needed to repent of. For instance, people who do not know the importance of keeping *ALL* of God's Ten Commandments, including the commandment to keep God's Sabbath holy, the commandment not to fight or kill in war, not to worship idols, and not to pray to "Mother Mary" or other "heavenly saints," have not really repented of their sins. They lack understanding of what sin is and, therefore, do not cease from their sins. They continue to engage in the same wrong conduct, showing that they did not begin to live in "newness of life."

When someone is in doubt whether his or her prior "baptism" was valid in God's eyes and resulted in receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, he or she needs to look at the fruits after that "baptism." Since God's commandments regarding idolatry and Sabbath-keeping are of such fundamental importance, the Holy Spirit would lead a person who is called by God to immediately recognize and accept this truth before or at the time of baptism, or very shortly thereafter. The person would immediately feel a compelling desire to keep the Sabbath and to cease from committing idolatry. If such an action did not take place at the time of "baptism," or at least within a reasonably short time thereafter, we can safely say that such a "baptism" was not valid in God's eyes and did not lead to the pouring out of God's Spirit on the person. If the person begins to understand now the importance of keeping all of God's commandments, is repentant of his or her prior conduct, believes in Christ's sacrifice for the forgiveness of his or her sins, and is willing to obey whatever God's Spirit might reveal to him or her in the future, then that person should now consider being properly baptized.

In order to determine whether a previous "baptism" of an adult person was valid in God's eyes, we should ask ourselves the following questions:

- (1) When I was baptized by immersion, did I understand what sin is? Did I repent of my sins? Did I ask, in faith, for forgiveness of my sins? Did I understand that forgiveness was bestowed on me because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who died for me, so that I could live for Him?
- (2) Did I understand, at the time of my baptism, what I was—not only what I did—and did I repent of my very evil and carnal nature that is hostile against the law of God? Did I actually bury my old self in the watery grave?

- (3) Did I make a commitment with God to let the Holy Spirit create in me a new heart, to make a new person out of me, to live in me, to guide me, to help me avoid sin, and to give me strength to strive against sin so that I would be able to acquire a new nature—the divine nature of God Himself? Did I actually come up from the watery grave “clean,” a new person, knowing that from then on I would have to strive as never before to avoid sinning and to live righteously, and that I would have to continually work at keeping all of God’s commandments, including those that would be revealed to me in the future?

If we cannot substantially answer all of the above questions with “yes,” then our previous baptism would not be valid in the eyes of God and we would not have received God’s Holy Spirit at that time.

Again, godly repentance is a necessary prerequisite for proper baptism and receiving God’s Holy Spirit. We need to know *WHAT WE ARE* and *WHAT WE DID* so that we can *REPENT* of our carnal ways and set our course to become a different person—to think, to speak, and to act differently from then on. We need to know, additionally, that based on human strength alone, we will *NOT* be able to accomplish this perfectly. That is why we *NEED* to have God’s Holy Spirit dwelling in us, directing us and giving us the needed power and strength to live a life in subjection to God. There is no promise in the Bible that we will receive God’s Spirit, unless we are first properly baptized.

## **WHAT TO BELIEVE IN...**

As mentioned before, the second most important prerequisite of baptism is belief, or faith. Christ said in Mark 16:16, “He who *BELIEVES* and is baptized will be saved.” What exactly are we to believe?

Prior to that statement, in Mark 16:15, Christ had pointed out that the disciples had to preach the *GOSPEL* to every creature. He then said in verse 16, “He who believes...will be saved.” Obviously, before being baptized, we must believe the *GOSPEL*. What is the gospel? Paul warned us that if we preach another gospel, other than the one that was preached by Christ and the early apostles, we are accursed (Galatians 1:6–9). It is imperative that we preach and believe in the gospel of Christ—Christ’s gospel—the gospel that He preached (verse 7, “[some] want to pervert [or distort] the gospel *OF* Christ.”). What was the gospel that Christ preached?

Mark 1:1, 14–15 tells us: “The beginning of the gospel OF Jesus Christ, the Son of God... Now after John [the Baptist] was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. REPENT, and BELIEVE in...’” What are we to believe in? “...the GOSPEL.”

Before we can be baptized, we are to repent *and* believe in the GOSPEL of the KINGDOM OF GOD. There is only ONE gospel. It is the gospel OF Christ—the gospel that Christ preached. It is Christ’s gospel ABOUT the KINGDOM OF GOD.

The gospel of the Kingdom of God includes, of course, the fact that Jesus Christ is the coming KING of the Kingdom of God, and that He died for us so that we could obtain eternal life IN the Kingdom of God. The message about Christ, and faith in Christ, is NOT the entirety of the gospel. Neither is faith in Christ and in His name something separate and apart from the gospel. Rather, it’s all part of the one and only true gospel.

Our free booklet, “*The Gospel of the Kingdom of God*,” describes in detail what the true gospel message entails. It includes the wonderful message that we can become full members of the Kingdom of God, and it explains how this can be accomplished. It also makes plain what exactly the Kingdom of God is. Shocking as it may sound, most people today have NO IDEA as to what the Kingdom of God really is. They have been taught to believe in a different gospel. Without understanding and believing the TRUE gospel of the Kingdom of God, we cannot be properly baptized.

The gospel of the Kingdom of God reveals who and what GOD is. It shows that GOD IS the Kingdom of God, ruling over His creation. It shows that God is a FAMILY, currently consisting of TWO God beings—God the Father and God the Son, who is Jesus Christ. It shows that converted Christians will become members of the God Family at the time of Christ’s return to this earth. It shows that the Kingdom of God will rule *on this earth*. It reveals that the Holy Spirit is NOT a separate God being at all, but rather the power of God that emanates from God—both God the Father and God the Son.

It explains that Jesus Christ was God before He became a human being, but that He gave up His divine nature to become a human being—flesh and blood—so that He could experience human suffering and so that He could die for us, thus paying the death penalty that we had earned because of OUR SINS. It shows that God the Father resurrected Christ from the

dead and brought Him back to the glorified state of the God being that He was before His human birth. It reveals that through Christ's suffering and death—through His supreme sacrifice—we can have forgiveness of our sins. It explains that the death penalty for our sins can be removed from us, if we accept, in faith, Christ's sacrifice for us.

## **BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL**

The gospel of the Kingdom of God is so much more than most people realize or want to admit! It is imperative that we *BELIEVE* in the gospel before getting baptized. We must *believe* who and what God is, *believe* what our human potential is, *believe* that we have incurred the death penalty because of our sins, and *believe* that Christ's sacrifice, as the Lamb of God, brought about our reconciliation with God the Father. We must understand and *believe* that our sins have separated us from God (compare Isaiah 59:1–2), and that *ONLY* through Christ's sacrifice could that separation be removed (compare Ephesians 2:14–18).

We must also believe that there is *NO OTHER WAY TO BE SAVED* than through Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). We must also *believe* that it is the Father who draws us and brings us to Christ (John 6:44, 65).

How many people who were baptized in times past *really believed* all of that? If they believed in a false gospel, then God did not accept their baptism.

For instance, did they believe that God is a Trinity? (Our free booklets, "*The Gospel of the Kingdom of God*," "*Is God a Trinity?*" and "*God Is a Family*," prove from the Bible who and what God really is.) If they believed that God is a Trinity at the time of their baptism, how could the true God consider their baptism as being genuine? Did they have a clear understanding as to what will happen to them when they die? Did they believe that they go to heaven when they die or that they have an immortal soul? (Our free booklet, "*Do You Have an Immortal Soul?*" explains from the Bible what man really is and what man is to become.)

Did they know and believe what God says about sin? Did they understand and believe that sin is the transgression of the law? That the observance of Sunday, as well as certain annual holidays derived from paganism, such as Christmas and Easter, is sin because it violates God's law? (Our free booklet, "*Don't Keep Christmas*," proves from the Bible why we are not to keep such annual holidays as Christmas, Easter, or Halloween.)

Further, did they know and believe that it is sin *NOT* to keep the weekly

Sabbath—the seventh day of the week—as well as God’s annual Holy Days—Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Feast of Trumpets, Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles? (Our free booklet, “*God’s Commanded Holy Days*,” explains in detail the biblical command to keep these days holy.)

Now, this may seem like a lot to believe in if you have never heard the true gospel message as Christ preached it. There’s even more!

We also need to believe that we must have additional power, from God, in order to be able to keep God’s laws after our baptism. We must understand and believe that God the Father will give us the Holy Spirit—the very *SAME SPIRIT* that emanates from both the Father and Jesus Christ—when we come out of our “watery grave” at baptism, followed by prayer and laying on of hands (see discussion below). We must believe that God’s Spirit in us enables us to begin the process of changing our hearts and minds, replacing our carnal nature that we acquired from Satan with a divine nature that God will give us. This is the *ONLY* way we can become more and more like God and Jesus Christ. We must believe that God’s Holy Spirit will actually dwell in us from that time on, that it will lead us and guide us, and that we can and *MUST* follow the lead of the Holy Spirit in us. We must also believe and understand that we are considered true Christians *ONLY* when God’s Spirit lives in us. We must believe that the Holy Spirit in us is a downpayment, or earnest, or guarantee (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13–14) that God will resurrect us from the dead and change us to immortal beings.

We must believe and understand that we must obey God. True godly belief in the gospel means obedience to Christ and His words. We must believe that we have to *GROW* in the knowledge of Christ—the same knowledge that Christ has—and that baptism is just the *BEGINNING* of our converted walk toward total obedience (compare 2 Peter 3:18 and Ephesians 4:15). Although we will sin from time to time after baptism, we must believe that Christ will, upon our genuine and heartfelt repentance, continue to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

## **BELIEVE IN CHRIST**

You may have heard the expressions, “Believe the gospel,” or “Believe in Christ.” To believe *IN* Christ means to **BELIEVE** Christ—believe what Christ taught—the message that He preached, the gospel mes-

sage, the good news about the Kingdom of God. Everything we covered in the previous section about believing the gospel is included in the simple phrase “Believe in Christ.” To believe in Christ means to believe in Him as our God, our Savior, and our King who **rules** over us. When we believe in Christ, we also believe in the Father. When we believe in Christ, we believe who and what Christ was before His human birth, what He was during His stay here on earth, as well as what He is now. When we believe in Christ, we believe that Christ is now our High Priest, continually intervening for us before the Father to obtain help and strength for us in time of need. When we believe in Christ, we obey Him, and when we obey Him, we obey God the Father. When we believe in Christ, we believe in His return to this earth to reward us according to our works.

Again, we ask, “How many really understood and believed the TRUE gospel message before they were baptized?”

As we have explained, “repentance” is a life-long process. It does not cease at the time of our baptism. Repentance is a godly change of mind from breaking God’s law to obeying God. To say that God accepts us “as we are” if we only “believe in Jesus” is a total misinterpretation of Scripture. Such a statement denies the need for change on our part.

When we believe *IN* Christ, then we BELIEVE Him and will OBEY Him. Paul spoke about “OBEDIENCE to the faith” on numerous occasions (Romans 1:5; Romans 16:26). We read that the disciples, including a great many of the priests, became “obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

Faith and obedience are not exclusive of each other. They are very much connected. James speaks about a “dead” or useless “faith,” and, conversely, a “living” faith. *Faith without works—without obedience—is dead* (James 2:14–26). When we believe in Jesus Christ, we must obey Him. Otherwise, our faith is dead and we worship Him “in vain” (Mark 7:6–13).

Christ told those who believed in Him that they had to “abide in My word” in order to be “My disciples indeed” (John 8:31). To abide in Christ’s word means to obey and live by His words. Only he who “DOES the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17). We have to DO the things that we have learned (Philippians 4:9). We are blessed if we “do His commandments” (Revelation 22:14). In fact, Christ tells us in John 13:17, “If you KNOW these things, blessed are you if you DO them.”

If we say that we believe in Christ and that we love Christ, we must also keep His word. He tells us in John 14:15, “If you love Me, keep My com-

mandments” (Compare John 14:21, 23; 15:10).

Christ is the light of the world (compare John 1:9) and He wants us to come to Him. How do we do that? John 3:20–21 gives the answer: “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who DOES the TRUTH comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

Coming to Christ—believing in Christ as our Savior, the one who DIED for OUR sins—means that we must be willing to live a life obedient to God’s law. Just believing *in* Christ, while continuing the practice of sin, is useless. Christ will NOT accept us that way! He tells us that we are His friends IF we do whatever He commands us (John 15:14). He even calls us His brothers, His sisters and His mother, if we do the Will of God (Mark 3:35). On the other hand, if we refuse to obey God’s commandments, reasoning that all that matters is to just “believe” in, and know of, the person of Jesus Christ, we are called liars in whom there is no truth. 1 John 2:4 makes this very plain: “He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

It is very clear that to believe in Christ means to obey Him. Notice John 3:36, *Revised Standard Version*, “He who *believes* in the Son has eternal life; he who does not *obey* the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.” Some translations replace the word “obey” with “believe,” however, the rendering of “obey” is correct according to the original Greek (compare, also, the *Revised English Bible*; the *New American Bible*; the *Elberfelder Bible*; the *Menge Bible*; the *Zürcher Bible*; and the *Luther Bible*).

## **WHEN TO BE BAPTIZED?**

Consideration for baptism requires an in-depth personal examination. It is not something to rush into. It is not a decision to be made based on emotions. We don’t simply “give our heart to the Lord.” We need to understand, repent and believe, as previously discussed. Why? Because baptism is a covenant—a contract—with God. Baptism represents an agreement that we make with God to obey Him—a promise to live by His requirements for the remainder of our lives. If we break that promise later, God certainly holds us accountable for doing so.

God does require us to be baptized in order to receive His Holy Spirit. The question of whether or not to be baptized depends on whether or not a person is old enough to understand and believe in the gospel. This in-

cludes the following: an understanding of what sin is; the fact that the death penalty hangs over our heads because of our own sins; the fact that Christ died for us so that we can have forgiveness of our sins when we truly repent of them and accept His sacrifice as payment for our sins; the fact that we need to put our carnal nature into the watery grave, and leave it there; the fact that we can acquire God's divine nature *ONLY* through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us; and the fact that we must be baptized in order to receive God's power to be able to change the way we think, speak and act. If you can grasp the meaning of the aforementioned and genuinely believe these things, then we say, "yes, you ought to go ahead with baptism as soon as possible."

True, we must not rush into baptism. On the other hand, once we understand what sin is and have truly repented of our sins, and once we believe in the gospel message of Jesus Christ and all that it entails, we are to be baptized immediately. We must not make the mistake of lingering and avoiding our responsibility to be baptized. Thoughts and ideas can easily come into our mind to discourage us from doing so. You can be sure that these ideas **DO NOT** come from God.

God **WANTS** us to be baptized. He **COMMANDS** us to be baptized. Satan, on the other hand, **HATES** nothing more than seeing one of "his children" leave him in order to place him- or herself under the government and rule of God. Satan will attempt to thwart our intentions by putting into our minds certain concepts, ideas and arguments in order to make us think that we should not get baptized—at least "not yet."

These diverting ideas come in different disguises. For instance, we may think that we don't even need to be baptized because, after all, we are not such a bad person. Make no mistake, *EVERYONE SINS*, and *EVERYONE MUST REPENT*. Another argument might be that, if we are baptized now, then all the fun stops, so, let's have our fun now and repent of it and get baptized later. A third line of reasoning may go this way: "I need to be perfect before I can get baptized. I am still trying to get rid of a particular bad habit or a sin and I don't want to get baptized before I have got rid of it."

All of these arguments miss the entire point as to *WHY* we must get baptized. Perfection will not be achieved in this life based on our own strength. That is why we **MUST HAVE GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT OF POWER** to help us to overcome our problems. We must, of course, **WANT** to change. That means, we must not engage deliberately in wrong con-

duct, knowing that it is wrong. Our weakness and inability to overcome our bad habits only proves that we must get baptized and that we must receive God's Holy Spirit to HELP us with our battle against our sins.

If we reason that we don't want to get baptized yet because we don't want to miss the fun, then our concept of what "fun" is must be corrected immediately. If baptism is a hurdle to us because we don't want to give up "fun," then we are, indeed, missing the point. Perhaps we have a false concept of what it means to be a Christian. For instance, some teach that a Christian must not dance, watch television or movies, drink alcohol, or play cards. None of these prohibitions, however, are biblical. Rather, they are based on human traditions and simply constitute self-imposed religion. On the other hand, if baptism would be contrary to certain habitual actions of "fun," then our concept of "fun" is contrary to God's word—with or without baptism. Anyone, who KNOWS better, actually SINS by engaging in sinful "fun." When we know to do good and to avoid evil, and don't live accordingly, we sin, whether baptized or not. As we explained before, SIN must be repented of BEFORE our baptism. To delay repentance is dangerous. God holds us accountable for what we know and what we do with the knowledge we have been given.

When we examine the biblical record, we find that when people were ready for baptism, they were baptized immediately. They did not delay, nor did the ministers have the disciples go through time-consuming "courses" of baptismal "requirements" before they were willing to baptize the person.

We find that on the day of Pentecost, 3,000 believers were baptized the same day when they heard Peter's inspired sermon and were motivated to come to genuine repentance (Acts 2:41). We find that Philip immediately baptized the eunuch who had worshipped God in Jerusalem, and who was studying the Bible on his return to Ethiopia (Acts 8:35–38). Philip explained to him the Scriptures as they relate to Jesus and the eunuch was baptized within a few hours. Paul—formerly Saul—was baptized by Ananias within a few days of Paul's encounter with Christ. Later, Paul described his experience with these words, "Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law...came to me; and he stood and said to me...“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord”" (Acts 22:12–16). Paul baptized the jailer and his household "the same hour of the night" (Acts 16:33).

When an adult person has genuinely repented and believes, he or she

should be baptized without the necessity of prior laborious requirements. A person who has repented and believes and obeys the gospel, who believes in, and keeps the Sabbath and the Holy Days, who has shown fruits worthy of repentance in his or her life, who tithes and gives offerings according to God's commandments, and who understands the future that God has in store for us, should get baptized. It is simply unconscionable to require of such a person—as some ministers have done—to first study a laborious Bible course or watch lengthy biblical videos that begin with a simple lesson as to whether or not “God” exists!

## **WHO SHOULD BAPTIZE?**

Once a person is truly ready for baptism, a true minister of Christ should perform the baptism, though it may sometimes require a waiting period by virtue of the fact that a minister of Christ is not immediately available. We need to understand, though, that God is in charge and that when He calls someone and leads them to baptism, He will also work out the necessary details to send one of His ministers to perform the baptism. For instance, God sent Peter to Cornelius, and He sent Philip to the eunuch so that they could be baptized.

The biblical record indicates that only ordained ministers of God should perform baptisms. The reason is that the baptism is done for the purpose of receiving the Holy Spirit. We need to remember that following baptism by immersing under water, the minister is to pray over the person and to lay his hands on their head so that the person can receive the Holy Spirit. The Bible shows that without the laying on of hands, a person normally does not receive the Holy Spirit.

Notice this in Acts 8:12–17: “But when they believed Philip [one of the original seven deacons, Acts 6:5] as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. . . . Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He [better translated: it—the Holy Spirit] had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given. . . .” (Compare, too, Acts 19:5–6).

We read later in the same chapter that Philip was sent, through an angel, to the eunuch, and that Philip baptized him. If this baptism led to the gift of the Holy Spirit, then Philip, who by that time would have been a minister, would have prayed over the eunuch and laid his hands on him. We note that Philip is called an “evangelist” in Acts 21:8.

We cannot reach a different conclusion by virtue of the fact that Christ’s apostles baptized others before they received the Holy Spirit themselves. The twelve apostles were in quite a different position than the rest of us are today, having been specifically chosen by Christ for a very unique and particular purpose. They were sent out by Christ to heal the sick, cast out demons and preach the gospel, *prior* to their conversion (Luke 22:32, AV; compare regarding conversion, 1 Samuel 10:6, 9). These activities, especially healing the sick and casting out demons, are reserved today for God’s ordained ministers. You may want to read the stirring account in Acts 19:13–16, reporting about the futile and unsuccessful attempt of unordained people to cast out a demon.

The fact that Christ allowed His apostles to baptize does not mean that unordained people have the authority to do so today. This would also include ministers from churches that do not teach *and* practice the law of God, including the observance of the Sabbath and the Holy Days. (Note that in unusual circumstances, God might grant His Holy Spirit to someone who is baptized by a minister outside the Church of God, or by an unordained person within the Church, if the baptized person fulfills all the requirements for proper baptism, as discussed earlier in this booklet. There is *no promise*, however, that God would grant the Holy Spirit under those circumstances, especially when the person to be baptized understands the role and function of God’s true ministers in His Church.)

Every example pertaining to the New Testament Church identifies Christ’s chosen ministers as those who would baptize people, pray over them and lay their hands upon them, so that the Holy Spirit could be given to them. We find, for instance, that only God’s ministers were given special authority from God to pray for the sick and to lay their hands upon them (while anointing them with oil). Notice it in James 5:14–15: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the *elders of the church*, and let them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.” (This is not to say that God might not give power to heal to some other people, but

how sure can we be of that? We *can* be sure, however, that the elders of God's Church have the authority and power to pray for healing of the sick.)

## **BAPTISM IN THE NAME OF CHRIST**

Some wonder whether baptism "in the name of Christ" is sufficient. They claim that a valid baptism must include the words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (compare Matthew 28:19). Is this claim correct? Let's notice, from the Scriptural record, how the early apostles baptized the disciples.

One of the early baptisms is described in Acts 8:14–17. This passage (discussed earlier in this booklet) summarizes for us the exact ceremony of baptism leading to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Let's read it again: "Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that *Samaria had received the word of God*, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, *prayed for them* that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He [better: it—the Holy Spirit] had fallen upon none of them. *They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*"

Notice carefully that they first received or accepted the word of God. They heard the message, accepted it, believed it and repented of their sins. They were then baptized "in the name of the Lord." Following their baptism, the ministers prayed for them and laid their hands on them to set them apart for the holy purpose of following God and His way of life. It was THEN that they received the Holy Spirit.

So we see that baptism in the name of Christ was sufficient. Some have said that this passage just describes the fact that the apostles baptized the people with Christ's authority. Although certainly included, the Scriptural meaning is more encompassing.

We must realize that in the phrase, "in the name of the Lord," the Greek word for "in" is "*eis*," and the Greek word for "name" is "*onoma*." The Greek word "*eis*" can mean "in" or "into," depending on the context. Scriptures such as Matthew 2:23; 18:6; Mark 2:1; 13:16, translate the Greek word "*eis*" correctly as "in." Other passages, such as Matthew 2:11, 12 and 13 (AV), correctly translate the Greek word "*eis*" as "into."

Additionally, the Greek word for "name," "*onoma*," can also mean, "possession." It would therefore be accurate to render the phrase, "baptism in

the name of Christ,” as “baptism into the possession of Christ.” This phrase not only describes the fact that baptism must be done with Christ’s authority, it also shows the result of baptism—we become Christ’s property because He died for us and bought us with His blood (compare Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 2 Peter 2:1).

Now notice another revealing passage in Acts 19:1–6: “And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ So they said to him, ‘We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.’ And he said to them, ‘INTO what then were you baptized?’ So they said, ‘INTO John’s baptism.’ Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.’ When they heard this, they were baptized *in the name of the Lord Jesus*. And when Paul *laid hands on them*, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.”

These disciples had been baptized into the baptism of John. That baptism was not sufficient to receive the Holy Spirit. John’s baptism was an outward sign of inner repentance, but it did not include the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. Another baptism—baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ—was necessary to receive the Holy Spirit. This passage implies that Christ’s baptism, which He accomplished through His apostles, was different from John’s baptism (compare again John 3:22; 4:1–3). Paul seemed to have known this distinction and that is why he asked the disciples, “Into WHAT [baptism] then were you baptized?”

Let’s notice again the distinction. The disciples were baptized “into John’s baptism.” The Greek word for “into” is “*eis*.” After they learned of the need of another baptism to receive the Holy Spirit, they were baptized “in [or *into*] the name of the Lord.” In the Greek, the word for “in” is also “*eis*,” which can also mean “into.” As they were baptized into John’s baptism, they were now baptized into the name or possession (“*onoma*” in Greek) of Christ, that is, into Christ’s baptism. This passage shows that baptism in, or into, the name of Christ is not only **necessary**, but is also **sufficient**, so that the Father will forgive our sins and give us His Holy Spirit.

## SPEAKING WITH TONGUES

There are only three recorded events in the Bible when people spoke with tongues after receiving the Holy Spirit. These special events occurred to provide evidence that the people had, in fact, received the Holy Spirit. This also provides further proof that baptism in, or into, the name of Christ is sufficient.

The first event is recorded in Acts 2, when the New Testament Church was born. God wanted to make it very clear that His disciples received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The second event occurred in Acts 10, when, for the first time, Gentiles received the Holy Spirit. God did not want to leave any doubt that He had now opened the door of repentance and faith to the Gentiles (Acts 10:45–46; 11:15–18). The third event is the one in Acts 19 that we just discussed. Here, God wanted to make it very clear that *ONLY* the baptism into Christ is sufficient to receive the Holy Spirit (and not, as in that case, the baptism into John). **We are not baptized into a man.** This is very important to understand, as our baptism does not become invalid if the minister who baptized us subsequently leaves the Church.

We need to understand, too, what actually happened when people spoke with tongues in these given instances. Some claim that baptism with the Holy Spirit causes the baptized person to fall backwards, begin rolling on the floor, and speaking and screaming in an unintelligible way, allegedly showing that he or she has received the gift of the Holy Spirit and can now “speak in tongues.”

However, that kind of conduct is not what is meant when the Bible talks about speaking in tongues. Acts 2 explains that speaking in tongues means speaking in another language. In Acts 2:4 we read: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Beginning in verse 6 and continuing in verses 8 and 11, we find the explanation of “speaking with tongues.” Verse 6: “...everyone heard them speak in his own language... (verse 8) ‘And how is it that we hear, each in our own language [*Authorized Version*: “tongue”] **in which we were born?**... (verse 11) We hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.”

The Greek word for “language” in verses 6 and 8 is “*dialektos*,” from which our word “dialect” is derived. The Greek word for “tongue” or “language” in verses 4 and 11 is “*glossa*.”

To speak in tongues, then, simply means to speak in a different language or dialect—but it is still a language or dialect “in which people are born.” They speak in a dialect or language, which other people understand due to their background, environment or upbringing. As mentioned, the Bible records only three incidents when people were given that gift immediately upon receiving the Holy Spirit. However, this gift has been given over the years to numerous baptized people, not necessarily at the time of their baptism, but in time, as they matured in their Christian lives.

Paul said specifically that “speaking in tongues,” or speaking a different language, should not be done unless someone is present to interpret what is said. The concept that one can speak in a “different tongue,” or in a foreign language, without understanding what the person is saying, is totally unbiblical and very dangerous. We are told that angels have their own language (1 Corinthians 13:1). This means, demons—fallen angels—have their own language, too.

Note 1 Corinthians 14:4–5: “He who speaks in a tongue [Greek: “*glossa*”] edifies himself... he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues [Greek: “*glossa*”], unless he indeed interprets, that the church may receive edification.”

In other words, if a minister preaches to the audience in a foreign language, the audience won’t understand him. The one who is speaking the language knows what he is saying (if he does not, then he is in all likelihood already in contact with and under the influence of demons), but nobody else in the audience will understand. Unless he or someone else who knows both languages interprets what he says, the audience is not benefited.

Paul continues, in verses 9: “So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue [Greek: “*glossa*”] words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.”

In the Greek, the word for “tongue” and “language” is the same; i.e., “*glossa*.” The *translator* decided to sometimes use the English word “tongue” and sometimes “language.” Translations, however, are not necessarily inspired. The *Living Bible*, for example, translates verse 9 this way, “In the same way, if you talk to a person in some LANGUAGE he doesn’t understand, how will he know what you mean?” Clearly, speaking in a foreign tongue means speaking in a foreign language.

Let’s note Paul’s command in 1 Corinthians 14:27–28: “If anyone speaks

in a tongue [or foreign language; Greek: “*glossa*”; the *Living Bible* translates here, “No more than two or three should speak in an unknown LANGUAGE...”], let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church, and let him speak to himself and to God.”

We should not expect the immediate gift of being able to speak in a foreign language at the time of our baptism. As we said, God granted this gift only on three separate occasions, for a very specific and important reason. If, however, God were to grant such a gift, it would be one that would manifest itself “decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). It would not be done in “confusion” (1 Corinthians 14:33). It would be a gift of speaking in a foreign language and the speaker would know what he or she would be saying, thereby “magnifying God” (Acts 10:46). Based on Paul’s comments, those present would either understand the language being spoken, or someone present would be able to understand and interpret what is being said.

## **CHURCH MEMBERS ARE NOT THE PROPERTY OF A MAN**

God bestowed the gift of speaking in tongues—foreign languages—on the disciples in Acts 19 in order to show that baptism must occur into Christ, not into any man. Paul reiterates the fact that baptism in or into the name of a minister is not sufficient. (After all, there is no other name than the name of Christ by which we can be saved; compare Acts 4:12.)

We read in 1 Corinthians 1:13–17: “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.”

Baptism in the name of a man is not sufficient to obtain the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the phrase, “in the name of Paul,” the Greek word for “in” is “*eis*,” which can also mean “into,” and the Greek word for “name” is “*onoma*,” which can also mean, “possession.” Paul tells us here that it is not sufficient to be baptized into the name or possession of a minister. We are not the property of a man. We are the property, or possession, of Jesus Christ who has purchased us with His own blood. (Compare again Paul’s words to the

ministry in Ephesus, as recorded in Acts 20:28, “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”)

## **BAPTISM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Ancient Israel was “baptized,” but again, that baptism was not sufficient for them to be saved from sin and to receive the Holy Spirit. (We understand that the Holy Spirit was not offered to the people of ancient Israel, except for a few people in Old Testament times who were selected by God to receive the Holy Spirit for a special purpose. These would include Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, David, and the prophets of old, among others.)

We read in 1 Corinthians 10:1–5: “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.”

They “drank” from the Spiritual Rock—Jesus Christ—who was with them and who taught them, but they were not baptized into His name or possession, and they did not subsequently receive His Holy Spirit. We read that they were baptized “into” (Greek, “eis”) Moses. Such a baptism is not sufficient to obtain the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Peter draws an analogy between true baptism and the flood at the time of Noah. While true baptism saves us from eternal death, the “baptism” that Noah and his family experienced saved them only from physical death. We read in 1 Peter 3:20–21: “...when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”

The “baptism” of Noah, his wife, his sons and his daughters-in-law did not, of course, lead to them receiving the Holy Spirit. It appears from the

biblical record that only Noah—perhaps Shem—had God’s Holy Spirit at the time of the flood. It is also strongly indicated in the Bible that Noah had received God’s Spirit prior to the flood (compare Genesis 6:8–9, 22; 7:1). There is no biblical indication that Noah’s other children and daughters-in-law had God’s Holy Spirit. The “baptism” of the flood was not a baptism that led to spiritual salvation because it was not a baptism “in the name,” or “into the possession,” of Jesus Christ. However, Peter’s analogy points at today’s baptism and links it to the *resurrection of Jesus Christ*. (We could not receive God’s Holy Spirit if Christ had not been raised from the dead.)

## THE ELEMENTS OF BAPTISM

To reiterate, baptism in the name, or into the possession, of Jesus Christ is not only *necessary*, but is also *sufficient* to obtain forgiveness of our sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. We need to remember that there is no recorded biblical incident where the early apostles baptized people other than **in, or into, the name of Jesus Christ**. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, explained this very well in Romans 6:1–4. Let’s read this passage again: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue to sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Paul says that we are baptized *into* (Greek, “*eis*”) Christ and *into* His death. As Christ died a physical death, so we die spiritually in baptism. As Christ was literally resurrected from the dead, so we, too, are raised by the Father from the spiritually dead to live in newness of life. This part of the symbolism of baptism—death in the watery grave—clearly compares symbolically only with the death of Christ. Neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit—God’s power—died in any way. Only Christ, as a human being, died. Further, it is Christ’s death that is not only sufficient, but also necessary, for our forgiveness (Matthew 1:21). That is the reason why baptism into any other human being, be it Paul or Moses or John, would not have the effect of granting forgiveness and receiving God’s Holy Spirit. Their death did not, and could not, accomplish what Christ’s death accomplished.

Clearly, the ordinance of baptism consists of several key elements:

- (1) Baptism begins with our spiritual *death* in the watery grave.
- (2) It is followed by our *resurrection* from the spiritually dead by the Father through the power of God's Holy Spirit.
- (3) The third part is the minister's *prayer* to God the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the minister's *laying on of hands* on the baptized person to receive God's Holy Spirit (compare again Acts 8:14–17).

As we have seen, all of these parts are important, because without any one of them, the Holy Spirit is not generally bestowed upon a person.

Let us also read again Colossians 2:11–13: “In Him [Christ] you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, *buried with Him in baptism*, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.”

When we are baptized into Christ—into His death—our old man dies, and we “put on” Christ—the new man of God. Notice Galatians 3:27, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Compare, too, Romans 13:14.

Baptism pictures our death and burial in a watery grave in the same way that Christ died and was buried in a tomb. Baptism also pictures our resurrection from the dead and our leaving the watery grave, just as Christ was resurrected from the dead and left the tomb. Finally, it pictures walking in newness of life as we put on Christ, who is now living in us through His Holy Spirit. 2 John 7 tells us that only deceivers don't confess Jesus Christ “*as coming in the flesh*.” Christ is coming today in the flesh. He does so by living His life in us. Christ lived in Paul (Galatians 2:20). He lives in us today. In this way, He is coming “in the flesh,” since we are flesh-and-blood human beings.

## **BAPTISM IN THE NAME OF CHRIST**

We read in Acts 2:38 that we must be baptized **IN** the name of Christ. Peter tells us to “Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The Greek word for “in” in this clause (“in the name of Christ”) is “*epi*.” The Greek word for “name” is again, “*onoma*.” Peter tells us, then,

that we must be baptized “in” the name, or possession, of Christ and then we will receive the Holy Spirit. After all, it is Christ who baptizes us with the Holy Spirit, as Matthew 3:11 tells us: “[Christ] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Compare, too, Matthew 3:14.)

We also read in Acts 10:48 that Peter commanded them “to be baptized in the name of the Lord.” The Greek word for “in” within the phrase, “in the name of the Lord” is “*en*.” We find here a biblical command, through the mouth of Peter, to be baptized “in the name of the Lord.” In the passages in Acts 2:38 and Acts 10:48, discussed above, the additional thought is conveyed that baptism must be done with Christ’s authority. Only then, the Father—through Jesus Christ—will bestow on us the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; Titus 3:5–6).

## **LAYING ON OF HANDS**

It is necessary that the minister lay his hands on the person he has baptized, *before* the person can receive the Holy Spirit. This shows that the Holy Spirit of God, flowing out from God the Father and Jesus Christ (Galatians 4:6; Philippians 1:19; Romans 8:9) through the baptizing minister into the baptized person, sets the baptized person aside from the rest of the world for a holy and righteous purpose. The baptized person is now sanctified—set apart—to walk in newness of life. The power of God’s Spirit within that person will now guide, lead and direct the person in the way that he or she should go, giving the person the ability to walk in the right path, as well as giving the strength to not give up and return to the world, thus purifying that person from sin.

## **THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT DURING BAPTISM**

Notice the important role of the Holy Spirit during the baptism ceremony. Without baptism, we don’t receive the Holy Spirit. With proper baptism, we do receive it, as it is a baptism **WITH** the Holy Spirit. We read in Acts 1:5: “You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit...” Compare, too, Acts 11:16.

Baptism with the Holy Spirit is done through the ordinance of water baptism, as was the case with the baptism that John performed. John’s baptism, however, did not go far enough, as we have already covered. It was not a baptism **WITH** the Holy Spirit. Only baptism in the name of Christ—baptism into Christ—can accomplish this.

It is through the baptism into Christ—the baptism WITH the Holy Spirit—that we become members of the Church, the spiritual body of Christ. We are baptized into the Church, a spiritual organism, not a particular human organization. We read in 1 Corinthians 12:13 (RSV): “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”

We were baptized “into one body”—the Church—by one Spirit. The Greek word for “into” is “eis.” In the phrase, “by one spirit,” the Greek word for “by” is “ek” and can also mean “out of.” We are told here that it is “out of” the Holy Spirit of God that we were placed into the Church. The Holy Spirit flows out of God—both the Father and the Son—into us, making us thereby a part of the spiritual body of Christ.

We are also told in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that we were all made to drink of the same Spirit. This means that we must continuously take in, or partake of, God’s Spirit in order to remain in Christ’s spiritual body.

1 Corinthians 6:11 tells us that we “were washed... sanctified... [and] justified in [Greek, “en”] the name of the Lord Jesus and BY [Greek: “ek”] the Spirit of our God.”

## **THE ROLE OF THE FATHER DURING BAPTISM**

The role of the Father is also very important during the baptismal ceremony. It was the Father who gave His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us. It was the Father who resurrected Christ from the dead. It is the Father who raises us from the spiritually dead in baptism, and who gives us His Holy Spirit. Both the Father and Jesus Christ begin living in the converted person, through the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of both the Father and of the Son—dwells in us, and when we *follow the lead* of the Holy Spirit in making life-changing choices, we begin to acquire the very nature of God—the divine nature of both God the Father and God the Son (compare 2 Peter 1:2–4). Ultimately, we will be changed to immortal God beings through this *same Spirit* and will become permanent members of the Kingdom—the Family—of God.

## **DOES MATTHEW 28:19 TEACH A “BAPTISMAL FORMULA?”**

We are all familiar with the passage in Matthew 28:19–20, where Christ told His apostles, “(verse 19) Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of

the Holy Spirit, (verse 20) teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you. . .”

Much has been written about whether or not Matthew 28:19 is genuine. We don't need to be concerned that much about it, as long as we understand that this passage does not teach a mandatory “baptismal formula,” and that it most certainly does not teach a Trinity and the personhood of the Holy Spirit. (Regarding the false concept of the Trinity, please read our free booklet, “*Is God a Trinity?*”)

In regard to the issue whether Matthew 28:19 sets forth a mandatory baptismal formula, note the following: In the phrase, “in the name of,” the Greek for “name” is “*onoma*,” and the Greek for “in” is “*eis*.” Therefore, the phrase can also be translated as, “baptizing them *into the possession of* . . .”

We need to remember and bring into focus the symbolic meaning conveyed with the ordinance of baptism and its different components so that we can properly understand this passage. When the Bible speaks about baptism, it may not always mention all of the different components in a given passage. For instance, the necessary components of prayer to the Father, or of the laying on of hands, may not be specifically mentioned in a particular passage. They are, however, necessary in order to receive the Holy Spirit.

We have seen from the biblical record that the disciples were baptized in, or into, the name, or possession, of Jesus Christ. There is no biblical example where someone was actually baptized in, or into, the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We read consistently that disciples were baptized in, or into, Christ, or in, or into, the name of Jesus Christ ONLY.

We discussed Acts 8:14–17 and Acts 19:1–6 as proof of this assertion. Note that in those passages, the Greek term for “in the name of” reads, “*eis to onoma tou*,” exactly as it does in Matthew 28:19. (Compare, as proof, “*The Englishman's Greek New Testament; giving the Greek Text of Stephens 1550, with the various readings of the Editions of Elzevir 1624, Griesbach, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Alford, and Wordsworth: Together with An Interlinear Literal Translation, and The Authorized Version of 1611.*”) **The occasional claim that the expression “*eis to onoma*” only appears in Matthew 28:19, is therefore incorrect.**

Is there a contradiction, then, to Matthew 28:19 where Jesus commanded the apostles to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them

in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”? How can we resolve this apparent contradiction?

Some insist that Christ was giving His apostles in this Scripture a “baptismal formula” to be used during baptism. They even go so far as to say that baptism is not valid unless the baptizing minister uses that exact formula. Does their reasoning have biblical support?

If Christ had given His apostles a *command* in Matthew 28:19 to use a particular “*formula*” during baptism, then His disciples would have been in flagrant violation of His command, as they never used that “*formula*.” At least, there is no biblical record that they ever used it. Rather, we find that Paul told the disciples to be baptized in, or into, the name of Christ (compare Acts 19:1–6), not, in or into, the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Remember, though, what happened after the persons came out of the watery grave. The baptizing apostles *prayed* over them, and they *laid hands* upon them (compare Acts 8:14–17). We pray to the *Father*, as Christ instructed us to do (compare Matthew 6:9), so in laying hands on the persons and praying over them, the apostles *asked the Father* to give those people the *Holy Spirit* to set them aside from the rest of the world.

Rather than viewing Matthew 28:19 as a “*formula*” to be used verbatim by the minister when he baptizes a person into the death of Christ, the passage in Matthew 28:19 sets forth a description of what happens during the entire ceremony, including the prayer for the person—*after he or she has been baptized*, and the laying on of hands on that person. Note that Matthew 28:19 is not worded as a command to be repeated as a formula, but as a clarification *how to* “make disciples.” We are to make disciples *by baptizing them* and *by teaching them* to observe all things that Christ commanded. Baptism into Christ and His death is the beginning, followed by the “resurrection” from the watery grave, the minister’s prayer to the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the laying on of hands. It describes the total process. In the same way, when Christ’s ministers teach “all things” that Christ commanded us, it encompasses a lengthy process of teaching the entire Gospel message, rather than a certain “*formula*” of words.

So, then, Matthew 28:19 does not set forth a particular word-for-word “baptismal formula,” given as a command. Neither does it set forth a particular word-for-word “teaching formula.” Rather, the command to “teach all things” is a summary term, describing the process of teaching. The same is true for the command to baptize. When a minister baptizes us in, or into,

the name, or possession, of Jesus Christ, we recognize that we are baptized into Christ's death. Note that the Bible nowhere states we are baptized into the death of the *Father* or the *Holy Spirit*. Such an analogy simply does not fit. It was *ONLY* Christ who died, and it was *ONLY* Christ who was resurrected, *by the Father, through the Holy Spirit*. (Compare again Romans 6:1–13.)

At the same time, it is also recognized that the *Father* gave Christ, His only begotten Son, to die for us; that the *Father* resurrected Christ; that the *Father* raises us up, spiritually speaking; and that the *Father* gives us the *Holy Spirit*. When we come out of the watery grave, God's minister places his hands on our head and asks *God the Father* for the *Holy Spirit*—the same Spirit that emanates from both the Father and the Son. It is this *Spirit of God* flowing into us that enables us to walk in newness of life. We also recognize that, at that very moment, we enter into the Family of God as begotten—not yet born again—children of *God the Father*, and brothers and sisters of our elder Brother, Jesus Christ. In that sense, we become the possession, or the “property,” of the God Family (Whatever Christ owns, the Father owns too, and *vice versa*; compare John 16:15). All of this is made possible, then, through *God's Holy Spirit*. So, rather than teaching a particular baptismal formula, Matthew 28:19 teaches how God makes it possible for us, through the Holy Spirit in us, to become part of the Family of God.

Notice Christ's words in the parallel account in Mark 16:15–16: “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes *and is baptized* will be saved; but he who does not believe [and is not baptized] will be condemned [better translated: judged].” There is not even a hint of a baptismal formula here.

Even some outside the Sabbath-keeping Church of God organizations have concluded that Matthew 28:19 does not set forth a particular “baptismal formula,” concluding, rather, that baptism in the name of Christ is sufficient. The Catholic Church determined at the Synod of Nemours in 1284 that baptism in the name of Christ is quite sufficient. Further, around 1913, a Pentecostal group concluded to baptize “in the name of Jesus rather than using the traditional... [baptismal] formula” (Susan Lynn Peterson, *Timeline Charts of the Western Church*, 1999, page 201). In 1945, the United Pentecostal Church was formed, through the merger of two Pentecostal groups. They continued to baptize in the name of Jesus (Peterson, p. 209).

The basis for what we believe and do must be the Bible. ***In view of all the Scriptural evidence presented in this booklet***, the *Church of the Eternal God* and its corporate affiliates, the *Church of God, a Christian Fellowship* in Canada, and the *Global Church of God* in the United Kingdom, have concluded that Matthew 28:19 does not set forth a mandatory “baptismal formula,” and that baptism in the name of Christ is both necessary and sufficient. This means that baptism in the name of Christ is valid, as long as the following requirements have been understood by the person to be baptized:

- (1) The person must have repented of his or her sins and his or her carnal human nature.
- (2) The person must have accepted Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior.
- (3) The person must believe the gospel, including the fact that Christ’s sacrifice is sufficient payment for the penalty of his or her sins.

When we are baptized, we also need to understand that baptism is the first step toward entering the Kingdom, or Family, of God. The ordinance of baptism, then, includes the following concepts:

- (1) One is baptized in, or into, the name, or possession, of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.
- (2) One is baptized and buried into the death of Christ, to be resurrected by God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- (3) One is baptized *with* God’s Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit in us enables us to put on Christ and to walk in newness of life.
- (4) One is baptized by, or “out of,” the Holy Spirit into the spiritual body of Christ, the Church. The Church is a spiritual organism and could be described as the Kingdom of God in embryo. Through baptism and receiving of God’s Holy Spirit, we become begotten children of God the Father, begotten brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, and begotten members of the Family of God, currently composed of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son.
- (5) One is baptized by, and with the authority, of our elder Brother, Jesus Christ.

Christians who have been baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” however, do not need to worry that their baptism is invalid, as long as they understood the proper meaning of baptism, including the facts that God is not a Trinity and that the Holy Spirit

is not a separate divine being. After all, when one is baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” the baptism “in the name of Christ” is included, and, as we have explained, the Father and the Holy Spirit have an important role during the baptismal ceremony. As long as a person understands, at the time of his or her baptism, the functions and the nature of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, his or her baptism is valid.

## **CONCLUSION**

We have presented in this booklet the biblical proof that water baptism through immersion is a necessary requirement for salvation. Without it, there is no promise in the Bible of receiving God’s Holy Spirit, and without God’s Spirit dwelling in us, we are not true Christians, and God will not grant us His gift of everlasting life in His Kingdom.

If you are old enough to understand the meaning of baptism, and what it entails, and if you genuinely desire to begin a new chapter in your life, now is the time to contact one of God’s true ministers for help and guidance. If you have been baptized in the past, but wonder whether your baptism was valid in God’s eyes, please don’t hesitate to contact us for counsel. We are here to help.

Don’t delay. Remember the stirring words of Ananias to Paul, as recorded in Acts 22:14, 16—words that apply to all of God’s called and chosen disciples, “The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth... And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

If you understand what you have read in this booklet, God is calling you. So, we say with Ananias, “...Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized...”

