

The New Birth

Part One

David Bernard & Neil Stegall

Systematic Theology

New Birth - Part One

These notes taken from: *The New Birth*
By David Bernard

Chapter 1 AN HONEST QUESTION

“Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).
“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

What I Have Learned

Every human being is a sinner and stands in need of salvation. Through the centuries many people have realized this fact and have asked, “How can I be saved?” Christianity proclaims that God has provided salvation through Jesus Christ. However, the question remains, “How can I receive the salvation that Jesus Christ provides?”

We believe the Bible provides the answer to this simple yet vital question. The goal of this book is to find the biblical answer to the question just posed, and to discuss the many issues arising out of this subject. We will attempt to lay aside the doctrines of men and man-made denominations and see what the Bible itself teaches.

The Universal Need for Salvation

The Bible emphatically declares that all human beings are sinners. “*Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?*” (Proverbs 20:9). “*But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away*” (Isaiah 64:6). “*There is no man that sinneth not*” (1 Kings 8:46; II Chronicles 6:36).

The first three chapters of Romans affirm that both Jews and Gentiles stand condemned in God’s sight. Those who did not have the Law of Moses are condemned by conscience, and those who had the Law of Moses are condemned by the law (Romans 2:12-16). In short, all mankind is under sin (Romans 3:9). “*There is none righteous, no, not one*” (Romans 3:10; see Psalm 14:1-3). All the world is guilty before God (Romans 3:19). “*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23).

Because of this, all mankind is under the sentence of death. “*For the wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23). “*Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death*” (James 1:15).

Salvation Comes Only Through Faith in Jesus Christ

Not only does each man need salvation, there is nothing man can do to save himself. No amount of good works or adherence to law can save a man. Ephesians 2:8-9 proclaims, “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.*” This means salvation is a free gift from God. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus

Christ made this free gift of salvation available, and the only way to receive salvation is to have faith in Jesus and in the sufficiency of His sacrifice. Of course, saving faith in Christ includes obedience to His gospel and application of His gospel to our lives.

We must stress that salvation can come only through faith, and that faith must be in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus asserted, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*” (John 14:6). He also said we must believe He is God manifested in the flesh as our Savior. “*I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins*” (John 8:24).

Why is reliance upon Christ absolutely necessary? Since all men are sinners, the holiness of God demanded that He separate Himself from sinful man and also required death as a penalty for man. God chose to bind Himself by the principle of death for sin. Without the shedding of blood (the giving of a life) there can be no remission or release from this penalty (Hebrews 9:22) and no restoration to fellowship with the holy God. (See Ephesians 2:13-17; Colossians 1:19-22.) The death of animals is not sufficient to remit the sin of man (Hebrews 10:4), because man is much greater than the animals in that he was created in the spiritual, mental, and moral image of God (Genesis 1:27). Neither can an ordinary man become the substitutionary sacrifice for another, for all deserve eternal death for their own sins.

In order to provide a suitable substitute, God manifested Himself in flesh through the man Jesus Christ. Christ is the only sinless man who has ever lived, so He was the only One who did not deserve to die and who could be a perfect substitute. Therefore, His death became a propitiation or an atonement – the means by which God can pardon sins without violating His holiness and justice (Romans 3:23-26). God does not excuse our sins, but He has inflicted the penalty for those sins on the innocent man Christ Jesus. This substitution avails to us when we place our faith in Christ and apply His gospel to our lives. Thus the substitutionary, atoning death of Christ was made necessary by:

- 1) The sinfulness of man,
- 2) The holiness of God and
- 3) God’s law requiring death as the punishment for sin

This is why there can be no salvation outside of Jesus Christ.

What Is Salvation?

What do we mean by the word *salvation*? According to *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, (unabridged), in general, *salvation* can refer to any kind of deliverance, preservation, or liberation. In the study of theology, it means deliverance “from the

power and effects of sin." From the Bible it is apparent that salvation has past, present, and future aspects.

1. We can say we *were* saved, meaning that at a past point in time we received forgiveness of sin, freedom from sin's control, and power to live for God. For example, Paul said, "*not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us*" (Titus 3:5).

2. We can also say we *are* saved, because we presently enjoy forgiveness of sins, power to live for God, and freedom from the power and effects of sin. Thus Paul said, "*By grace ye are saved*" (Ephesians 2:5). The resurrection and life of Christ effect present salvation. Not only did His death purchase past salvation from sin, but His life provides present victory over sin through His Spirit that dwells in us (Romans 5:10; I John 4:4).

3. In another sense of the word, however, salvation is still future. We have not yet received final and complete deliverance from all the curse of sin. We still live in this sinful and imperfect world, have mortal bodies, have the sinful nature within us, face temptation, and have the ability to sin. Our salvation will be complete only when we receive glorified, immortal bodies like that of the resurrected body of Jesus (Romans 8:23; Philippians 3:20-21). At that time we will no longer be subject to sickness, pain, the temptation of sin, or the possibility of death (I Corinthians 15:51-57). This last stage in God's salvation plan for us is called glorification (Romans 8:30), and it will occur when Christ comes back for His church (I Thessalonians 4:14-17; I John 3:2). Thus the Bible often speaks of salvation as a future event: "*But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved*" (Acts 15:11). "*For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed*" (Romans 13:11). "*So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation*" (Hebrews 9:28).

The Relation Between Past, Present, and Future Salvation

Obviously, the three tenses of salvation are closely related. Future salvation will come only to those who have experienced past and present salvation in this life. Those who are saved in the present have full assurance of salvation in the future. However, a one-time past experience does not automatically guarantee future salvation. We are responsible for keeping our salvation until the end. Just as we have received past salvation through faith in Jesus, we will receive future salvation only if we continue to live by faith in Jesus. We can forfeit our present salvation and our promise of future salvation by a voluntary return to sin and unbelief. The link between past and future salvation is continuance in present salvation.

Many scriptural passages emphasize this truth. Jesus taught the absolute necessity of abiding in Him and keeping His commandments (John 15:1-14). He said, "*He*

that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22). "*Whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16). In this last verse, "believeth" is in the present tense, implying that continued present belief is necessary.

Likewise, Paul said the gospel of Christ is "*the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. . . For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith*" (Romans 1:16-17). Salvation will come to those who move from faith to faith, to those who continue to live by faith.

Paul also stated, "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*" (Philippians 2:12). This does not mean we can save ourselves by our own plan or earn our own salvation. Rather, it means we must consciously abide in and keep our salvation. We should view salvation with awe and respect, realizing we can lose it if we do not value it. We should be watchful of Satan's tricks and timid of doing evil.

Many other verses give similar admonitions. "*Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee*" (I Timothy 4:16). "*Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off*" (Romans 11:22). "*I declare unto you the gospel. . . By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I have preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain*" (I Corinthians 15:1-2). Many other passages teach that we can lose salvation through unbelief and disobedience (Galatians 5:4; I Timothy 5:12; Hebrews 12:14-15; James 5:19-20; II Peter 1:10; 2:1; 2:20-21; Revelation 3:5).

In short, we have not yet received all the eternal benefits of salvation, and therefore our future salvation is still a hope. "*We are saved by hope,*" and we have "*the hope of salvation*" (Romans 8:24; I Thessalonians 5:8). The hope of future salvation is more than a mere wish, however, for we have the promise and assurance of salvation if we continue to walk in the gospel. The one way to obtain eternal salvation is to find present salvation from sin in this life.

How can we be saved from sin in this life? There are three crucial New Testament passages relating to this subject. The first passage comes from the ministry of Christ. The other two are only places in the New Testament church where someone asked how to be saved.

The Lord's Statement to Nicodemus

John chapter three records an important conversation between a Jewish religious leader named Nicodemus and Jesus. Nicodemus came to Jesus one night and acknowledged Him as a teacher from God. Jesus replied, "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (John 3:3). Nicodemus

did not understand this, for he asked the Lord how a man could be born a second time from his mother's womb. Jesus explained, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Jesus was pointing towards a new age in which the kingdom of God would soon be revealed, and every person who wished to enter that kingdom would have to be born again, that is, born of water and the Spirit.

The Kingdom of God

What is the kingdom of God? How does it relate to salvation? The words themselves express the sovereign rule of God in the universe. In analyzing this concept more closely, we find that the kingdom of God has both present and future aspects, just as salvation does. In the present tense, the kingdom of God is the rule of God in the hearts of men. Jesus came preaching that the kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1:14-15). Once, the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. He replied, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21). This aspect of the kingdom came into existence when God sent His Spirit to dwell in the hearts of believers. Thus Paul said, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17). The present aspect of God's kingdom actually consists of the riches of His eternal kingdom temporarily come down to this world through the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14; Hebrews 6:4-5).

The kingdom of God also has a future aspect in that one day God will completely destroy all opposition to His rule and will display His kingship in every facet of the universe. His kingdom will come physically to this earth in the thousand-year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:4-6). It will be established throughout eternity by the judgment of all sinners and by the creation of a new heaven and a new earth without sin. Sin is rebellion against God, so God's kingdom will find perfect expression only when all sin is judged and eliminated.

The Book of Revelation describes the future aspect of the kingdom. "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). In that day, voices will proclaim, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Revelation 19:6). Jesus will be "king of kings, and Lord of Lords" and will occupy the throne throughout eternity (Revelation 19:16; 22:1-3).

Applying Christ's words in John chapter three to the concept of the kingdom of God, we find that one must be born again in order to partake of either its temporary, present manifestation or its eternal manifestation. No one can have the spiritual rule of God in his life until he is born of water and the Spirit. No one can have joy, peace, and righteousness in the Spirit until he is born of water and the

Spirit. No one in the present age can enter into God's eternal kingdom – the new heaven and the new earth – unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

In short, the Lord's words to Nicodemus tell us how to be saved. Present salvation consists of freedom from the dominion and penalty of sin, and this simply means entering into the present aspect of the kingdom of God (Submitting to His rule and receiving His righteousness). Future salvation consists of eternal life free from sin and its consequences, and this simply means entering into the future aspect of the kingdom of God (the new heaven and new earth that will be free of rebellion against God's rule). The question, "**How can I be saved?**" has the same answer as the question, "**How can I enter the kingdom of God?**" The answer of Jesus Himself is, "You must be born again of water and the Spirit".

Peter's Answer on the Day of Pentecost

In Acts chapter one, Jesus gave His disciples last minute instructions just before His ascension into heaven. He told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father, namely the baptism of the Holy Ghost. About one hundred twenty disciples obeyed Him and gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem.

Acts chapter two records that on the Jewish feast day of Pentecost, the promised Spirit baptism came. Soon, many people in the city began to gather around the disciples, attracted by the supernatural sound that had accompanied this first outpouring of the Spirit as well as by the foreign languages supernaturally being spoken by those who had just received the Spirit.

Peter seized the opportunity to preach to the crowd. Standing with the other eleven apostles, he began to explain what had just happened and proceeded to preach about Jesus. He proclaimed to the multitude that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had crucified, was both Lord and Christ (Messiah).

When the crowd heard this, they began to feel guilt and conviction of sin, for undoubtedly many of them had demanded the crucifixion of Jesus less than two months before. Consequently, they asked Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). They were really asking, "How can we receive forgiveness for our sin? How can we correct the wrong we have done in rejecting Jesus and crucifying Him? How can we now accept Jesus as Lord and Messiah?" The essence of salvation is receiving forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ, so their question simply meant, "What must we do to be saved?"

Here is the answer that Peter gave, with the support of all the apostles: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). In our search for a biblical answer to the question of how to be saved, we must attach great significance to this verse.

It is a plain, simple, answer to a direct inquiry. It is an answer that had the full endorsement of all the apostles. It is the climax of the first sermon of the New Testament church—the first sermon preached after the outpouring of the Spirit. As *The Pulpit Commentary* states, “We have in this short verse the summary of Christian doctrine as regards man and God.” In short, Acts 2:38 is the authoritative answer of the apostolic church to the question, “What must I do to be saved?”

Paul’s Answer to the Philippian Jailer

We find only one other situation in the New Testament church that directly poses the question, “What must I do to be saved?” Acts chapter sixteen records that the magistrates of Philippi, a city in Macedonia, jailed Paul and Silas for preaching the gospel. As midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God. Suddenly, an earthquake shook the prison and opened the doors. When the jailer awoke and realized what had happened he assumed the prisoners had all escaped. Apparently faced with the penalty of death for allowing this to happen, he decided to commit suicide. As he drew his sword, Paul shouted, “*Do thyself no harm: for we are all here*” (Acts 16:28). When he heard this, the jailer called for a light and went to investigate for himself. He came trembling and fell down at the feet of Paul and Silas, realizing that they were the ones responsible for the miraculous earthquake. He brought them out and asked, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*”

They replied, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house*” (Acts 16:30-31). The Bible further records, “*And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house*” (Acts 16:32-34).

In this passage, Paul and Silas told the jailer that the path to his future salvation was through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Presumably the jailer was a Gentile and did not know very much about God. Unlike the Jews on the Day of Pentecost he probably did not understand terminology such as repentance, baptism, and the Holy Ghost. Furthermore, this was a crisis situation with no time for a long sermon or a detailed explanation; he needed to be shown the right direction quickly. Paul and Silas told him in the most simple way possible how he could receive future salvation, namely, by believing on Jesus instead of on pagan gods and idols.

At this, the jailer took them to his home and gave them the opportunity to speak to his whole household. They did not stop with the general statement quoted above, but they preached the Word of the Lord with specificity. As a result of their message, the jailer was baptized that same hour and received an experience that caused him to rejoice.

One translation says, “*He leaped much for joy and exulted*” (Acts 16:34, TAB). All of this happened when he believed on the Lord and the Word of the Lord.

It is very instructive to study the Greek word translated as *believe* in this passage. It does not denote merely mental understanding and assent but asserts absolute reliance and adherence. The biblical definition of belief includes acceptance of God’s Word and obedience to it. The publisher’s foreword to *The Amplified Bible* translates Acts 16:31 as, “*And they answered, Believe in and on the Lord Jesus Christ—that is, give yourself up to Him, take yourself out of your own keeping and entrust yourself into His keeping and you will be saved;[and this applies both to] you and your household as well.*”

In order to gain a better understanding of this passage, we should examine the significance that Peter attached to the phrase “*believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*”. On one occasion he explained that the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost the same as the Jews who “believed on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 11:15-17). Thus he linked faith in Jesus Christ with receiving the Spirit. Paul taught that the kingdom of God includes joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17). Although it is not specifically stated in Acts chapter sixteen that the Philippian jailer received the Holy Ghost, the reference to his joy may indicate that he received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. (See also Acts 8:39.)

Comparison of the Three Answers

When we look at the biblical answer to the question “How can I be saved?” in light of the three most prominent passages on the subject, we see different language in each passage. Since the Bible is the inspired, infallible Word of God, we know it does not contradict itself. Since God wants everyone to find salvation, we know the Bible must be clear and unambiguous on the subject. So, despite the differences in wording, the three passages cannot be contradictory or confusing. Instead, we must believe that each answers the question correctly, or each gives the same answer in different terms, from different viewpoints, and in different situations. But it is the same answer!

When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus He was not answering a direct question about salvation. He was describing God’s plan of salvation for the future New Testament church that was about to come into existence. The Spirit was not yet given at that time and would not be given until after Christ’s ascension (John 7:39; Acts 1:4-5). Christ’s purpose was to give Nicodemus information and to motivate him to believe in His person and mission (John 3:16), not to impart the Spirit to him immediately.

The situation on the Day of Pentecost was different in that Peter gave a direct answer to a direct question about salvation. The Spirit had been poured out, so Peter did intend for his answer to give explicit instructions and to produce an immediate new birth. His listeners were Jews

and Jewish proselytes, most (if not all) of whom had heard about Jesus of Nazareth. Since they were well acquainted with religious concepts and terminology, Peter was able to give them a precise, thorough answer in a single statement.

In Acts chapter sixteen, Paul and Silas confronted a man who knew little if anything about God. He had just attempted suicide. He was recovering from the fright of an earthquake and was awestricken in the presence of the supernatural. They answered his question in a simple, general way that would be understandable and reassuring. They let him know that the way of salvation is through Jesus Christ. Then they explained the gospel in detail to him and his household.

The differences in these three passages stem from the different situations, but the content of each is consistent with the others. Two passages speak of water baptism, and the third refers to the birth of water. Two passages speak of the work of the Spirit in salvation, and the third describes an experience that caused rejoicing, which is experienced when a person received the Spirit. Only one of the three passages explicitly mentions repentance and only one explicitly mentions faith in Christ, but many other verses teach that both faith and repentance are prerequisites to salvation.

We conclude from these three passages that salvation comes only through repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith will lead to water baptism in the name of Jesus (birth of water) and to the baptism of the Spirit (birth of the Spirit).

Other verses that mention salvation support this conclusion. For example it is stated that salvation comes through:

- 1) The name of Jesus (Acts 4:12)
- 2) Confession of Jesus as Lord, belief in His resurrection, and calling on His name (Romans 10:9-13)
- 3) Grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- 4) Repentance (II Corinthians 7:10)
- 5) Sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth (II Thessalonians 2:13) and
- 6) Obedience to Christ (Hebrews 5:9)

We can view salvation from two complementary, not contradictory, points of view:

- 1) It has a minimum requirement, namely, the new birth.
- 2) It is a process of progressively appropriating God's grace throughout a continual life of faith and holiness.

We will see both aspects fulfilled in our lives if we are to inherit eternal salvation.

From start to finish, our salvation rests on faith in Jesus Christ. If we have faith in Him we will repent of sin, be

baptized in His name, receive His Spirit, and continue to live a holy, Christian life by faith. In this way we will receive both present salvation from sin and future salvation from all the eternal consequences of sin.

Understanding and Obeying the Gospel

If some have already experienced salvation as explored in this book, we hope they will understand the importance and necessity of what they have received. They should learn exactly what has happened to them and why. If some have not been baptized in the name of Jesus or have not received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, we ask them to read with an open mind, open heart, and open Bible. We do not wish to minimize or deny what God may have already done in their lives; however, we want them to see the importance of the birth of water and Spirit. It is biblical, it is for us today, and God wants everyone to experience it. The new birth is not something strange, nor is it difficult to receive from God. Rather it is a privilege that every Bible-believing person can and should enjoy.

All of us should seek to draw closer to God at all times. We should seek to know more about Him and to be more and more obedient to His Word. We must let God lead us further and further into the truth of His Word. We must seek to receive everything God has for us today.

Instead of dwelling so much on the question, "Do I have to receive this?" we should ask, "Can I receive this?" If God has something more for us that we have not received, or if God's Word reveals something that we have not yet obeyed, then we should not be distracted by a debate over whether it is necessary or optional. Instead, we should seek to receive all that God has for us and seek to obey all that God's Word teaches. This is the attitude of one who truly has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What Have You Learned?

1. Who needs salvation and why? _____

2. How do we know that both Jews and Gentiles are condemned by God? (Support with Scripture.) _____

3. Why is reliance upon Christ absolutely necessary for salvation? _____

4. The atoning death of Christ was made necessary because of what three (3) things? _____

5. In the study of theology, what is meant by *salvation*? _____

6. According to the Bible, what is meant by the past aspect of salvation? _____

7. According to the Bible, what is meant by the present aspect of salvation? _____

8. According to the Bible, what is meant by the future aspect of salvation? _____

9. What does Paul mean when he says we should *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* in Philipians 2:12? _____

10. Write John 3:5 in full. _____

11. What is the answer, given by Jesus, to the two questions “How can I be saved?” and “How can I enter the kingdom of God?” _____

12. Where (in God’s Word) can we find the authoritative answer of the apostolic church to the question, “What must I do to be saved?” (Write out the Scripture with reference.) _____

13. What are the two complementary points of view about salvation? _____

Chapter 2
GRACE AND FAITH

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

What I Have Learned

Before proceeding to analyze the various aspects of salvation, we need to understand what grace and faith are and how they relate to each other.

Grace Defined

Grace is the unmerited favor of God towards man. It is God’s free gift to man. It is God’s work in man. The word expressed that salvation is an undeserved, unearned blessing that God bestows freely. God does all the work involved in saving a soul. Man cannot aid God in his own salvation or contribute to it; he can only accept or reject the work that God has done and is willing to do on his behalf.

Man’s Salvation Stems from God’s Grace

Ephesians 2:8-9 emphasizes that salvation comes by God’s grace and not by any works on man’s part. Specifically, God has made salvation available to us through the death of Jesus Christ. We are *“justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood”* (Romans 3:24-25). Not only did God give His Son to die for us and to purchase through His death our salvation, but He now extends everything necessary to preserve our salvation. As Paul asked, *“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, now shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”* (Romans 8:32).

Philippians 2:13 teaches that God works in us to bring about salvation: *“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”* In Philippians 2:12 Paul admonished us to work out our salvation with awe, reverence, and watchfulness. Then in the next verse he explained that we cannot save or help save ourselves; rather we can either reject or submit to God’s work in us. If we let Him, God will give us both the desire (willingness) and the power (ability) to perform His will.

God, who purchased our right to be saved, now freely provides all things necessary for us to receive and retain salvation. Thus man's salvation is a product of God's grace from start to finish. Of course, grace does not eliminate our choice. God has given us the freedom either to surrender to Him or reject Him, but we can contribute nothing positive to earn our own salvation.

Grace and Works

We are not saved by works in the sense of earning, meriting, or purchasing salvation by good works. However, the grace of God will lead to good works and holiness of life. After Ephesians 2:8-9 emphatically teaches salvation by grace and not works, the next verse continues, *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."* God gives us grace expressly to enable us to produce good works. *"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work"* (II Corinthians 9:8). God's grace has come to show us how to live righteous, holy lives and to give us power to do so. *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world"* (Titus 2:11-12).

Grace does not give license to sin. *"Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid"* (Romans 6:1-2). *"Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid"* (Romans 6:15). On the contrary, grace makes the power of the Spirit available to us. If we follow the Spirit, we can fulfill all the righteousness that the Law of Moses demanded but could not give (Romans 8:3-4).

In summary, God's grace brings salvation as a free gift, including the power to live righteously. Although we cannot earn the gift of salvation, once we receive it our lives will change and we will begin to do good works as a result. If we do not manifest righteous and godly attributes, then we are not letting God's saving grace work in us. We cannot separate grace from a life of devotion and obedience to Christ.

Grace and Faith

If the doctrine of grace teaches that God does all the work in man's salvation, are all men automatically saved? This cannot be true because many will receive eternal damnation at the last judgment (Revelation 20:11-15). If the doctrine of grace teaches that man cannot assist God in providing salvation, does God unconditionally choose certain ones to be saved regardless of their own attitudes and responses? This cannot be true either because God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). If He chose some unconditionally, His fairness would cause Him to choose all. The doctrine of faith helps us understand the answer to both of the above questions.

Faith is the means by which man accepts and receives God's saving grace (Romans 3:21-31; Ephesians 2:8). Man cannot help God in providing salvation, but man does have the responsibility to accept or reject what God offers. Man's response to God in accepting His work of salvation is called faith. Thus faith is the channel through which God's grace comes to man. Both God's grace and man's faith are necessary for salvation. *"Without faith it is impossible to please him [God]"* (Hebrews 11:6). One Protestant author stated, *"That man must do something to take advantage of God's provision of salvation through Christ does no violence to the doctrine of grace. Theologically as well as etymologically there are two aspects of charis (grace): unmerited provision and thankful reception."*

However, we must avoid saying that salvation comes partly from man. When man accepts grace the credit belongs wholly to God and the power of His grace, but when man rejects grace the blame falls wholly upon man and his unbelief. Thus we affirm both salvation by grace alone and the responsibility of man to accept salvation.

Justification by Faith

To be justified means to be counted or declared righteous by God. The Bible clearly teaches justification by faith: *"The just shall live by faith"* (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38).

Paul preached this doctrine: *"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man [Jesus] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses"* (Acts 13:38-39).

Paul emphasized justification by faith in his writings: *"By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight. . . But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe. . . Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood"* (Romans 3:20-25). *"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified"* (Galatians 2:16). Romans chapter four and Galatians chapter three contain much additional teaching on this subject.

The bottom line is this: no one can be justified by observing the Law of Moses or by doing good works. Instead, the only way to salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for us. Having established this, we must next determine what true faith in Christ is and how to have it. For a start, we note the words of Benjamin Warfield: *"Justification by faith does not mean. . . salvation*

by believing things instead of doing right. It means pleading the merits of Christ before the throne of grace instead of our own merits.”

The Source of Faith

Before discussing faith in detail, we need to answer the question, “What is the origin of faith?” If man manufactures faith on his own, then he would seemingly be his own savior, at least partially. This would negate the doctrine of grace. The answer is that the ability to possess faith comes from God’s grace.

However, this raises a second problem. If God gives potential faith to everyone, will everyone be saved? On the other hand, if God gives potential faith only to some, He would arbitrarily condemn the rest to hell without giving them any ability to choose. The answer is that God does give potential faith to everyone, but He leaves it up to each individual whether or not to accept and apply faith to his life. Another way to phrase this is to say God gives everyone the ability to have faith in Him. Every human being has the capacity to believe, but not everyone chooses to believe in God; nevertheless, everyone believes or can believe in something, whether it be God, the devil, false gods, self, other people, or material things. In creation God left a clear witness of Himself so that everyone would have a chance to believe in God and would have no excuse for failure to do so (Romans 1:19-20).

The Scriptures teach that God gives everyone the ability to believe and therefore He is the source of a Christian’s faith. “*God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith*” (Romans 12:3). Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Even after the new birth, the Spirit continues to impart faith as a supernatural gift in moments of crisis and as an element of daily Christian life (I Corinthians 12:9; Galatians 5:22).

Due to our sinful natures, none of us could ever seek God on our own in the absence of His drawing power (John 3:27; 6:44; Romans 3:10-12). No one would ever have faith if God did not grant it. However, Christ died for the whole world so that He could bestow grace upon all (John 3:16). Although man on his own is so depraved and sinful that he cannot of himself choose God, God gives every man the ability to seek after Him and respond to Him. This grace that precedes salvation and is given to all mankind is what theologians call “universal prevenient grace”.

The Bible teaches that universal grace precedes salvation, enabling and encouraging all mankind to accept God’s work of salvation: “*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men*” (Titus 2:11). God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30), and He gives the ability to fulfill what He requires (Philippians 2:13; I John 5:3). God wants all to repent, and He gives all a chance to do so (II Peter 3:9). The goodness of God leads men to repentance (Romans 2:4), so He

extends to everyone the goodness or grace that leads to repentance. The call goes to all (Matthew 11:28; Revelation 22:17), but only those who respond are saved. Many are called but few are chosen (Matthew 20:16; 22:14).

We also find that faith comes by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). There are many instances recorded in Scripture in which the hearing of the Word of God inspired faith. Such was the case with the Samaritans, with Cornelius and his household, and with the Corinthians (Acts 8:12; 10:44; 18:8).

Thus everyone receives an initial measure of faith from God. We can increase our faith by hearing the Word of God and by operation of the Holy Spirit. We are responsible for letting God develop faith in us and for using the faith He has placed in our hearts.

Faith Defined

We have already identified faith as man’s positive response to God and the means by which man accepts God’s saving grace. It is the means by which we yield to God, obey His Word, and allow Him to perform His saving work in us. This accurately states the function of faith, but now we will try to define more precisely what faith is. *Webster’s Dictionary* defines *belief* as “a state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some person or thing,” and it defines *faith* as “allegiance to duty or a person; loyalty. . .belief and trust in and loyalty to God. . .something that is believed especially with strong conviction.”

When we turn to the Greek language, we find an even greater depth of meaning. The publisher’s foreword to *The Amplified Bible* contains a significant discussion of the word *believe*. As it points out, most people believe in Christ in the ordinary English meaning of the word. That is, most people believe that Christ lived, was the Son of God in some sense, and died on the cross to save sinners. However, according to *The Amplified Bible* no single English word can adequately convey the intended meaning of the Greek word *pisteuo*, which most translations render *believe*. Here is *The Amplified Bible’s* definition of *pisteuo*: “It means ‘to adhere to, trust, to have faith in; to rely on.’ Consequently, the words, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. . .’ really mean to have an absolute personal reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour.”

W. E. Vine, in his *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, defines *pisteuo* as follows: “to believe, also to be persuaded of, and hence, to place confidence in, to trust, signifies, in this sense of the word, reliance upon, not mere credence.” The *King James Version* sometimes translates it as “commit” or “trust”. The noun form of *pisteuo* is *pistis*, which is usually translated as “faith”.

Vine defines *pistis* as “primarily, firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing.” He states that *pisteuo*

and *pistis* include a total acknowledgement of God's revelation, a personal surrender to Him, and a lifestyle inspired by that surrender:

"The main elements in faith in its relation to the invisible God, as distinct from faith in man, are especially brought out in the use of this noun and the corresponding verb, *pisteuo*; they are (1) a firm conviction, producing a full acknowledgement of God's revelation or truth, e.g., II Thess. 2:11, 12; (2) a personal surrender to him, John 1:12; (3) a conduct inspired by such surrender, II Cor. 5:7. . . All this stands in contrast to belief in its purely natural exercise, which consists of an opinion held in good faith without necessary reference to its proof."

The well-known Bible commentator Charles Erdman confirms that Biblical faith embraces a personal relationship to Christ reflected in a person's trust, obedience, and holy conduct:

"If faith denotes mere assent to dogmas, or the repetition of a creed, then to accept one as righteous, in view of his faith, would be absurd and unjust; but faith describes a personal relationship to Christ. For a believer, it means a trust in Christ, obedience to Christ, love for Christ, and such trust and obedience, and love inevitably result in purity and holiness and a life of unselfish service."

Protestant theologian Donald Bloesch makes a number of illuminating remarks with respect to Biblical faith. He speaks of the "heresy of cheap grace whereby salvation became a passport to heaven that was assured to one simply through baptism or a public affirmation of faith or by birth in the covenant community." In opposition to the concept of "cheap grace", he states that "the free gift of salvation demands not simply an outward intellectual assent or a voluntary submission to the Gospel but a total commitment and lifelong discipleship under the cross." Furthermore, he presents a definition of faith as "a radical commitment of the whole man to the living Christ, a commitment that entails knowledge, trust, and obedience."

Three Components of Saving Faith

In other words, saving faith means much more than mental knowledge or assent. In fact, we can identify three key components of saving faith:

- 1) Knowledge
- 2) Assent, and
- 3) Appropriation

To have faith in something, a person must first have a certain degree of knowledge or mental understanding. He must know what he professes to believe. Saving faith does not require us to understand everything about God or life,

but it does require that we realize our need of salvation and know that Jesus Christ is our only Saviour.

Second, to have faith there must be assent or mental acceptance. Knowledge is not enough, for a person can understand a certain proposition and yet disbelieve it. In addition to understanding, there must be an acknowledgement that the profession is correct.

Finally, there must be an appropriation of what is believed. In other words, there must be a practical application of truth. The only way we can believe another person is by accepting and following his word. Saving faith in Jesus Christ, then, involves more than mentally acknowledging Him as the Saviour. We must appropriate this truth and make it the guiding principle of our lives. We do this by obeying the gospel of Jesus, by identifying with Him, by totally committing ourselves to Him, and by establishing a relationship of total trust in and adherence to and reliance upon Him.

Our study of the Greek words *pistis* and *pisteuo* emphasized this third component. Without it, there is no saving faith. Many will acknowledge Jesus to be Lord and Saviour and yet admit they have not obeyed the gospel. Although they have both knowledge and assent, they have not appropriated the gospel to their lives. They have not acted upon the truth. They have not committed themselves to Christ or identified with Him. In sum, saving faith is an active reliance upon God and His Word. We cannot separate it from reliance, obedience, and commitment.

Examples of Insufficient Belief

The Scripture gives many examples of people who had some degree of faith in Christ but who were not saved. This demonstrates that a person can have a mental belief in Jesus as Lord and Saviour and yet not obey Him, rely upon Him, or commit himself to Him to the point of salvation.

For example, many people in Israel believe on Jesus when they saw the miracles He performed. However, Jesus did not commit Himself to them because He knew their hearts. They had not fully committed themselves to Him as Lord of their lives (John 2:23-25).

Similarly, many of the Jewish religious leaders believed on Jesus but they did not confess Him for fear of being put out of the synagogues. They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42-43). God did not accept them because they did not act upon their belief.

According to Jesus, some people do great miracles in His name, yet if they refuse to do God's will, they will not be saved (Matthew 7:21-27). They will have enough faith for miracles but not enough faith to obey God's Word in all things. They will have faith but not saving faith.

The Samaritans believe Philip's preaching and were baptized, yet they did not receive the Spirit of God until

Peter and John came (Acts 8:12-17). Simon the magician was one who believed and was baptized, but he later tried to buy spiritual power and blessings with money (Acts 8:18-19). Peter rebuked him and told him to repent of his wickedness, saying, *"Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. . . For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity"* (Acts 8:21-23). He was not saved at this point, even though he had believed to some extent.

Even the devils believe in one God (James 2:19), which is more than some do. Not only do they believe, they confess Jesus to be the Son of God (Matthew 8:29). Despite their belief and confession, however, they do not have saving faith.

In each of these cases, there was mental understanding and assent, but there was also a lack of total commitment to Jesus and obedience to His Word. The people possessed a degree of faith but not enough to bring about salvation. Saving faith, then, is inseparably linked with obedience.

Faith and Obedience

Paul emphasized justification by faith more than any other writer, yet he strongly insisted that saving faith is inseparably bound up with obedience. He taught that the mystery of God's redemptive plan, the church, has been *"made known to all nations for the obedience of faith"* (Romans 16:26). The *New International Version* translates this last phrase as *"made known. . . so that all nations might believe and obey him"*. God's grace brings *"obedience to the faith"* (Romans 1:5). Christ worked through Paul to *"make the Gentiles obedient"* (Romans 15:18). Similarly, Luke recorded that a great number of priests were *"obedient to the faith"* (Acts 6:7). Faith and obedience are so closely linked that a lack of obedience to God is proof of a lack of faith: *"But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?"* (Romans 10:16).

Many other passages reiterate the essential link between obedience and salvation. Jesus said, *"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven"* (Matthew 7:21). Only the man that both hears and does the Lord's Word will be saved (Matthew 7:24-27). Jesus also said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments"* (John 14:15); *"If a man love me, he will keep my words"* (John 14:23).

The Lord will punish with everlasting destruction those who *"obey not the gospel of our lord Jesus Christ"* (II Thessalonians 1:7-10). Christ has become *"the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him"* (Hebrews 5:9). Peter said, *"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?"* (I Peter 4:17).

John gave the following test for a Christian: *"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him"* (I John 2:3-5). We know God, have the love of God perfected in us, and are in God only when we obey God. The true believer will obey God's commandments and will thereby know that he has love (I John 5:1-3).

When God sent the death angel to visit every household in Egypt, the Israelites were not automatically protected simply on the basis of their mental attitude. They had to apply the blood of the Passover lamb to their doorposts (Exodus 12). Only when they expressed their faith through obedience to God's command were they safe. *"Through faith he [Moses] kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them"* (Hebrews 11:28). Likewise, saving faith today includes active obedience. We must apply the blood of the Lamb to our lives by obedience to His gospel of repentance, water baptism in His name, and receiving His Spirit.

Someone who really believes God's Word will obey it. God's Word teaches water baptism, so the Bible believer will be baptized. God's Word promises the gift of the Spirit, so the true believer will expect, seek, and receive this gift. One Protestant writer has stated, *"Christians have historically affirmed that to enjoy a life-transforming relationship with God a person must believe and obey the gospel."* Another Protestant theologian wrote, *"The content of faith can in fact be caught in one sentence: Jesus is Lord (I Cor. 12:3). . . Therefore, to say in faith that 'Jesus is Lord' is also to commit one's self to obedience. To believe the fact is to obey the summons implicit in the fact; and only in obedience is the fact truly acknowledged. . . For Paul obedience is the same as faith, just as disobedience is a lack of faith."* Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, *"Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes."*

Faith and Works

The Bible also teaches that faith cannot be separated from good works. *"This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works"* (Titus 3:8).

There is no faith apart from or without works. James wrote of the inseparableness of faith and works: *"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? . . . Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou*

know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. . . For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:14, 17-24, 26).

Some people see a contradiction in Paul's teaching about faith and James' teaching about works. Martin Luther disliked the Book of James and even questioned its place in the Bible because he thought it contradicted justification by faith. However, Paul's epistles and James' epistle are equally part of the Word of God, and God's Word does not contradict itself. The writings of Paul and James complement each other and fit together into a harmonious whole.

Paul emphasized that we are saved by faith in Jesus, not by our works. God has purchased salvation for us and we accept it by faith; we do not purchase salvation by good works. In particular, Paul emphasized that keeping the Law of Moses cannot save anyone, because ceremonial observances do not have the power in themselves to cleanse sin.

James likewise recognized that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17), including salvation. He pointed out that the kind of faith that saves will necessarily produce works. In other words, we cannot demonstrate faith in the abstract apart from works; the only way God or anyone else sees our faith is through our response. Faith is not just a condition of the mind but a life-changing force.

Paul cited Abraham as an example of justification by faith (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:1-3). James used the same example to show that faith can only be demonstrated by works. Without works Abraham's faith would have been dead. What if Abraham had said, "I believe God," but he would have refused to offer up Isaac? According to James, he would not have had true faith and so would not have been justified. God Himself told Abraham after he had willingly offered Isaac, "I will bless thee. . . because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Genesis 22:16-18). Paul's description of Abraham's faith leads to the same conclusion. Against hope Abraham believed in hope. He did not consider human limitations, he did not stagger at the promise of God, he was strong in faith, he gave glory to God, and he was fully persuaded (Romans 4:18-21). This passage does not describe mental assent apart from works but rather active faith that supported Abraham in his conduct for many years – faith that caused him to trust and commit himself wholly to God.

Any remaining confusion clears when we realize that Paul and James used the same terms in somewhat different

ways and contexts. In Romans, *faith* means true faith in God with all this entails; in James it means mental assent that could fail to affect conduct, which would not be true, living faith at all. In Romans, *works* means dead works that can be done apart from faith; in James it means living works that can be done only through faith and that will attest to the existence of faith. In Romans, *justified* means "declared righteous by God"; in James it means "shown to be righteous." Vine commented on this harmony between Paul and James:

"In regard to justification by works, the so-called contradiction between James and the Apostle Paul is only apparent. . . . Paul has in mind Abraham's attitude towards God, his acceptance of God's word. . . . James (2:21-26) is occupied with the contrast between faith that is real and faith that is false, a faith barren and dead, which is not faith at all."

It is evident that Paul and James both agreed that saving faith will produce a life-changing reliance upon God, evidenced by works. Paul taught that we are saved through faith; James taught that saving faith will produce works and is only demonstrated by works. If works do not come with a person's faith, there is something wrong with his faith.

Hebrews chapter eleven beautifully illustrates the complementary relationship between faith and works. The main purpose of this chapter is to show how necessary faith is and to show what it will produce. It names many Old Testament heroes and records their deeds done "by faith". The passage demonstrates that faith will always produce works and that it can only be shown by works. Every time the writer described someone's faith, he listed those actions faith caused.

Certainly, we are saved by grace through faith. We rely on God's work and not our own works to bring salvation. However, this does not relieve us of our responsibility to respond to God, to obey Him, and to act upon our faith. Saving faith is a living faith that works.

Continuing Faith

Saving faith is not just a temporary condition but a continuing relationship with Jesus Christ. We are not saved by faith held only at one point in time. Rather, "the just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Habakkuk 2:4). Colossians 2:6 says, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him." Just as we received Him in faith, so must we continue to exercise faith in Him.

The Bible often speaks of faith in the present tense, indicating continuing faith. For example, the word *believeth* in John 3:16 indicates continuous faith: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Salvation is not just a past tense

experience; it is a present tense relationship that will lead to eternal salvation. We must live daily by faith in order to be saved in the end. It is much easier to see the close relationship between faith and works when we realize this fact. Faith is progressive; it leads further and further into God's will.

The Object of Faith

Just as there is no merit in faith apart from response, so there is no merit in faith apart from the object of faith. Faith in and of itself is of no value. If man's faith in itself were meritorious, then justification by faith would be simply another form of man saving himself.

The value of faith depends totally upon the object of faith. We are saved by the One in whom we have faith, not by the condition of having faith. When Paul used Abraham as an example of justification by faith, he pointed out that Abraham believed God, the omniscient and omnipotent Being who could fulfill His promises (Romans 4:16-17). Pagan religionists may have great faith, but they are not saved because they do not have faith in Jesus. Since salvation comes solely through Jesus, it is vitally important to have faith in Him.

This means we must have faith in His Word as well. Many people have great faith in certain religious systems that profess Christ, but they are not saved because their faith is not based on the Word of God and the gospel of Christ. Belief in a man-made system and sincerity in that belief are not enough. We must worship God in truth as well as in spirit (John 4:24). Jesus said, *"He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water"* (John 7:38). We must believe in accordance with the teaching of Scripture. There is no saving power in man's mental faith apart from belief in and obedience to Jesus and His Word.

Faith and Repentance

What will faith in Jesus produce? Faith and repentance work together in salvation. Jesus preached, *"Repent ye, and believe the gospel"* (Mark 1:15). A person must have some faith in order to repent. No one seeks to repent from sin unless he believes that sin is wrong and that repentance is both possible and necessary. God's Word declares that all will perish without repentance and that all men everywhere must repent (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30). Certainly, then, faith in the Word of God will lead to repentance.

Some debate whether repentance precedes or follows faith. Lutheran theologians traditionally have viewed repentance as preceding faith, while Calvin described it as a product of faith. This all depends on the usage of the term *faith*. For example, if a person uses it to mean the moment of salvation, then repentance must precede it because repentance is a prerequisite for salvation. On the other hand, if he views faith as a continuous process as well as a point in time, then faith can both precede

repentance and also follow it. This latter view finds the support of Scripture.

Faith can begin at the first hearing of the Word of God even though at this moment faith does not bring salvation. We have explored biblical examples that show that a person can have some degree of faith prior to the salvation experience. A person is not saved at the first moment faith begins, but rather salvation is experienced as faith matures, gains control of his heart, and leads him to a positive response to Christ and the gospel so that he obeys the Scriptures in repentance, water baptism, and seeking and receiving the gift of the Spirit.

Repentance, then, follows the first moment of faith but it precedes the full expression of saving faith (the new birth experience). Perhaps it is best to describe repentance as the first "faith response" to the gospel, for repentance stands at the beginning of a life of faith and is itself the initial act of faith.

Faith and Water Baptism

Faith in God will also lead to water baptism. Jesus said, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16). Obviously, He taught that faith would lead to baptism, and the history of the Early Church affirms this truth. After Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost, *"they that gladly received his word were baptized"* (Acts 2:41). When the Samaritans *"believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized"* (Acts 8:12). The Philippian jailer believed and was baptized in the same hour that Paul admonished him to believe (Acts 16:31-34). When Paul preached in Corinth, many people *"believed, and were baptized"* (Acts 18:8).

On many other occasions people were baptized when they heard and accepted the gospel (Acts 8:36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:14-15; 19:5). We conclude that water baptism is an act of faith – a faith response to God. True faith in God and His Word will cause the believer to submit to water baptism.

A Baptist scholar stated, "There is, indeed, much to be said for the contention, independently advocated by the theologians of various schools, that in the New Testament, faith and baptism are viewed as inseparables whenever the subject of Christian initiation is under discussion. . . Baptism is. . . the divinely appointed rendezvous of grace for faith. It is. . . the indispensable external expression and crowning moment of the act of faith."

Faith and the Holy Spirit

Faith also leads to receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. Jesus said, *"He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water"* (John 7:38). John explained that Jesus spoke of the Holy Ghost. *"But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified"* (John 7:39).

Peter taught that the gift, or baptism, of the Holy Ghost comes to all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. He identified Cornelius' experience as the Pentecostal Spirit baptism and asked, "*Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?*" (Acts 11:15-17). In other words, Peter identified "*believing on the Lord Jesus Christ*" with being baptized with the Spirit.

Paul also expected that believers would receive the Holy Ghost. When we found some disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus he asked, "*Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?*" (Acts 19:2). The *New International Version* puts the question even stronger: "*Did you receive the Holy Ghost when you believed?*" Paul further taught in his epistles that we receive the Holy Spirit through faith: "*That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles, through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith*" (Galatians 3:14). "*In whom [Christ] also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise*" (Ephesians 1:13).

The inescapable conclusion is that faith leads to receiving the Holy Ghost. In other words, the true believer will receive the Holy Ghost; his faith is shown to be genuine and complete when God grants him the gift of the Spirit.

Repentance, Water Baptism, and Works

Can repentance and water baptism be classified as work? They are not works in the sense of things man does to assist in earning his salvation, but they are saving works of God. Saving faith necessarily expresses itself through repentance, water baptism, and receiving the Spirit.

In himself man does not have power to turn from sin, but God leads him to repentance and grants power to repent. God works repentance in man, changing his mind and direction. Likewise, God remits sin at baptism. Without the work of God and faith in His work, baptism is a meaningless ritual. Finally, receiving the Holy Spirit is certainly not a work on man's part; the Spirit is a free gift of God that a person receives by faith.

Man's role in all of this is simply to believe the gospel, to seek repentance, to submit to water baptism, and to allow God to fill him with the Spirit. These elements are all part of the appropriation, response, commitment, reliance, and obedience that saving faith necessarily includes. This "faith response" on man's part does not earn or pay for salvation, but it is a necessary response for receiving salvation.

God offers salvation to all people freely on the basis of Christ's atonement, but only those who express faith in God receive salvation. Man either allows God to perform the work of salvation (by his faith and obedience) or he refuses to let Him work (by unbelief and disobedience). God calls a person, leads this person to Himself, changes the person's mind and direction (repentance), washes

away his sins (at water baptism), baptizes him with His Spirit, keeps him in His grace, and empowers him for a holy life. This action on God's part constitutes His salvation of man in the present age.

Confession, Belief, and Salvation

Does this conclusion about saving faith contradict Romans 10:8-10? This passage reads, "*The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*"

Some interpret this passage to mean that salvation comes automatically if one mentally assents that Jesus rose from the dead and verbally confesses that He is Lord. However, this interpretation contradicts the truth that saving faith includes appropriation and obedience. Under this view, many who do not even claim to be living for God would be saved. Even the devils would be saved, for they know Jesus is alive, confess Him verbally, and believe in one God (Matthew 8:29; James 2:19). Clearly, such a superficial understanding of Romans 10:8-10 is inadequate.

This becomes even more apparent as we continue reading Romans chapter ten. Verse thirteen says, "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" Does this mean that everyone who verbalizes the name of Jesus is saved? Certainly not, or else the name of Jesus would be merely a magical formula. Moreover, verse sixteen teaches that a lack of obedience indicates a lack of faith: "*But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?*" Many will verbally confess Jesus as Lord and call on His name, but only those who actually do God's will shall be saved (Matthew 7:21-23). Despite one's verbal confession of faith, if he refuses to obey the gospel he does not have saving faith.

If this is so, what is the correct interpretation of Romans 10:8-10? First, we must realize that Paul was writing to Christians. His purpose was to remind them of how accessible salvation really is (verse eight). He did not have to explain the new birth in detail because his readers had already experienced it. He was simply reminding them that the foundation of salvation remains faith in Christ and the gospel and in public confession of this faith to the world in which they lived. A commentator on Romans noted that Paul in this passage referred to faith that brought us to a proper relationship with Christ and to confession as the means by which we maintain that relationship.

"If we render 'salvation' by safety, we have perhaps the best equivalent. We receive righteousness through believing, and we realize that righteousness as 'safety' by continual

confession of Christ as Lord. . .while believing in Christ brings man into a right relation to God, confession of faith maintains him in that right relation and keeps him continually safe until the final salvation.”

Second, we should read Deuteronomy 30:14, for this is the verse Paul quoted in Romans 10:8; *“But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.”* This verse demonstrates that confessing and believing necessarily includes obeying the Word of God.

Third, to *“confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus”* means to give a truthful, verbal confession that He is Lord. For this to be truthful, however, we must submit our lives to Him as Lord and be obedient to Him. When do we first confess Jesus as Lord? Verbal confession comes when we call His name at water baptism (Acts 22:16) and when we speak in tongues at the Spirit baptism (Acts 2:4). After all, no one can confess that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:3).

In the fullest sense of this passage, no one can truly confess Jesus as Lord of his life until he receives the Spirit and lives by the Spirit’s power. Interestingly, F. F. Bruce in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* also linked this passage in Romans ten with I Corinthians 12:3. He also connected *confession* to water baptism: “If we are to think of one outstanding occasion for such a confession to be made, we should more probably think of that first confession. . .made in Christian baptism.”

Fourth, to believe in the heart that God has raised Christ from the dead means a true belief, which includes reliance. We must believe in the resurrection and rely upon this supernatural event for salvation. We rely on the resurrection to make Christ’s atoning death effective (Romans 4:25) and to give us new life through the Spirit of the risen Christ (Romans 5:10; 6:4-5; 8:9-11). True belief in Christ’s resurrection, therefore, will lead us to apply His atonement to our lives and then to receive His Spirit.

Calling on the Name of the Lord

When Romans 10:13 says, *“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,”* it means more than merely an oral invocation of the name of Jesus. Otherwise, faith itself would not be necessary. Saving faith is more than oral confession of Christ, for that act alone is not enough. (See Matthew 7:21.) Obviously Romans 10:13 describes the sincere heart’s cry of someone who believes on Jesus. Oral confession is a step in that direction, but living faith and obedience are required to validate this confession.

The main point of Romans 10:13 is not to give a formula for salvation but to teach that salvation is for all. The emphasis is on *whosoever*. Paul quoted this verse to support his statement that *“there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich*

unto all that call upon him” (Romans 10:12). The quotation originally appears in Joel 2:32, which follows Joel’s prophecy concerning the latter-day outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28-29) and the latter-day judgment of God (verses 30-31). Joel 2:32 explains that *all* who call upon Jehovah will be delivered from this judgment.

Peter applied this prophecy to the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:21). Furthermore, Ananias commanded Paul (the writer of Romans) to call on the name of the Lord at water baptism (Acts 22:16).

In summary, we draw two conclusions about “calling on the name of the Lord.”

1. It does not proclaim an “easy believism” but teaches that God’s salvation is freely available to all who seek Him and call upon Him in faith.
2. If one truly calls on the Lord he will receive His Spirit and call on His name at baptism.

One Plan of Salvation

We believe that God has always made salvation available to mankind according to one plan, namely, by grace through faith based on the atoning death of Christ. God has dealt with man in various ways throughout the ages, but ultimately all His dealings rest upon this one plan. Although our age has seen the fullness of God’s grace to the point that we can call it the age of grace (John 1:17), salvation in all ages has been a product of God’s grace and not man’s works. If man could have ever saved himself, he could still do so now, but God’s Word declares he cannot.

Likewise, the principle of faith has become so clear in this age that we can call it the age of faith (Galatians 3:23-25), but God has always required faith. Abraham was justified by faith (Galatians 3:6). Even though some Jews thought their salvation rested in works of the law, keeping the law was never of any value without faith (Matthew 23:23; Romans 2:29; 4:11-16; 9:30-33).

Of course, faith has always included obedience. As part of faith in God, Abraham obeyed the command to leave his homeland, trusted in God’s promises, and offered his son Isaac back to God (Romans 4:16-22; Hebrews 11:8-10, 17-18; James 2:20-24). As part of faith in God, the Jews adhered to God’s law as revealed to Moses, including the system of blood sacrifices (Hebrews 11:28-29). As part of faith, we obey the gospel of Christ. All of this obedience was and is necessary, but salvation in every age has come through faith, not works.

Finally, salvation in every age has rested upon the atoning death of Christ. He was the only sacrifice that could ever remit sin (Hebrews 9:22; 10:1-18). Christ’s death atoned for the sins of all ages. “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he

had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished” (Romans 3:25, NIV).

The Old Testament saints were saved by faith in God’s future plan of atonement, which they expressed (without fully comprehending it) by obedience to the sacrificial system God had ordained. The New Testament saints are saved by faith in God’s past plan of atonement, which they express by obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament requirements of obedience, such as circumcision and blood sacrifice, were consistent with the principle of justification by faith, and the New Testament requirements of obedience, such as repentance and water baptism, are also consistent with justification by faith.

Saving Faith

Saving faith is acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ as the sole means of our salvation and appropriation (application) of that gospel to our lives by obedience to its requirements. Saving faith *rests* in Jesus, His sacrificial death on the cross, His resurrection, and the teachings of His Word. Saving faith *expresses* itself in our obedience to Christ’s gospel and by our identification with Him. It is a living faith that works.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is His death, burial, and resurrection (I Corinthians 15:1-4). We apply the gospel to our lives – we identify with Christ and His saving work – by repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus, and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost (Romans 6:3-5). No matter how we analyze it, saving faith finds expression through, leads to, produces, and includes these three elements.

An Analogy of Grace and Faith

Here is an analogy that may help to put what we have learned into perspective. Suppose David tells John, “Meet me at the bank tomorrow morning at 10:00 a.m. and I will give you \$1,000.” (This is a condition for receiving the gift.) If John really believes David, he will appear at the appointed place and time. (Faith necessarily produces trust, response, and reliance.) If John shows up, has he thereby earned the money? Of course not, because the money is a free gift. Yet his appearance is a necessary condition that must be met in order to receive the gift. (Grace on David’s part, faith on John’s part.) If John fails to show up, he will not receive the gift and the responsibility for the failure will fall totally upon him. (Lack of faith in the promise.)

Similarly, we must respond to God in faith by seeking repentance, remission of sins at water baptism, and the Spirit baptism. If we do, God will graciously grant our petition, and we will receive salvation totally as a free gift and not as an earned right. If we do not respond in obedience to God’s Word, we will not receive salvation, and the blame will rest totally upon us.

Grace, Faith, and the New Birth

The doctrines of grace and faith do not eliminate the necessity of the new birth, but they explain how we experience it. The doctrine of grace teaches that the new birth is a free gift from God, which we do not earn or deserve. The doctrine of faith teaches that we receive the new birth by relying totally and exclusively on Christ and His gospel. Faith is the means by which we appropriate God’s grace, yield to Him, and allow Him to perform His saving work in us.

Genuine faith in God always includes obedience to His Word. If we believe on Jesus, we will obey His commands to repent and to be baptized. If we have faith in Christ and His atoning death, He will remit our sins at water baptism; otherwise we simply get wet at baptism. If we believe on Jesus according to the Scriptures, He will fill us with His Spirit. After this, faith will keep the born-again believer in a continuing obedience and holiness of life through the power of the indwelling Spirit. In sum, the new birth experience is a free gift of God that we receive through faith in Jesus Christ.

What Have You Learned?

1. What is grace? _____

2. Who does all the work involved in saving a soul?

3. What is man’s role in the salvation process? ____

4. God has made salvation available to us through what? _____

5. How do grace and works go together in the salvation process? Give at least one Scripture to support your answer. _____

6. How does grace help us overcome sin? Support your answer with Scripture. _____

7. What is the means by which man accepts and receives God's saving grace? Support your answer with Scripture. _____

8. What does it mean to be justified? Give Scripture reference to support your answer. _____

9. What is the origin of faith? _____

10. Write Romans 10:17 in full. _____

11. Define what faith is. _____

12. In addition to mental knowledge or assent, saving faith involves what three (3) components? _____

13. What is meant by the term "easy believism?" _____

14. Give five examples (supported with Scripture) of people whose faith was not sufficient to salvation. _____

15. Write in full John's test for a Christian as found in 1 John 2:3-5. _____

16. What does the word *justified* mean in the book of Romans? _____

What does *justified* mean in the book of James? _____

17. What is the main purpose of Hebrews chapter twelve? _____

18. How do we know that faith is progressive? _____

19. Write John 7:28 in full. _____

20. Saving faith expresses itself in at least what three (3) ways? _____

21. What is the main point of Romans 10:13? _____

22. Salvation in every age has rested upon what? _____

23. What is "saving faith?" _____

24. If the doctrines of grace and faith do not eliminate the necessity of the new birth, what do they do? _____

Chapter 3
THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you. . . For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures”.
(I Corinthians 15:1, 3-4)

What I Have Learned

What is the Gospel?

The English word “gospel” means “good news” or “good message”, and as such it is a correct translation of the original Greek word *evangelion*. I Corinthians 15:1-4 gives us the basic biblical definition of the gospel – the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Of course, for these historical facts to have meaning today, it is essential to understand their doctrinal significance. Merely preaching the historical events without explaining their meaning does not convey what is good about the good news. The significance is that by these acts Christ purchased salvation and made it available to everyone who would believe on Him. He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again, thereby winning victory over sin and death and enabling us to have eternal life. W. E. Vine defines gospel as follows: “In the N. T. it denotes the good tidings of the Kingdom of God and of salvation through Christ, to be received by faith on the basis of His expiatory death, His burial, resurrection, and ascension.”

The good news, then, is that Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection brings salvation to all who respond in faith. By definition, saving faith includes the appropriation or application of the gospel to our lives.

In this chapter we will discuss the specific answer to these questions:

- How do we appropriate or apply the gospel to our lives?
- How do we respond to or obey the gospel?
- How do we identify personally with the gospel?

Paul gave the answer to these questions in Romans 6: 3-5, in which he explained how a person actually identifies with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.

Death

First of all, we must identify with Christ’s death. Just as Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, so our “old man” must be crucified and put to death. The “old man” is not the ability to sin for this remains with the born-again believer. Nor does our experience of death with Christ eradicate the carnal nature, for the Christian continues to war against his carnal nature (Galatians 5:16-17). What is

put to death is the dominion and control that the sinful nature has over the unsaved (Romans 6:12-14). When we are saved, sin’s and Satan’s control over us is destroyed. Since the dominion of sin over us is lost in our death with Christ, we should treat sin itself as dead. Sin can no longer dictate to us or control us. We can overcome temptations and ignore sin’s power. Although we can sin if we desire, we should not submit to sin but treat it as though it no longer exists.

Paul explained our freedom from sin’s power to the Romans when he reminded them of what actually occurred when they were saved: *“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid, How shall we, that be dead to sin, live any longer therein? . . . Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him [Christ], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. . . Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof . . . For sin shall not have dominion over you”* (Romans 6:1-2; 6-7; 11-12).

Peter also mentioned our identification with Christ’s death. Speaking of Christ, he wrote, *“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness”* (I Peter 2:24).

A careful study will reveal that both Paul and Peter referred to a specific experience and a specific time at which death to sin occurred. The Greek wording in Romans 6:2 indicates such specificity. This specification is clearly seen in the phrase *“we are dead to sin”* in the KJV, which is translated *“we died to sin”* in the NIV and *“we who died to sin”* in TAB.

When did this death to sin occur? An individual’s death to sin, or the death of the old man, occurs when he repents from sin. This is apparent from the very definition of repentance, which is a turn away from sin and a turn to God. At repentance man confesses sin, decides to forsake it, turns his back on it, and refuses to accept its dominion. He dies to the lusts and desires of the old man, and decides to live for God. At that point, Christ’s death on the cross becomes effective in his life to enable him to break the bondage of sin.

Of course, the decision to repent is not complete in itself, for it brings only limited, temporary power to turn from sin. The completion of the salvation process includes the burial of past sins that takes place at water baptism and the reception of power to remain victorious over sin through the Holy Ghost. Since to die with Christ does not eradicate the sinful nature in us, we must continue to kill the desires of the flesh (Romans 8:13) and die to self daily (I Corinthians 15:31); still the turning point – the death of the old man – comes at repentance. We first apply the death of Jesus to our lives when we exercise enough faith to repent from our sins.

Burlal

Next we identify with Christ's burial. Again, Paul explained how: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death" (Romans 6:3-4). Paul repeated this truth that Christians are "buried with him [Christ] in baptism" in Colossians 2:12. By water baptism, then, we identify with Christ when His body lay dead and buried in the grave.

As we study water baptism more in depth, we will find that water baptism is effective only after repentance, that immersion is the biblical mode, and that the name of Jesus is the biblical formula. Since baptism follows repentance, it actually does signify that the baptized person identifies with the dead state of the man Christ Jesus. Since baptism is a total submergence, it truly is a burial. Since baptism is done in the name of Jesus, it truly is identification with Him. When a man receives water baptism, it signifies that he has died to sin and is burying that sin. When he emerges from baptism, his old lifestyle and his past sins are forever buried and forgotten. Water baptism, then, applies Christ's burial to our lives.

Resurrection

Paul also explained how we identify with Christ's resurrection: "Like as Christ was raised up from the dead in newness of life; For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Romans 6:4-5). Some would limit this to future bodily resurrection and eternal life thereafter, but the focus is upon the new life in this present world. We should notice that Paul wrote, "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:11).

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9), so when we receive the Spirit, Christ literally comes to live in us. The Holy Spirit brings into our lives the same power that resurrected Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11). Those who walk after the Spirit have life in Christ other than the "newness of spirit" in Romans 7:6. This "newness of spirit" is not just a renewal of the human spirit, but also the indwelling of God's Spirit. It is "the new way of the Spirit" (NIV), or "the Spirit in newness of life" (TAB). The Spirit brings about a new birth (John 3:5) and will give new life (II Corinthians 3:6). Thus, the resurrection of Jesus Christ becomes effective to give us new life when we receive the Holy Spirit.

We will now analyze the messages of prominent New Testament preachers to see if their presentation of the gospel corresponds to I Corinthians 15 and Romans 6.

John The Baptist's Message

John's ministry was essentially one of preparation for the future arrival of the Messiah. His message was repentance and water baptism for the remission of sin:

"Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). He also pointed to the baptism of the Spirit: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire" (Matthew 3:11). We can therefore discern three prominent elements of John's message:

- ☑ Repent, and show evidence of repentance.
- ☑ After repentance, be baptized in water to signify your repentance.
- ☑ Look for the One who will baptize with the Holy Ghost and fire.

Christ's Message

The four Gospels record so many teachings of Jesus that we cannot reproduce them all here. However, let us identify His basic teachings and commands relative to salvation. Three such passages stand out because of the strong emphasis that Jesus Himself placed on them.

- ☑ One concerns His deity: "For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24).
- ☑ The second is His comments to the Jews: "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3,5).
- ☑ The third is His words to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

The records in the Gospels of the last instructions of Jesus to His disciples before His ascension also deserve special attention. Matthew 28:19-20 records His commands and promises as follows:

- ☑ Go and teach all nations.
- ☑ Baptize them.
- ☑ I will be with you always. This last statement is a reference to His abiding Spirit (John 14:16-18).

Mark 16:15-18 records these elements:

- ☑ Go and preach the gospel to every creature.
- ☑ He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.
- ☑ Numerous miraculous signs, including tongues, shall follow believers. This last promise is a reference to the power accompanying the Spirit baptism (Acts 1:8, 2:4).

Luke's account of Christ's last words contains these basic points:

- ☑ You are witnesses of my death and resurrection.
- ☑ Preach repentance and remission of sins among all nations (of course, remission of sins includes water baptism [Acts 2:38]).
- ☑ Wait until you receive power from on high, the promise of the Father, which is the baptism of the Holy Ghost (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:4-5).

From the Gospels we can summarize Christ's commands relative to the experience of salvation as follows:

- Believe in His deity.
- Repent.
- Be born of water and the Spirit. This last command corresponds to His command to be baptized and to wait for the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

Peter's Message

Peter was the spokesman for the disciples and the Early Church on many occasions. When he confessed that Jesus was the Christ and the Son of God, Jesus gave him the keys of the kingdom of heaven as well as the power to bind and loose things in earth and heaven (Matthew 16:19). Jesus gave the power to bind and loose to all His disciples (Matthew 18: 18), which is the power to receive answers in prayer (Matthew 18:19; John 14:12-14) and the power to extend salvation to others, the power that accompanies all preaching of the gospel.

The keys of the kingdom, however, refers to the power to open the kingdom of God to the world through preaching. By giving Peter the keys, Jesus acknowledged that Peter would possess the true salvation message. By this message, people could enter into the kingdom of God. The specific appointment of Peter apparently signified the vital role Peter would play in introducing the gospel to all classes of people. At Pentecost he preached the first sermon of the New Testament church and opened the door to the Jews (Acts 2:14-40). Then he was instrumental in helping the Samaritans and Gentiles who represented all races and nationalities of people.

What messages did Peter use to open the door of the New Testament church to the Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles? At Pentecost, he proclaimed, *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"* (Acts 2:38). If a preacher today had the opportunity to preach the very first sermon to a group of people, would he preach this? If sinners under conviction asked him what they needed to do, would he answer in this way? Peter did.

In Acts 3:19, Peter preached, *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."* The blotting out of sins includes water baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16), and the times of refreshing refer to receiving the Holy Ghost with speaking in tongues (Isaiah 28:11-12).

In Acts 10, the Gentiles received the Holy Ghost while Peter was preaching to them. Afterwards, he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 10: 44-48). When he reported this to the Jewish Christians, they rejoiced that God had granted the Gentiles *"repentance unto life"* (Acts 11:16-18).

Philip the Evangelist's Message

Philip brought the gospel to the Samaritans. The Bible simply says Philip *"preached Christ"* and *"the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus"* (Acts 8:5,12). His message included water baptism because when the people believed Philip's preaching they were baptized. Moreover, preaching Christ and the kingdom of God includes the baptism of the Spirit because the Samaritans specifically sought this gift and ultimately received it. Peter and John *"prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost"* (Acts 8:15-17).

Ananias' Message

God used Ananias of Damascus to preach the gospel to Saul of Tarsus, who became known as the Apostle Paul. What did Ananias tell Paul to do? *"The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost"* (Acts 9:17). *"And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord"* (Acts 22:16).

Paul's Message

Paul adhered to the message he received from Ananias. When he met twelve disciples of John the Baptist and heard that they were "believers," he asked two questions:

- "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" (Acts 19:2).
- "Unto what then were ye baptized?" (Acts 19:3).

Then he laid hands upon them and they received the Holy Ghost (Acts 19:6).

In several of Paul's epistles he reminded his readers that they had been saved through repentance, water baptism in Jesus' name, and the infilling of the Holy Ghost, as he did in Romans 6:3-4. He told the Corinthians, *"But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified; but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God"* (I Corinthians 6: 11). He described God's work in salvation as follows: *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost"* (Titus 3:5).

The Message of Hebrews

The book of Hebrews does not identify its author, although tradition names Paul. Hebrews 6:1-2 lists the basic doctrines of the church. The writer desired for his readers to go beyond spiritual babyhood and learn more than these foundational doctrines: *Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation . . ."* (Hebrews 6:1, NIV). In other words, the doctrines listed here are fundamental, foundational truths that even newborn Christians understand. Among the doctrines in this category are

“repentance from dead works,” “faith toward God,” and “baptisms” (plural).

The book of Hebrews also teaches that the Holy Ghost is a witness of the new covenant (Hebrews 10:15-16). A few verses later, we are admonished to draw near to God, “having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22), a reference to our prior repentance and water baptism.

The Apostle John’s Message

First John contains a significant reference to the salvation message: “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth . . . And there are three that bear witness, in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one . . . He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself” (1 John 5:5-6; 8,10).

John identified three inseparable elements that bear witness of salvation and agree (work together) in the one purpose of salvation – the Spirit, the water, and the blood. Those who believe on the Son of God will have this witness in themselves. In other words, the true believer will have Christ’s blood applied to his life at baptism of water and the infilling of the Spirit.

The Gospel of New Testament Preachers

All the New Testament writers and preachers taught the same salvation message in answer to the question of what a person must do to be saved. The elements, excluding faith, in appropriating salvation are shown in Table 3-A (at the end of these notes). Table 3-B contains the passages teaching water and Spirit baptism.

The Gospel in Typology

Since we are living under the new covenant, we have established the gospel message from New Testament passages. However, the Old Testament is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24), and it contains many types, shadows, and figures of our salvation (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1). Let us briefly mention some Old Testament foreshadowings of the New Testament gospel.

FIRST, the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt typifies our deliverance from the bondage of sin. We find three key elements in their deliverance:

- The blood of the Passover lamb
- The water of the Red Sea
- The cloud of the LORD’S presence that guided them (Exodus 12:14)

God used blood to save them from the plague that persuaded Pharaoh to release the Israelites, just as Christ’s blood saves us. God used water to destroy Pharaoh’s armies but deliver the Israelites, just as He uses

water baptism to destroy the power of sin but to deliver us. God used the cloud to represent His presence and guidance, which the baptism of the Spirit imparts to us today. Paul taught this typology, saying the Israelites “were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1-2).

SECOND, just before God gave Israel the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, He required them to sanctify themselves (set themselves apart to Him) and wash their clothes with water, after which He promised to come down and visit them (Exodus 19:10-11). Immediately after God gave the law, Moses ratified the covenant by sprinkling the people with blood and water (Hebrews 9:18-20). The old covenant was inaugurated by separation, blood, water, and the manifestation of God’s presence.

THIRD, the Tabernacle in the Wilderness also typifies our salvation (Hebrews 9:8-9).

- The first piece of furniture in the courtyard was an altar made of brass, used for animal sacrifice (Exodus 27:1-8; 40: 6). The altar was a place of bloodshed and death. It points to the death of Jesus Christ, who became our supreme sacrifice for sin, and to our repentance, in which we die to sin and apply Christ’s death to our lives.
- The next piece of furniture in the courtyard was a laver or basin of brass, which contained water (Exodus 30:17-21; 40:7). This was a place of self-examination and washing. After the priest sacrificed on the altar, he washed himself clean of blood, ashes, and any other impurities. This points to water baptism, for after we die at repentance we proceed to water baptism to wash away our sins. Titus 3:5 speaks of “the washing of regeneration” or “the laver of regeneration” (Conybeare). Many see this as a typological reference to the Tabernacle laver. Since many commentators agree that Titus 3:5 describes water baptism, we can safely assume a linking of the laver as type and baptism as antitype.
- The Tabernacle itself consisted of two rooms separated by a veil (Exodus 26:33-35), and no priest could enter therein until he had sacrificed at the altar and washed at the laver.
 - The first room, or holy place, contained a golden lamp stand, a table of holy bread (“bread of the presence” NIV), and an altar of incense (Exodus 25:23-40; 30:1-10).
 - The lamp stand signifies God’s light in this world, which today comes by Christ through His people (John 8:12; Matthew 5:14).
 - The holy bread signifies spiritual nourishment, which we find in Christ,

who is the Bread of Life, and in the Word of God (John 6:51; Luke 4:4).

- ❑ The altar of incense represents the prayers of God's people (Revelation 5:8; 8:3).
- ❑ The whole room, therefore, emphasized communication between God and His people.
- ☑ The room behind the veil, the most holy place, contained the Ark of the Covenant, which in turn contained the Ten Commandments, a pot of manna, and the rod of Aaron (Exodus 25:10-22; Hebrews 9:1-5).
- ☑ The ark was the witness of the mutual agreement between God and Israel, with its contents symbolizing:
 - ❑ Israel's duty to God
 - ❑ God's provision for Israel
 - ❑ God's power and delegated authority

The high priest came into this room once a year to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat (the lid of the ark) as atonement for the sins of the nation (Hebrews 9:7). This room represented the highest possible fellowship and communion with God under the Law (Exodus 25:22).

When Moses erected the Tabernacle, the priests offered blood sacrifices at the brazen altar and washed at the laver, after which a cloud covered the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:36-38).

The Tabernacle building, and especially the most holy place, points to the baptism of the Spirit. In our day God's abiding presence, His guidance, communication with Him, and communion with Him come through the Spirit (Romans 8). The Spirit is the seal, guarantee, and witness of the new covenant (Ephesians 1:13-14; Hebrews 10:15-16).

FOURTH, the consecration of the priests required a blood sacrifice, the washing with water, and the anointing with oil (Exodus 29:1-7). Anointing with oil is symbolic of the anointing of the Spirit today. (Compare I John 2:20, 27 with John 14:16-17, 26.)

FIFTH, when the Israelites sacrificed a bullock, sheep, or goat, the priest killed the animal, sprinkled its blood on the altar, washed it with water, and then burned it with fire (Leviticus 1:1-13). On Mt. Carmel Elijah saturated the blood sacrifice with twelve barrels of water and God consumed it with fire from heaven (I Kings 18:33-39). Fire is another symbol of God's presence (Hebrews 12:29), particularly the work of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 3:11; Acts 2:3-4).

SIXTH, one who was healed of leprosy was purified by ceremony involving blood, water, and oil before he could join the congregation (Leviticus 14). After the priest sprinkled him seven times with the blood of a bird mixed with water, he (the healed leper) washed with water, and

then the priest applied blood and oil to him and offered sacrifices. Before this, the leper was physically cut off from all contact with society including his own family. His existence was a kind of living death. Likewise, the sinner is cut off from God and His people; he is alive physically but dead spiritually until blood, water, and Spirit bring him into spiritual communion with God and the church.

SEVENTH, one who became ceremonially unclean (typifying sin) under the Law of Moses went through a purification ceremony involving blood, water, and fire (Numbers 19). The priest killed a red heifer, sprinkled some of its blood before the Tabernacle, and burned the sacrifice with fire. Then someone mixed the ashes with water and applied this water of purification to the unclean person.

EIGHTH, God commanded the Israelites to war against the Midianites because they had caused many Israelites to sin (Numbers 31:1-18). Afterwards, He ordained this purification ceremony for the spoils of war and the warriors' clothing: everything was to be washed with water and everything that could pass through fire was to be purged with fire as well (Numbers 31:21-24).

NINTH, in Noah's day, God used water to destroy sin on earth and at the same time He saved His people. Peter taught this was a type of baptism (I Peter 3:20-21). God will purge the earth a second time before the creation of a new earth, but this time He will do it by fire (II Peter 3:5-7). Likewise, we are purged at the waters of baptism and by the fire of the Spirit before we become new creatures in Christ.

Saving Faith and the Gospel

"Saving faith," means acceptance of the gospel of Jesus as the sole means of our salvation and appropriation of that gospel to our lives. Now we have learned that the gospel is Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. We appropriate or apply that gospel to our lives by repentance (death to sin), water baptism (burial), and the Spirit baptism (new life in Christ), thereby identifying personally with the redemptive work of Christ. We obey the gospel by fulfilling these commands. The Old Testament foreshadowed and all New Testament preachers proclaimed this one message.

As we study each part of this message, we will find that the gospel presents a comprehensive remedy for every consequence of man's sin. We can say with the Apostle Paul, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth*" (Romans 1:16).

What Have You Learned?

1. What does the English word "gospel" mean? ___

15. What three things were symbolized by the contents of the Ark of the Covenant? _____

16. What is the flood of Noah's day a type of? Use Scripture to support. _____

Chapter 4
BIRTH OF WATER AND SPIRIT

***“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.”
(John 3:5)***

What I Have Learned

The New Birth Doctrine

Jesus introduced the doctrine of the new birth in John 3:5. Many subsequent passages build on this teaching when they mention regeneration or new life in Christ. The new birth is the same as the past tense experience of salvation. In this New Testament church age, the new birth is an indispensable part of receiving eternal salvation.

When Nicodemus came to Jesus, the Lord told him, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). The words Christ used here can also mean “born from above”, but in this case the primary meaning is “born anew”. As W. E. Vine noted, “Nicodemus was not puzzled about birth from Heaven; what perplexed him was that a person must be born a second time.” Nicodemus asked Jesus how a man could enter into his mother’s womb a second time and be born again. Jesus then explained that He meant the birth of water and Spirit, that is, not a second physical birth but an experience that would impart new life spiritually. Nicodemus did not understand this statement either, for he asked, “How can these things be?” (John 3:9). Jesus in turn expressed amazement that a religious scholar and leader like Nicodemus did not understand what He meant.

Christ’s doctrine of the new birth should not have been totally strange to the Jews. He built upon the promise of Ezekiel 36:25-26: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will

take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”

Since Jesus divided the new birth into two components in order to explain it, we will do the same. We must bear in mind, however, that the new birth is a single experience consisting of two parts; one part is incomplete without the other. There is only one birth, not two.

Birth of Water

Theologians have propagated many theories about the meaning of this phrase, the most prominent interpretations being:

- It refers to the natural birth, which is accompanied by a flow of watery amniotic fluid.
- It is identical to the birth of the Spirit.
- It refers to spiritual cleansing performed by the Word of God.
- It is water baptism; not merely the human ceremony, but the work God performs when He remits sin at water baptism.

Let us analyze each of these views.

Natural Birth?

This interpretation is extremely unlikely for several reasons:

- It would be a very strange way to describe the natural birth, especially since this usage does not appear elsewhere in Scripture or in ordinary speech.
- Jesus specifically informed Nicodemus that the new birth was a birth of water and Spirit, not a natural birth. A comparison of verses three and five shows that “born again” is equivalent to “born of water and of the Spirit”.
- If birth of water means natural birth, then Jesus either told Nicodemus to do something he had already done or to do a physical impossibility. If this were the case, Nicodemus’ questioning was valid, and Jesus would not have rebuked him.
- It seems unnecessary to say we must be born into this world since everyone obviously has been.
- If the birth of water is actually the natural birth, why did Jesus indicate that the new birth has two components?

There may be a parallel between water in the natural birth and the new birth, but the context of John 3 establishes that the birth of water itself is not the natural birth.

Identical to Birth of Spirit?

According to this view, Jesus actually meant, “You must be born of water, which is the Spirit.” Of course, a few passages do liken the Spirit to water (John 4:14; 7:38). However, there are several difficulties if we try to apply this symbolism to John 3:5:

- ☑ The natural, ordinary reading of the verse makes a distinction between water and Spirit, and all major translations preserve this distinction.
- ☑ Many other passages indicate that water and Spirit are two separate aspects of the gospel message.
- ☑ In a later writing, John preserved the distinction between water and Spirit as they relate to Salvation. *“And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one” (I John 5:8).* If John 3:5 actually equates water and Spirit, John would not have separated the two so sharply in I John 5:8, especially since both verses deal with the same subject (salvation).

Cleansing By the Word?

This view depends heavily upon Ephesians 5:26, which says the Church, is sanctified and cleansed *“with the washing of water by the word.”* However, this verse can cut both ways. If John 3:5 refers to baptism, then Ephesians 5:26 could refer to water baptism administered in accordance with the Word of God. At any rate, there is no necessary connection between the two passages; one does not necessarily provide an interpretation for the other.

F. F. Bruce stated that the phrase from Ephesians 5:26 could be rendered “cleansing it by water and word” or, as he further amplified it, “cleansing her by the washing of water accompanied by the spoken word.” He continued: “The accompanying ‘word’ (Gk. *Rhema*) is probably not here Holy Scripture but the word of confession or invocation spoken by the convert, as in Ananias’ words to Paul: *‘Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name’ (Acts 22:16).*”

There are several serious objections to the view that the water of John 3:5 is actually the Word:

FIRST, it ignores the literal meaning of water and chooses a symbolic meaning with no support from the context. This in turn raises further issues.

- ☑ Why would Jesus choose such an obscure symbol when explaining such a vital subject?
- ☑ Why would He not explain this symbolism to Nicodemus upon further questioning?
- ☑ Why did He not symbolize the Spirit as well?
- ☑ Why would He describe one aspect of the new birth literally and another aspect symbolically?

SECOND, this symbolism occurs nowhere in the Old Testament or in the teachings of Jesus, so how could Jesus expect Nicodemus to understand it? Since the Word of God had never been symbolized by water in Nicodemus’ day or before, why would Jesus reproach him for lack of understanding? As Dwight Pentecost observed, “To interpret water as only a symbol of the Word of God .

. . . would be to render our Lord’s answer unintelligible to Nicodemus.”

THIRD, we should not resort to a symbolic interpretation when the context does not indicate one. This is especially true here, where context, grammar, and later usage all offer a good literal reading.

FOURTH, theologically speaking, it is more appropriate to describe the Word of God as the agent of conception rather than part of the new birth itself. *“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (I Peter 1:23).* *“You have been regenerated – born again- not from a mortal origin (see, sperm) but from one that is immortal by the ever living and lasting Word of God” (TAB).* In one of Christ’s parables, a farmer sowed a seed on four types of ground, only one of which bore fruit (Luke 8:4-15). When Jesus interpreted the parable, He said, *“The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11).* The four types of ground represented four types of people. Although God tried to plant His Word in all four, only three had initial results and only one had lasting results. In short, the Word of God is the origin of salvation; it is the seed that will cause conception. However, the new birth itself consists of water and Spirit and occurs when we believe, obey, and apply the Word.

Water Baptism

We believe this last view is correct, namely, that the birth of water occurs when God remits sins at water baptism. Many theologians throughout church history have supported this interpretation, particularly the early church fathers and the early Lutherans. There are many good reasons why we accept this view.

FIRST, this results from a straightforward, literal reading of the text. Baptism is the only significant use of water in the New Testament church, so if we interpret water literally it indicates water baptism.

- ☑ For example, Peter asked with respect to Cornelius and his household, *“Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?” (Acts 10: 47).*
- ☑ John himself later used water in a literal way when he spoke of Spirit, water, and blood agreeing in the one purpose of salvation (I John 5:8). If the Spirit and blood are literal, then water is literal. *The Pulpit Commentary* agrees that I John 5:6-8 refers to water baptism.
- ☑ Baptist theologian Beasley-Murray has remarked that John 3:5 refers to water baptism: “At a time when the employment of water for cleansing in view of the last day had taken the specific form of baptism, it is difficult to take seriously any other reference than baptism.”

SECOND, the context of John 3:5 strongly suggests water baptism. John 1:25-34 and 3:23 speaks of John the

Baptist's ministry of baptism. John 3:22 and John 4:1-2 describes baptism administered by Christ's disciples on His authority. In this context, the most natural understanding of water is water baptism. This view is supported by *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*: "In light of the reference to the practice by Jesus of water baptism in verse 22, it is difficult to avoid construing the words of water and of the Spirit conjunctively, and regarding them as a description of Christian baptism, in which cleansing and endowment are both essential elements."

THIRD, this is the one meaning Nicodemus could have been expected to understand. As a Jewish religious leader, Nicodemus was familiar with the ceremonial cleansings of the Old Testament as well as Jewish proselyte baptism. More importantly, he had the witness of John's baptism (Luke 20:1-7). Both Jewish proselyte baptism and John's baptism were part of conversion and repentance, so Nicodemus should not have been puzzled when Jesus spoke of water as part of making a new start for God. In fact, by this time, Jesus may have already authorized His disciples to baptize, as recorded only a few verses later (John 3: 22; 4:1-2).

FOURTH, the birth of the Spirit means Spirit baptism; so grammatically speaking, the birth of water must mean water baptism.

FIFTH, there is only one baptism (Ephesians 4:5), yet the Bible clearly teaches both water baptism and Spirit baptism. We can reconcile this apparent contradiction by recognizing that water baptism and Spirit baptism are two parts of one whole, with one being incomplete without the other. Doctrinally speaking, if one is part of the new birth, the other must be also.

SIXTH, God remits sins at water baptism. Therefore, baptism must be part of the new birth, for how could there be a new, spiritual life until the old life of sin is erased? Until sin and its punishment are washed away, there can be no eternal life in God's kingdom.

SEVENTH, Titus 3:5 is a companion verse to John 3:5, and it apparently refers to water baptism. "*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*" Regeneration simply means new birth, so there is a second passage linking water and Spirit with the new birth. The wording of this verse points strongly to water baptism rather than to the other alternatives. It describes a specific act of washing, distinct from the work of the Spirit.

Many translations emphasize the connotation of a specific act:

- "The laver of regeneration" (Conybeare)
- "The bathing of the new birth" (Rotherham)
- "The bathe of regeneration" (Weymouth)
- "The water of rebirth" (New English Bible)

This act of washing is a cleansing from sin, which brings to mind Ananias' instructions to Paul: "*Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord*" (Acts 22:16). Paul recounted the story in Acts 22 and wrote the words in Titus 3, so presumably he was aware of the parallel thought.

The conclusion is inescapable: "*the washing of regeneration*", which means "the new birth of water", is the washing away of sins at water baptism. Indeed, according to Bloesch, "Biblical scholars generally agree that the washing of regeneration refers to the rite of baptism."

EIGHTH, many other passages link water and Spirit baptism together in the salvation message and emphasize the important role baptism plays in salvation.

Opponents of this view usually protest that it makes salvation dependent on water baptism, thereby negating salvation by grace and faith alone. Of course, without repentance from sin and faith in Christ's sacrifice, water baptism is valueless. There is no saving power in the water itself or in man's actions at water baptism. The birth of water is not the human act but God's act in remitting sin. Water baptism in and of itself is not a saving act, and the birth of water is totally dependent upon God's grace. Titus 3:5 demonstrates that one can give God all the credit for salvation and still emphasize the role of water baptism in the new birth.

Throughout salvation history God has always required obedience to His Word as a part of faith, and this does not contradict His plan of salvation by grace through faith. By identifying the birth of water as God's work in water baptism, we do not detract from His grace or His position as our only Saviour.

As second objection is that the Old Testament saints were not baptized in water as we are today. However, neither did they receive the Spirit as we do (John 7:38-39). The Old Testament saints were not born again in the sense Jesus described and established for the New Testament church.

Birth of the Spirit

The birth of the Spirit is the operation of the Holy Spirit in man's salvation. This is the literal reading of John 3:5-8, and no one seriously disputes this. While there is agreement that the birth of the Spirit means receiving the Spirit of God to dwell in one's life, there is some difference of opinion as to whether this is identical to the baptism of the Spirit. Most Protestants equate receiving the Holy Spirit with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, although they usually reject the sign of speaking in tongues. Thus Bleosch stated, "We insist that the baptism of the Spirit must not be distinguished from the new birth." Likewise, Adam Clarke equated the birth of the Spirit with the baptism of the Spirit. In the New Testament church, the

birth of the Spirit, and gift of the Spirit, receiving the Spirit, and the baptism of the Spirit are all one and the same:

- ☑ Jesus expected Nicodemus to understand what He meant about birth of the Spirit, undoubtedly on the basis of Old Testament prophecies concerning the Spirit's outpouring. In particular, Nicodemus should have known about Joel's prophecy, which Peter applied to the baptism of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-18).
- ☑ John the Baptist explicitly promised the baptism of the Spirit (Mark 1:8). No doubt Nicodemus was acquainted with John's ministry and should have been expecting its fulfillment.
- ☑ The Book of Acts teaches that we receive the Spirit when we are baptized with the Spirit. Jesus told the disciples to wait for the promise of the Father, which He described as being "*baptized with the Holy Ghost*" (Acts 1:4-8). The disciples received this promise on the Day of Pentecost when they were "*filled with the Holy Ghost*" (Acts 2:4). Peter promised this same experience, which he called "*the gift of the Holy Ghost*", to the repentant onlookers that day (Acts 2:38-39). When Cornelius and his household received the very same experience, the Bible describes it in several ways: "*the Holy Ghost fell on all them*", on them "*was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost*", and they "*received the Holy Ghost*" (Acts 10:44-48). Peter identified it as both the gift and the baptism of the Holy Ghost (Acts 11:15-17). In short, Acts equates all the descriptions of the Spirit's saving work with the baptism of the Holy Ghost.
- ☑ Some say the birth of the Spirit refers to the indwelling of the Spirit without the Spirit baptism. However, it is a contradiction in terms to say the Spirit dwells in someone even though he has not received the Spirit. If the words mean anything, the indwelling of the Spirit must begin with receiving, being filled with, or being baptized with the Spirit.
- ☑ First Corinthians 12:13 demonstrates that the work of the Spirit in salvation is the baptism of the Spirit: "*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.*"

Many other passages emphasize the need for the Spirit baptism and link it with water baptism as part of the salvation message. (See Chapter 3.)

The New Birth As a Whole

We must stress that the new birth is a single whole. One is either born again or not; there is no such thing as being half born. Although Jesus identified two parts – water and Spirit – He nevertheless spoke of one new birth. The Spirit, water, and blood all agree in one (I John 5:8). There is only one baptism (Ephesians 4:5), comprised of both water and

Spirit. The Scripture encompasses both water baptism and Spirit baptism when it teaches that we are buried with Christ in baptism to rise in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4), that we are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27), and that we received spiritual circumcision by baptism (Colossians 2:11-13). Whatever repentance, water baptism, and the Spirit baptism accomplish individually, we must always remember that the total work of salvation is completed at the union of the three. We should never attach so much importance to one element that we deem the others to be unnecessary.

The Bible pattern is to experience all three – repentance, water baptism, and the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38). Even though the Samaritans had been baptized in Jesus' name, they still needed to receive the Spirit (Acts 8:15-17). Even though Cornelius had already received the Spirit, Peter commanded him to be baptized in Jesus' name (Acts 10:44-48).

Ideally, all three should occur practically simultaneously or in rapid succession. Acts 2:38 promises that when people repent and are baptized they will receive the Holy Ghost without any wait between the three parts.

In particular, if people will exercise faith they will receive the Holy Ghost as soon as they repent and are baptized. This is exactly what happened to the disciples of John at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-6). The Ethiopian eunuch and the Philippian jailer both received a joyous experience after they were baptized, which apparently was the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 8:36-39; 16:31-34). God has designed it so that the entire new birth process can occur at one time.

Comparison of First and Second Births

A comparison to the natural birth will illustrate the unity of the new birth. We can view each as a single event, but each is also a process consisting of several parts. One write has compared the two as follows:

<u>Natural Birth</u>	<u>New Birth</u>
1. Conception	1. Hearing of gospel; beginning of faith
2. Baby leaves womb.	2. Water baptism
3. Baby takes first breath	3. Baptism of the Holy Ghost

When is the Blood Applied?

Since the new birth is a single, indivisible whole, we believe that the blood of Christ applied throughout the process. The blood is not a magical substance to be daubed on our souls. When the Bible speaks of the blood of Jesus, it simply means Christ's substitutionary death that satisfied God's justice and made God's mercy available to us. The blood of Jesus purchases our salvation. Without Christ's atonement we could not seek God, could not repent effectively, could not receive remission of sins at water baptism, nor could we receive the Holy Ghost. In other words, the substitutionary death of Jesus makes repentance, water baptism, and the Spirit baptism both available and effective.

Using the terminology of the blood, the blood is applied to our hearts at the first hearing of the gospel to enable us to seek God, at repentance to enable us to turn from sin to God, at water baptism to remit sin, and at the Spirit baptism to enable us to receive God's Spirit. After the new birth, we continue to live an overcoming, holy life by the power of the blood. Thus, the blood is applied not just at one point in time, but throughout the salvation process, from the first hearing of the Word until the return of Christ for His church.

Characteristics of Born-Again Believers

First John discusses the new birth from the point of view of those who have already experienced it. John did not write his epistle to teach sinners how to be saved but to teach baptized, Spirit-filled believers how to have present assurance in their born-again status and how to live as born-again Christians. Nothing in John's epistle revokes the need for birth of water and Spirit as recorded in John's gospel. First John gives us the following characteristics that the born-again person will exhibit if he obeys the leading of his regenerated nature:

The Born-Again Believer	Verses in I John
1. Confesses that Jesus came in flesh	4:2
2. Has love	4:7
3. Confesses that Jesus is Son of God	4:15
4. Believes that Jesus is the Christ	5:1
5. Overcomes the world	5:4
6. Does not continue to commit sin	3:9; 9:18
7. Keeps God's commandments	3:24
8. Has the Holy Spirit	3:24; 4:13
9. Has the witness of Spirit, water, & blood	5:8-10

Thus, the believer has been baptized in water and Spirit and applied Christ's blood. He has assurance of salvation as long as he continues to confess, love, believe, overcome sin and the world, and submit to God.

Old Testament Saints Were Not Born Again As We Are

The saints under the old covenant were not regenerated in the sense Jesus taught, for regeneration is a new covenant experience. As part of the new covenant God promised to write His law in the hearts of His people (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and give them a new spirit (Ezekiel 11:19). The old covenant revealed God's moral law but gave no spiritual power to rise about the sinful nature and fulfill the law (Romans 7:7-25; 8:3). Under the new covenant, however, God's people receive a new nature – the Spirit of God – that superceded the law and imparts power over sin on a daily basis (Romans 8:2-4; Galatians 5:16-18). As a result, we now serve God in "*newness of spirit*" rather than in "*oldness of the letter*" (Romans 7:6).

Likewise, there was no permanent forgiveness of sin under the law, but only a deferral of sin to the future, ultimately to the death of Christ (Romans 3:25). Blood

sacrifices had to be offered continually in order to roll the penalty of sin forward for a season, but Christ's sacrifice made remission of sin an eternal reality in the new covenant (Hebrews 10:1-18). Only under the new covenant can we receive permanent remission of sins immediately (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 10:14-18).

To summarize, Old Testament saints were not born again in the New Testament sense because neither: 1) permanent remission of sin nor 2) the new nature in the form of the permanently indwelling Spirit was available to them. This corresponds to the fact that neither 1) baptism in Jesus' name for the remission of sins nor 2) the baptism of the Holy Spirit existed in the Old Testament

Conclusion

From our study so far, we conclude that to be born again means to be baptized with water and with the Holy Spirit. This exactly parallels our conclusion from previous study of Systematic Theology. First we asked, "How can I be saved?" Then, "What is saving faith?" Next, "What is the gospel of Jesus Christ and how can I apply it to myself?" And now we have asked, "What is the new birth?"

From our study of four great concepts of Christianity – salvation, faith, the gospel, and the new birth – we find that the full gospel is repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus, and receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

What Have You Learned?

1. Jesus' doctrine of the new birth (as expressed to Nicodemus in John chapter 3) is built upon the promise of what prophetic Scripture? Write that Scripture in full.

2. What is the origin of salvation? _____

3. When does the birth of water occur in the salvation plan? _____

4. What is meant by "the birth of the Spirit?" _____

5. Write Titus 3:5 (a companion verse to John 3:5) in full. _____

6. What does “regeneration” mean? _____

7. What Old Testament prophecy about the birth of the Spirit should Nicodemus have been familiar with?

8. Give examples from Scripture to prove that the blood is applied not just one time, but throughout the salvation process. _____

9. Give two (2) reasons why we know the Old Testament saints were not regenerated in the sense Jesus taught? _____

Chapter 5 REPENTANCE

“I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).
“Then Peter said unto them, Repent . . .” (Acts 2:38).

What I Have Learned

In Chapter 3 we described repentance as death to sin and the old nature. In Chapter 4 we explained that repentance is necessary for the new birth and that it must accompany the baptism of water before there can be a new birth. This confirms both our identification of repentance with death and our identification of the new birth with water and Spirit.

Repentance Defined

According to *Webster’s Dictionary*, to repent means:

1. To turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one’s life
2. To feel regret or contrition
3. To change one’s mind

The Greek word is *metanoeo*, which literally means, “to perceive afterwards” and “hence signifies to change one’s mind or purpose”. In the New Testament, this word always indicates a change for the better.

Many theologians list three necessary aspects of repentance:

1. An intellectual change (change of views)
2. An emotional change (change of feelings)
3. A volitional change (voluntary change of purpose)

This corresponds with the Bible’s injunction to love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). Basically, then, repentance is a change of mind, heart, and direction.

Many Bible references affirm this. God chose Paul as a preacher to the Gentiles “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:18). Paul fulfilled this by preaching that everyone “should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20). One of the fundamental doctrines of the church is “repentance from dead works” (Hebrews 6:1). In the context of biblical preaching, then, repentance is a turn from sin and a turn to God.

In a broad sense, repentance can mean everything that occurs when men turns from sin and to God, including the baptism of water and the gift of the Spirit. For example, upon hearing that Cornelius and his household had received the Holy Ghost and been baptized in Jesus’ name, the Jewish Christians “glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). Most passages, however, use the word in a more restricted way to mean the first step away from sin and to God, prior to baptism of water and the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38). This is the meaning we will use in this chapter.

In this sense, repentance is a radical transformation of mind, attitude, conviction and direction. It is a voluntary act of man in response to the call of God. It denotes an active turn, not just a feeling of regret or an apology. It is more than a moral resolution or reformation; it is a spiritual decision and a spiritual change.

Repentance is the first act of faith, and it includes several important elements: recognition of sin, confession of sin, contrition of sin, and a decision to forsake sin.

Of course, the word *repent* can have usages that do not pertain to salvation. Here are some examples:

- God repented that He made man (Genesis 6:6). Here the word means sorrow, grief, or regret. (See NIV and TAB)
- God repented of the judgment He had planned for Ninevah (Jonah 3:10). God changed His plan because the Ninevites changed their wicked ways and turned to Him.
- God promised never to repent of His decision to make the man Christ a priest after the order of

Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4). He promised not to change His mind.

- ☑ Esau carefully sought a place of repentance, but in vain (Hebrews 12:16-17). He unsuccessfully sought to change his father's mind about the birthright and the blessing given to Jacob (Genesis 27:34 – 38).

None of these passages refer to salvation, but they demonstrate that repentance has application to other situations as well.

Recognition of Sin

Before someone can repent from sin he must first realize he is a sinner. Jesus said, *"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"* (Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32). All men have sinned, so Jesus actually came for the whole world. However, His statement points out that He will save only those who recognize their sins.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). All of us are spiritual paupers without God, but only those who recognize their poverty will seek God and find heavenly riches. Many morally good people and devoutly religious people find it difficult to repent and receive the Holy Spirit, because they do not recognize their great need and do not develop a sense of urgency. Repentance can take place only when man recognizes his sins and acknowledges his need of God.

Confession of Sin

Once someone realizes he is indeed a sinner he must confess it to God. God already knows everything, but He requires honest confession to self and to Him. *"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy"* (Proverbs 28:13). When people received John's *"baptism of repentance,"* they went into the water *"confessing their sins"* (Mark 1:4-5). If one sins after conversion, confession is still part of repentance (I John 1:9).

We confess sins directly to God, for He is the only One who can forgive us of our sins (Isaiah 43:25; Mark 2:7). We do not need an earthly mediator because the man Jesus is our mediator and high priest (I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 4:15-16). It is appropriate for someone to confess his repentance openly (Acts 19:18). Moreover, there are times to confess to one another, such as when we seek prayer on our behalf or when we have wronged someone and seek his forgiveness (Luke 17:3-4; James 5:16).

Confession should be as public as the sin. Confession does not necessarily mean listing every sin committed throughout life, although one should ask God to forgive all the sins he recalls. The essence of confession, however, is acknowledging to self and to God that one is a sinner, asking God for forgiveness, and asking God for help to overcome sin in the future.

Contrition for Sin

With confession, there must be contrition, which is a genuine sorrow for sins committed. The sinner must feel regret for wrongs done, and his heart must be broken over his sins. *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise"* (Psalm 51:17). The sinner must feel in himself a taste of God's displeasure, not just a human sorrow or regret. *"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death"* (II Corinthians 7:10).

Many people are sorry for their sins but have not genuinely repented. They regret sin's consequences but they fail to turn from sin. Sometimes sin places them in terrible situations and they are sorry they got caught in them. However, when given a chance to escape those situations, they will continue to live in sin.

Sometimes people cry at the altar because they feel sorry for themselves and are upset about their predicament, but they are not willing to give their lives totally to God. These are examples of worldly sorrow, which cannot bring repentance. True repentance stems from godly sorrow, which will cause a person to be sorry for his sins, decide to change his sinful lifestyle, and have no regrets about making the change.

Decision to Forsake Sin

Proverbs 28:13 says we must both confess and forsake sin in order to obtain mercy. There must be an actual turning from sin and to God. Repentance is more than sorrow for sins; it also includes a determination to do something about those sins. Repentance is more than confession of sins; it also includes forsaking sins by the help of God.

John the Baptist emphasized this element of repentance. When the multitudes came to be baptized he said, *"O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance"* (Luke 3:7-8). He refused to baptize many who came to him until they first showed evidence of repentance. For him, repentance was much more than a mental decision; it was a spiritual decision that brought about a change of life. Like John, Paul preached that men should *"repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance"* (Acts 26:20). True repentance causes an actual change in one's actions.

This does not mean repentance requires a certain length of time in which to prove oneself to God. God knows instantly whether or not someone has made a genuine commitment to forsake sin, so repentance and receiving the Spirit can happen in a moment. Unfortunately, some later renege on this commitment, but at the time they received the Spirit they had truly decided to forsake sin.

Restitution

As part of forsaking sin, the truly repentant person will seek to correct the impact of his past sins upon others to the extent possible. This is called restitution. For example, if he has stolen money, he will repay it (Luke 19:8). If he has harmed someone by lying or gossiping, he will seek to repair the damage done and set the record straight.

Jesus taught, *"If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift"* (Matthew 5:23-24). God's plan of forgiveness does not let man continue to enjoy the earthly benefits of his sin without restitution, nor does it eliminate the need to seek forgiveness from someone he has wronged.

Repentance and Emotion

Repentance will affect the emotional side of man, since it includes godly sorrow and remorse. It will usually bring tears and other physical demonstrations of this emotion. However, a show of emotion cannot substitute for repentance. Some people shed tears of self-pity but not godly sorrow. Some respond to God's presence but stop short of full repentance. God often lets them feel His presence as a means of drawing them to repentance, but we must not mistake this feeling for repentance itself.

When someone repents, he will feel joy because he is being restored to fellowship with God. He will also find relief because he has made his decision and he no longer has to face sin alone. However, he should not let this joy and relief hinder him from going further, for God has much more for him. God wants to deal with his past sins permanently through water baptism, and God wants to give him the Holy Spirit. Some people stop when they feel the joy of repentance, but they are to proceed to water baptism, another joyful experience. Then, in praising God, they will receive the Spirit.

Examples of Repentance

The parable of the prodigal son illustrates all the elements of repentance (Luke 15:11-32). In the story, the errant son came to a realization of his sin and his desperate condition: *"He came to himself"* (Luke 15:17). Then he made a decision to return home and seek forgiveness: *"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants"* (Luke 15:18-19). Finally, he actually left the place where he was, returned to his father's house, and confessed his sin with contrition (Luke 15:20-21).

Another parable shows the proper attitude in repenting (Luke 18:9-14). A Pharisee stood and prayed in the Temple, thanking God that he did not commit sins and boasting to God of his good works. A tax collector also came to pray. He approached God with humility, beating his breast in an emotional, heart-felt expression of

contrition. He prayed, *"God be merciful to me a sinner."* Jesus condemned the self-righteous Pharisee but commended the honest, repentant tax collector.

David's prayer after his adultery with Bathsheba is a beautiful example for a child of God who has sinned, and the spirit of his prayer is characteristic of all true repentance. *"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgression. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight . . . Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow . . . Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit"* (Psalm 51:1-4, 7, 9-12).

The Source of Repentance

Repentance is part of salvation, so the opportunity and ability to repent come from God's grace. The goodness of God leads men to repentance (Romans 2:4). Repentance unto life is a gift God provides (Acts 11:18; II Timothy 2:25). God alone can give the sorrow that brings repentance (II Corinthians 7:10). When someone repents, he simply responds to God's universal call and voluntarily accepts God's saving work.

Repentance does not earn salvation, but it qualifies one for, and begins the work of, salvation. Repentance, then, comes by God's grace through man's faith. Men come to repentance in situations that emphasize God's presence, His Word, and faith in Him.

The Spirit of God is absolutely necessary to lead men to repentance. Jesus said, *"When he [the Holy Spirit] is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment"* (John 16:8). Psychological tricks and gimmicks will not produce true repentance; it takes the convicting power of God's Spirit.

Rather than emphasizing oratory, persuasive techniques, or scare tactics, we should concentrate on preparing a spiritual atmosphere. Verbal persuasion and warning have their place, but our foremost concern should be to let the Spirit have perfect liberty, for only God can draw men to Him (John 6:44).

The Word of God has power to bring men to repentance as the Spirit applies it to hearts. The preached Word brings men to a realization of their sins and their need for God. Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost brought conviction and a desire to repent: *"Now when they heard this they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"*(Acts 2:37).

Jonah's preaching brought the entire city of Ninevah to repentance. Again, our emphasis should not be on man-made ideas or techniques but upon the pure Word of God.

Ministers must preach against sin and define it so that the sinner will realize his sin. Nathan explicitly named David's sin, and John the Baptist named Herod's sin. John told the tax collectors, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you" and told the soldiers, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:12-14).

In our day there is too much generality in proclaiming the Word of God. Where the Word reveals sin, we must be specific. If we will preach the Word, God will apply it to individual hearts. The hearing of God's Word brings faith (Romans 10:17), and faith will cause men to obey the command to repent.

Repentance comes as a response to the drawing, convicting power of God's Spirit, to the hearing of God's Word, and to the impulse of an awakening faith in God. From God's point of view it is a gift to enable man to be saved; from man's point of view it is his first voluntary act of faith in God.

The Command to Repent

Repentance is absolutely necessary for salvation; the Bible commands everyone to repent. When Adam sinned, God questioned him and expected a confession (Genesis 3:9-13). In Noah's day, God destroyed all but eight souls because mankind would not repent. He spared the wicked city of Ninevah only because its inhabitants repented in response to Jonah's preaching. In Ezekiel, God entreated Israel to repent: "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the LORD GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the LORD GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye" (Ezekiel 18:30-32). "As I live, saith the LORD GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way will ye die, turn ye from your evil ways; for thy will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11). These passages portray the compassion of God, the necessity of repentance, and the definition of repentance as a turn from sin to God.

John the Baptist preached repentance strongly (Matthew 3:1-11; Mark 1:4-5; Luke 3:3-9), and so did Jesus. Jesus proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3,4). While Christ was on earth He sent His disciples to preach repentance (Mark 6:12), and just before His ascension He again

commissioned them to preach repentance (Luke 24:27). Peter preached repentance (Acts 2:38; 3:19), and so did Paul (Acts 26:20).

Paul told the Athenians, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). In Old Testament times, God did not hold the Gentiles accountable to every command in the Mosaic Law because they were ignorant of it. However, God did judge them by the standard of conscience and natural law and found them guilty even on that basis (Romans 2:12-16). In New Testament times, Jews and Gentiles are on an equal basis; all hear the same call to repent. God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).

What Happens At Repentance?

At the moment of repentance, man begins to let God work in his life. Man decides to turn away from sin to God, and he allows God to turn him. As part of the turn from sin, God enables man to break away from sinful habits and desires. As part of the turn to God, God allows man to start a personal relationship with Him.

From the time of Adam and Eve's sin, sin has separated man from God, for sinful man cannot have fellowship with a holy God. When man repents from sin, he can begin to have communion with God on the basis of Christ's substitutionary death. Repentance removes the barrier that sin erected and allows man and God to begin a personal relationship. Thus repentance qualifies a person for water baptism and the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Relationship to Water and Spirit Baptism

As a first step toward God, repentance alone does not bring the full power of salvation, although it does bring positive emotional feelings and a limited, temporary strength to break away from sin. Both water baptism and Spirit baptism are necessary to complete the work that repentance begins.

Repentance and water baptism together complete the full work of forgiveness. At baptism God washes away sin by removing the eternal record and penalty of sin.

Some like to say that God forgives sin at repentance and remits sin at water baptism. This is a fairly good description based on the English wording in the KJV. However, the original text does not support a clear-cut distinction, for these two words, *forgive and remit*, come from only one Greek word, *aphesis*. Theologically speaking, then, forgiveness (or remission) comes with the combination of repentance and water baptism. We should not separate the two experiences.

For purposes of study only, perhaps we can make the following distinction: At repentance, God destroys sin's present dominion in a person's life, and He removes the barrier preventing a personal relationship with Him. At

water baptism, God removes the legal record of sin and erases the penalty for that sin, namely death. God deals with the present consequences of sin at repentance and with the future consequences of sin at water baptism. Both are necessary for forgiveness. Thus Peter said, *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins”* (Acts 2:38). The *New International Version* is more emphatic: *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven.”*

Repentance is also insufficient without the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Repentance alone brings temporary, limited power over sin; permanent, unlimited power comes only after the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 1:8). Old Testament saints repented, but this did not give them a regenerated nature with permanent overcoming power. Neither the Law of Moses nor the human mind can give power over sin (Romans 7:15-25). Only the Spirit imparts power over sin and power to fulfill the righteousness that the Law taught but could not give (Romans 8:2-4). At repentance, God gives the initial ability to break away from sin’s hold, but the indwelling Spirit makes new life in Christ a daily reality (Romans 8:10, 13).

Jesus taught that when an unclean spirit leaves a man he goes elsewhere seeking rest (Luke 11:24-26). When he finds no other place to go, he returns to his former house (the man). If he finds it empty, swept, and garnished (put in order), he brings seven other devils with him and reenters the house. This story contains a principle relevant to our discussion. Namely, merely expelling evil is not enough; one must replace evil with good. Merely cleaning up one’s life and putting it in order at one point in time is not enough; one must receive power to keep it that way.

The man who repents and goes no further will fall victim to an endless, frustrating cycle of repentance and failure, and eventually he will be worse off than ever before. This is a great problem in Christendom today. Many groups proclaim the need for repentance and morality but do not preach the baptism of the Spirit, which provides the power to make Christianity a success instead of a failure. The Spirit will fill the empty life, keep it clean, and resist the devil when he returns.

Guidelines for Altar Work

It is important that those who pray with seekers at the altar have correct understanding of repentance. Below are some practical guidelines based on our discussion:

- We should emphasize the moving of God’s Spirit, not gimmicks or techniques. Special phrases or motions cannot substitute for repentance.
- We should attempt to discern where the seeker is spiritually. If he has not fully repented, we should not prematurely force him to express joy and expect the Spirit. Once he has repented,

then we can encourage him to praise God and believe for the Spirit.

- We can put ourselves in the seeker’s position and pray with him. This will show him how to pray and will help us pray with a burden.
- If the seeker does not seem to be making progress, there may be several problems, each of which requires a different approach. The problem may be a failure to understand what repentance is, a refusal to surrender everything to God, a lack of desire (hunger, desperation, sense of urgency), a lack of godly sorrow, or a lack of faith.
- We must not try to teach him how to speak in tongues. This sign will come as the Spirit gives utterance. Instead of stressing only that he should yield his tongue to God, we should stress that he should surrender his whole mind and life to God. When the seeker yields everything to God, concentrates totally on Him, and exercises faith, he will be able to yield his tongue to God.
- Let us avoid distracting practices such as shaking the seeker, pounding him, forcing him to do certain things, giving conflicting advice, or otherwise annoying him. People often repent and receive the Spirit in spite of, not because of, the altar workers.

If the seeker is sincere and ready to repent, he will receive the Spirit in a short time. If he does not, there is something lacking in his repentance or in his faith. In such a case, altar workers need to be spiritually sensitive and knowledgeable so they can help him overcome these difficulties.

Repentance and the Christian

If we sin after the new birth, we still have an avenue of forgiveness by confession of sin to Christ (I John 1:9; 2:1). There is no need to be baptized again, because there is only one baptism and it is effective for all sins repented of, whether committed before or after baptism. There is no limit to God’s forgiveness in this life as long as we genuinely repent. God expects us to forgive the truly repentant without limit, and He will do no less for us (Matthew 18:21-22; Luke 17: 3-4). The important thing is that we sincerely regret our sin and honestly determine to do better with God’s help.

Of course, the first principle for a born-again believer is, *“Do not sin”* (I John 2:1). If we do sin, we should confess it, obtain forgiveness, and accept no condemnation (Romans 8:1). However, we should not always need to repent of the same things since the Spirit gives strength to overcome. Repentance is a fundamental doctrine, but we should not have to stay in this foundational stage all the time. *“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death...”*

(Hebrews 6:1, NIV). Repentance is always available to a Christian, but at some point he should mature to where the need to repent from sin becomes the exception rather than the rule.

The Need to Emphasize Repentance

Many churches have neglected the doctrine and practice of repentance today. If we expect the lost to be saved, we must preach and teach repentance with the anointing of the Spirit. Preachers must name sin and be specific in explaining repentance. Ministers must counsel those who wish to be baptized to make certain they have actually repented, for without repentance baptism becomes an empty symbol. Altar workers must first guide a seeker to repentance, for without true repentance there will never be a Spirit baptism.

Unscriptural methods do not bring the Spirit baptism. Old-fashioned repentance must take place first! Certainly, someone can and should receive the Holy Spirit quickly, without tarrying, but he must repent first. The Holy Spirit will not enter or dwell in a spiritually unclean temple (II Corinthians 6:17 – 7:1). It is impossible to turn to God without first turning away from sin.

Could it be that Christendom is filled with people who profess Christ but yet fail to repent? Could it be that many people seek blessings, miracles, and sensational experiences without repentance? Many public figures and celebrities claim to be born again, yet they continue to participate in unclean, unholy activities. Their claims and confessions are not valid. Somehow we must realize that without repentance and holiness, all spiritual experiences are worthless.

Those who bypass repentance are substituting their plan for God's plan, just as Cain did when he offered vegetables instead of a blood sacrifice. They may enjoy temporary blessings, but like the man at the wedding feast who did not have his wedding garment, they will be cast out when the king comes (Matthew 22:11-14).

Some people seem to enjoy the blessings of God and yet live ungodly, unholy, worldly lives. Because God does not execute judgment speedily, they think they have escaped (Ecclesiastes 8:11), not realizing that God extends goodness, longsuffering, and patience so they will have space to repent (Romans 2:4; II Peter 3:9). It is imperative to repent and live a repented life.

Conclusion

Repentance is a turn from sin and to God. It is the first response of faith to the call of God. Repentance includes recognition of sin, confession of sin, contrition for sin, and a decision to forsake sin. It is death to sin, and it opens up the possibility of a permanent relationship with God.

Repentance alone is not the complete work of salvation. Water baptism makes the turn from sin permanent by burying the old man, and the Spirit baptism makes the turn

to God permanent by imparting a new nature with power to overcome sin daily. Without repentance, water baptism is of no value, and without repentance, one cannot receive the baptism of the Spirit.

If we desire to retain the Spirit of God in our lives, we must live a repented life. If we desire to see others saved, we must preach and teach true repentance.

What Have You Learned?

1. According to *Webster's Dictionary*, what does *repentance* mean? _____

2. What are three necessary aspects of repentance (as given by men who study the Bible)? _____

3. What must happen before someone can repent from sin? _____

4. Why do we not need an earthly mediator when we confess our sins to God? Give Scripture to support your answer. _____

5. How is it possible to feel sorry for sins and not truly repent? _____

6. Give three examples from Scripture (with reference) of someone who truly repented. _____

7. Where does the opportunity and ability to repent come from? _____

8. What is the difference in God's view of repentance and man's view? _____

9. What distinction can be made (for the purposes of study only) between what happens at repentance and then at water baptism in the salvation process? _____

10. Where does permanent, unlimited power over sin come from? _____

11. What story, told by Jesus, supports the principle that merely expelling evil is not enough, one must replace evil with good? Give Scripture reference to support.

12. Is it necessary to be baptized again if we sin after the new birth experience? Support your answer with Scripture. _____

13. All spiritual experiences are worthless without what two things? _____

14. Repentance includes what six (6) things about sin and my relationship to God? _____

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. . .” (Acts 2:38).

What I Have Learned

Water Baptism Defined

Christian water baptism is a ceremony in which one who has repented of his sins is immersed in water in the name of Jesus for the remission of those sins. It is an act of faith in Jesus Christ.

In this chapter we will study baptisms in the Bible, establish that God commands all followers of Christ to be baptized, and analyze each part of the definition given above.

John’s Baptism

John the Baptist, whom God sent to prepare the way of the Lord, preached and administered the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Mark 1:2-4; Luke 3:3-4). He came baptizing in order to manifest Christ to Israel (John 1:31). His baptism was a transitory one designed to prepare the Jewish people for Christ’s message and Christian baptism. John made no attempt to abolish the Jewish law, but he supplemented it, expecting his converts to live a repented, moral life as defined by the law and to wait for the One who would baptize them with the Holy Ghost. John’s baptism was pre-Christian, for the New Testament church was not yet founded. In fact, John’s disciples were rebaptized in Jesus’ name after the Day of Pentecost (Acts 19:1-5).

John’s baptism was for, of, or unto repentance. Apparently he used no baptismal formula, but he told the people, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance” (Matthew 3:11). His baptism both motivated and displayed repentance; his converts repented and confessed their sins at baptism (Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:5).

Since John’s baptism was “for the remission of sins,” did it confer remission? It could not confer absolute remission of sins, nor could it deal with future sins, for before Christ’s atoning death all remission was conditioned upon that future event. Some people contend that John’s baptism did confer conditional remission, but conditional remission was already available through the sacrificial system, which John made no attempt to replace. It seems that his baptism simply pointed to future remission that would come through Christ and Christian baptism. It was “unto” remission, a valid translation of the Greek word *eis*, which is usually rendered “for.” Hastings’ *Dictionary of the Bible* concurs in this view.

The Baptism of Christ

Jesus Himself was baptized by John. Since Christ was without sin (Hebrews 4:15), we know He was not baptized to show repentance or in anticipation of remission of sins. Instead, He was baptized to manifest Himself to Israel as

Chapter 6 WATER BAPTISM

***“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”
(Mark 16:16).***

Messiah, the Baptizer with the Spirit, and the Son of God (John 1:31-34); and He submitted to baptism in order “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). We can sub-divide these purposes into several points:

1) Christ was baptized to introduce Himself publicly and to inaugurate His ministry. Significantly, both water (baptism) and Spirit (in the form of a dove) were present on this occasion, foreshadowing the gospel message He was to teach in John 3:5.

2) By this act, Christ sanctioned John’s baptism and his message of repentance, water, baptism, and Spirit baptism.

3) Christ provided an example for us to follow. He did not need baptism for Himself, but He submitted to it for our benefit. If the sinless Christ was baptized, how much more should we? If we are to conform ourselves to Christ (Romans 8:29), we must follow His footsteps in baptism.

4) Since Christ was baptized to fulfill all righteousness, He did not regard it as a mere ceremony or ritual. Throughout His ministry Christ emphasized moral purity rather than ceremonial purity and described the many traditional washings of the Pharisees as unnecessary (Matthew 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23). By contrast, He recognized baptism as having moral significance and as being necessary for us.

Early Baptism by the Disciples

During Christ’s early ministry, His disciples baptized many converts upon His authority (John 3:22; 4:1-3). The Bible says very little about this and does not explain its purpose. Some writers state that this was baptism in Jesus’ name while others believe that it was basically a continuation of John’s baptism. Proponents of the first theory often say it was a latent form of Christian baptism that became effective to remit sin after Christ’s atonement. However, the latter view is probably correct, as Hastings’ *Dictionary of the Bible* holds. The following four reasons support this view:

- 1) This baptism is mentioned in conjunction with John’s.
- 2) The disciples did not yet have a full understanding of the gospel message.
- 3) Christ was preaching John’s message of repentance, the coming kingdom, and the coming Spirit baptism.
- 4) It is doubtful whether Christian baptism could have existed even in latent form before Christ died since it is an identification with His burial.

However a person interprets these pre-Christian baptisms, it should be recognized that both John’s baptism and the disciples’ baptism were preparatory to Christian baptism and did not confer absolute remission of sins.

Christ’s Command

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven He commanded His disciples to go into all the world, to preach the gospel, to make disciples, and to baptize them (Matthew 28:19). He expected all believers to be baptized, and He promised salvation to those who believed and were baptized (Mark 16:16). The Pharisees “rejected the counsel of God” by refusing John’s baptism (Luke 7:30), and we will be guilty of the same if we refuse the Lord’s baptism.

Early Christian Baptism

The church in the Book of Acts carried out the Lord’s expectation and command regarding baptism. In the first sermon of the church, Peter commanded everyone to be baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38): “*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized*” (Acts 2:41). When the Samaritans believed the preaching of Philip they too were baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 8:12,16). The Ethiopian eunuch, Saul of Tarsus, Cornelius, Lydia of Thyatira, the Philippian jailer, the Corinthians, and John’s disciples at Ephesus were all baptized when they heard and believed the preaching of the gospel (Acts 8:35-38; 8:18; 10:47-48; 16:15; 16:33; 18:8; 19:5). Even though Cornelius and his household had received the Holy Ghost, Peter “*commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord*” (Acts 10:47-48). Ananias commanded Paul to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16).

Baptismal Mode: Immersion

Baptism requires the literal use of water (John 3:23; Acts 8:36; 10:47-48). The word *baptism* comes from the Greek word *bapto*, which means “to dip.” W. E. Vine defines baptism as “the processes of immersion, submersion and emergence.” Other words existed to indicate sprinkling, but God chose a word to indicate immersion.

Immersion is the only mode of baptism the Bible records. John baptized in the Jordan River (Mark 1:5,9) and “*In Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there*” (John 3:23). He needed springs and rivers large enough for immersion, not just the few drops of water sprinkling would have required. John immersed Jesus: “*And Jesus, when he was baptized, when up straightway out of the water*” (Matthew 3:16). “*And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened*” (Mark 1:10). Philip immersed the Ethiopian eunuch: “*They went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip*” (Acts 8:38-39).

Paul described baptism as a burial with Christ (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). These passages presume that baptism is by immersion and only make sense if the reader understands this. No one is buried by sprinkling or pouring a little dirt over the body, but only by complete submergence. Relative to Romans 6:4, *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The reference. . . is to the form of

baptism, viz. by immersion, which was understood to signify burial, and therefore death.”

Since Bible days, other modes of water baptism have arisen, notably sprinkling (aspersion) and pouring (affusion). However, the Bible itself never describes these methods. Some Old Testament purification ceremonies involved the sprinkling of water, but while they may foreshadow Christian baptism we cannot expect them to teach a precise mode of baptism. Several verses mention the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, but these verses simply describe Christ’s sacrifice in a metaphoric way to connect it with Old Testament blood sacrifices (Hebrews 9:13; 10:22; 11:28; 12:24). These verses do not literally refer to the mode of baptism, but they do show that the Bible could have used another word for baptism that definitely meant “to sprinkle” rather than “to immerse.”

Historically, sprinkling and pouring arose as a matter of convenience. Immersion became especially inconvenient after the emergence of three nonbiblical baptismal practices:

- 1) Infant baptism
- 2) Triple baptism by some trinitarians
- 3) Postponement of baptism until the deathbed (in an attempt to live one’s whole life in sin and still be saved).

Does the Baptismal Mode Matter?

A person should follow the biblical mode for many reasons.

1) Baptism is a biblical command, so we should follow the biblical mode. In view of the importance the Bible places on water baptism, we should perform it exactly as the Bible describes it.

2) Jesus was immersed as an example for us to follow. If He, who did not need baptism, submitted to immersion, how much more should we? If baptism is worth doing, it is worth doing the way Jesus and His apostles did it.

3) Other modes of baptism come from nonbiblical tradition, and tradition is a poor substitute for biblical teaching. Jesus condemned tradition quite strongly when it caused a deviation from God’s Word. He told the Pharisees, “*Laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men*” (Mark 7:8), and “*Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition*” (Matthew 15:6).

4) The only advantage sprinkling has is convenience, which is also a poor excuse for not following the Bible. What right have we to insist on a more convenient method than Jesus and the Early Church used? Certainly it would have been more convenient for John to have sprinkled the multitudes, for the apostles to have sprinkled 3000 at Pentecost, for Philip to have sprinkled the eunuch in the wilderness, and for Paul to have the jailer at midnight; yet they chose to immerse.

Why should we deviate from this pattern on grounds of convenience, especially since the baptismal practices which made sprinkling so popular are themselves nonbiblical?

5) Immersion demonstrates obedience to God and respect for His Word. Why invent an arbitrary mode to try to justify it? Why debate whether various man-made alternatives would be acceptable? True respect for God and His Word will cause us to be content with the biblical mode; instead of ignoring or refusing it we will obey it.

6) Only by immersion do we retain the significance of baptism as a burial with Christ.

Remission of Sins at Baptism

John preached “*the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*” (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3), pointing to the time when God would remit sins at Christian water baptism. Just prior to the first Christian baptismal service, Peter said, “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*” (Acts 2:38). Remission denotes a release, wiping out, cancellation, or dismissal. At baptism, God releases, wipes out, cancels, and dismisses our sins.

Some disagree with this understanding, holding that baptism is performed because one has already obtained remission of sins. To them the word *for* in Acts 2:38 means “because of” or “with a view towards.” It seems clear, however, that *for* actually means “to receive” or “in order to obtain.”

1) This is the literal meaning one gathers from reading both the Greek and English texts. The *NIV* translates Acts 2:38 as, “*Peter replied, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. . . .*”

2) The context leads to this interpretation. Guilty sinners asked, “*What shall we do?*” (Acts 2:37). Peter answered them by explaining what they needed to do to receive remission of sins, not by describing optional conduct. He did not mean, “Repent and be baptized because you already have received remission of sins.”

3) Matthew 26:28 records exactly the same Greek wording when Jesus said, “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” Christ shed His blood so that we might obtain remission of sins, not because we already have it. The phrase can point to future remission of sins (as John and Jesus used it), but it never points back to remission already obtained.

4) Many other verses of Scripture describe the role of baptism in remitting sins.

Baptismal Regeneration?

At this point, we must emphasize that the Bible does not teach “baptismal regeneration,” for the water and the ceremony do not have saving power in themselves. Water baptism is not a magical act; it is without spiritual value

unless accompanied by conscious faith and repentance. Baptism is important only because God has ordained it to be so. God could have chosen to remit sin without baptism, but in the New Testament church He has chosen to do so at the moment of baptism. Our actions at baptism do not provide salvation or earn it from God; God alone remits sins based on Christ's atoning death. When we submit to water baptism according to God's plan, God honors our obedient faith and remits our sin.

Baptism – Part of the New Birth

Jesus said we must be born of water and the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5). We are saved by *"the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost"* (Titus 3:5). These verses place water baptism within the process of the new birth, but they do not teach baptismal regeneration. Jesus mentioned one new birth that includes both water and the Spirit.

Belief and Baptism Bring Salvation

Jesus said, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"* (Mark 16:16). Jesus linked both belief and baptism together in the promise of salvation, showing that both are necessary. If we say baptism is not necessary, we amend the Lord's statement to say, *"He that believeth and is [not] baptized shall be saved."*

Jesus did not discuss the situation of one who "believed" but refused baptism, for that is a contradiction in terms. He knew that if someone did not believe he would not be baptized or that if he were baptized, his baptism without belief would be worthless. He knew a true believer would be baptized. By saying *"He that believeth not shall be damned,"* Jesus implicitly covered the case of one who would refuse baptism.

Washing of Sins

Acts 22:16 says, *"And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."* God washes away sins at baptism when we call on His name. *"But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God"* (1 Corinthians 6:11). Many commentators see this verse as another reference to the washing of sins that occurs when one is baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Part of Salvation

Peter recalled that in Noah's day *"eight souls were saved by water"* (1 Peter 3:20). He continued, *"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also not save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 3:21). Another translation may help to explain the meaning of this verse: *"Eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the*

body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (NIV). The Greek word translated as *answer* (KJV) or *pledge* (NIV) also means "inquiry" (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*) or "appeal" (*W. E. Vine Expository Dictionary*). Other versions of the Bible reflect the various meanings of *answer*: "an appeal to God for a clear conscience" (RSV); "the prayer of a clean conscience before God" (Moffat); and "the request unto God for a good conscience" (Rotherham).

The same flood waters that killed the people of Noah's day actually served as the instrument of salvation for the eight in the ark, for the ark floated on the water. They were saved through the water, which symbolizes the role of baptism today. Baptism has become a means of salvation for us, not because it washed dirt from our physical bodies but because it provides us with a good conscience before God. Since God washes away sins at baptism, it is a request or an appeal to Him to give us a conscience free from condemnation.

We should not suppose, however, that the waters of baptism possess saving virtue in themselves; water alone does not save a person just as the floodwater alone did not save the eight. Salvation was found in the ark, and only those who obeyed God's plan to enter the ark were saved. In the same manner, obedience to God in water baptism places a person in a place of safety. In other words, baptism is the water through which we receive salvation, but Jesus Himself is the ark of salvation.

The Pulpit Commentary supports this explanation of 1 Peter 3:21: "The literal translation will be, 'Which (as) antitype is saving you also, (namely) baptism'; that is, the water which is saving you is the antitype of the water of the Flood." It concludes, "Baptism doth save us, but not the mere outward ceremony. . . . The outward and visible sign doth not save if separated from the inward and spiritual grace. The first is necessary, for it is an outward sign appointed by Christ; but it will not save without the second."

Burial with Christ

Paul taught that baptism was a burial with Christ (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12). The old man is buried at baptism. The old man is the unregenerate lifestyle, the record of past sins, and the dominion of sin. After baptism, we never have to face the record of our past sins again. With respect to Romans 6:3, F. F. Bruce stated in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, "From this and other references to baptism in Paul's writings, it is certain that he did not regard baptism as an 'optional extra' in the Christian life, and that he would not have contemplated the phenomenon of an 'unbaptized believer.'"

Baptism into Christ

Paul also taught that we are baptized into Christ: *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put*

on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). We understand this to mean the one baptism of water and Spirit that places us into the body of Christ. Water baptism is necessary to identify us with Christ and to place us in His spiritual family.

Spiritual Circumcision

Paul compared baptism to circumcision in the Old Testament: *"In whom [Christ] also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses"* (Colossians 2:11-13).

This verse refers to water and Spirit baptism, which includes both burial of the old man and the resurrection of the new man in Christ. Water baptism is a spiritual circumcision that separates from sins, cuts away the control of the sinful nature, and results in forgiveness of sins. The Spirit baptism completes the circumcision process by imparting new spiritual life.

Old Testament circumcision was the means by which a male Jew became part of the Jewish religion and heir to God's promises to Abraham. God told Abraham, *"This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. . . And the uncircumcised man child. . . shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant"* (Genesis 17:10,14). Circumcision alone was valueless without a corresponding faith in God and obedience to His Word (Romans 2:25; 4:12). But God demanded that the Jews practice literal circumcision (Exodus 4:24-26; Joshua 5:2-9). An uncircumcised man could not participate in the Passover supper (Exodus 12:43-44). Likewise, at Christian baptism God cuts away a person's old sins and joins him to God's people. Without circumcision an Israelite male was not part of God's people; he was subject to the penalty of death and could not participate in God's salvation plan.

Baptism in Typology

Previously we have discussed the following typological references to water baptism:

- The Red Sea Crossing
- Washing and sprinkling of Israel at the giving of the Law
- The laver in the Tabernacle courtyard
- Washing of priests at their consecration
- Washing of animal sacrifices
- Washing and sprinkling of lepers who were healed
- Washing of the ceremonially unclean
- Washing of spoils of war and warriors' clothing

- Noah's flood
- Circumcision

Some additional examples are:

- The Levites, who ministered before God, were consecrated by the sprinkling of the water of purification (Numbers 8:7).
- On the Day of Atonement the high priest had to wash twice (Leviticus 16:4, 24).
- Naaman the leper received healing after he dipped seven times in the Jordan River in obedience to Elisha's command (2 Kings 5:10-14).

Naaman thought it beneath his dignity to dip in the muddy Jordan, yet he did not receive his healing until he obeyed. His servants asked him, *"If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?"* This principle applies to any of God's commands, including baptism. We should not question His plan or despise it, but obediently submit to water baptism and receive the spiritual cleansing God provides there.

A close look at some of these types indicates the role of baptism as a cleansing from sin. Before the priest could enter the Tabernacle he had to wash at the laver; otherwise God would strike him dead. God commanded, *"They shall wash with water, that they die not"* (Exodus 30:20). A ceremonially unclean person had to wash with water before he could become clean (Leviticus 15; 17:15-16; Numbers 19; compare Ezekiel 36:25). This was *"the water of separation. . . a purification for sin"* (Numbers 19:9) or the *"water of cleansing. . . for purification from sin"* (NIV). If the unclean person refused to wash in this manner, he continued to bear his iniquity (Leviticus 17:16). *"That soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him"* (Numbers 19:13). *"But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the LORD: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean"* (Numbers 19:20).

A close look at some of the types shows that blood was applied by means of water. This indicates that in water baptism, the blood of Christ is applied for remission of sins. After the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai, Moses mixed blood and water and sprinkled it on the people (Hebrews 9:19). When cleansing an ex-leper, the priest mixed a bird's blood with water and sprinkled it on the person (Leviticus 14:1-7). In order to prepare the water of purification for an unclean person, the priest killed a red heifer and burned it as a sacrifice, with much of its blood still in it (Numbers 19:1-5). The ashes became equivalent to blood as a purifying agent (Hebrews 9:13) and were mixed with water to make the water of purification

(Numbers 19:9). In all these cases, water was the means by which the atoning blood was applied.

More Than a Public Confession

Those who do not believe sins are remitted at baptism hold that it is merely a public confession of faith, an announcement that sins have already been remitted, or a declaration of joining the visible church. However, many Bible accounts indicate that it is not primarily a public confession or a sign of a previous spiritual event.

The Ethiopian eunuch was baptized in the middle of the desert with no one to observe his baptism (Acts 8:26-39). The Philippian jailer was baptized around midnight by Paul and Silas who had just received a brutal scourging (Acts 16:25-33). If baptism was merely a public ceremony of no immediate necessity, surely they would have waited until Paul and Silas had recovered somewhat from their wounds, or at least until daylight. John's disciples had already been baptized once and had made a public confession, but Christian baptism was so important that Paul re-baptized them in the name of Jesus (Acts 19:1-5). Cornelius and his household had already received the Holy Ghost and had spoken in tongues as public evidence to all, yet Peter still commanded water baptism (Acts 10:47-48).

"Christ Sent Me Not to Baptize"

In an attempt to denigrate the importance of baptism, some quote Paul's statement, "*Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel*" (1 Corinthians 1:17). Just prior to this verse Paul reprovved the Corinthians because they had formed factions, some claiming to follow Paul, some Apollos, some Cephas, and some Christ (1 Corinthians 1:11-13). Paul expressed relief that he had personally baptized only a few of them. No one could accuse him of trying to start his own following or to baptize in his own name (1 Corinthians 1:14-16). As far as Paul was concerned, others could have the honor of baptizing, but he had a special calling to preach. It did not matter who performed the ceremony, but only that the gospel be preached.

In this way, Paul emphasized to the Corinthians that salvation comes solely through Christ, not through great leaders. Instead of looking to the personalities who had preached and administered baptism to them, they needed to look to Jesus and His gospel. As Bruce noted in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Paul's "references to baptism in 1 Corinthians i. 14:17 do not mean that he regarded the sacrament itself as unimportant, but that the identity of the baptizer was unimportant. He takes it for granted that all the members of the Corinthian church were baptized." Paul's correction of the Corinthians in no way detracted from the importance of baptism as part of the gospel, which he taught in many other passages.

The Human Element in Baptism

Some contend that baptism cannot be necessary because this would mean salvation by human works. We must understand that baptism is an act of faith; it is the occasion at which God has chosen to remit the sin of the repentant believer. With Martin Luther, we affirm both justification by faith and the essentiality of water baptism.

God frequently requires an observable faith response on man's part before He performs a spiritual work. The Old Testament requirements of circumcision, blood sacrifice, and purification ceremonies were consistent with justification by faith. Before Jesus turned water into wine He required the servants to fill the water pots (John 2:7). Before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead He required the onlookers to roll the stone away (John 11:39). He could have performed these miracles without assistance, but He required a manifestation of faith and obedience.

Just because one man baptizes another does not mean man saves man. Man does not remit sin; God just uses him as an instrument to transmit the gospel. By the same principle God uses man's preaching to bring salvation (1 Corinthians 1:18; 21), and no one will hear the salvation message without a preacher (Romans 10:13-17). When God arrested Paul on the road to Damascus, He did not reveal the plan of salvation to him, but He directed him to a preacher named Ananias (Acts 9). The angel of God did not preach to Cornelius but directed him to Peter for the salvation message (Acts 10). God uses humans to bring the message of salvation to others, and water baptism is simply another example of this fact.

If we can ignore the command to be baptized because it is a "work," then we can ignore the command to repent also. This would lead to the absurd view that one can be saved without repentance.

Forgiveness and Remission

Some people teach that forgiveness and remission are two distinct events, the former occurring at repentance and the latter at water baptism. According to this teaching, at repentance God accepts man's apology and restores him to a personal relationship, and at baptism God removes the record and penalty of past sins. This distinction has some basis in the definitions and *KJV* usage of the English words. For example, *Webster's Dictionary* defines *forgive* as "to cease to feel resentment against (an offender): Pardon" and it defines *remit* as "to release from the guilt or penalty of. . .to refrain from exacting. . .to cancel or refrain from inflicting." Forgiveness conveys the idea of personal reconciliation, while remission connotes a legal settlement.

However, even in English, *forgive* and *remit* are often used interchangeable. *Webster's Dictionary* defines *pardon* as "to free from penalty. . .to remit the penalty or forgive." More importantly, there is no distinction between *forgiveness* and *remission* in the Greek. There is only one Greek word, *aphesis*, which the *KJV* sometimes translates

as “forgiveness” (Acts 5:31) and sometimes as “remission” (Acts 2:38). Most later translations, such as the RSV, and NIV, use only *forgiveness* and not *remission*. *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* defines *aphesis* as “freedom; (fig.) pardon.” Vine’s *Expository Dictionary* says it “denotes a dismissal, release” and defines the verb form, *aphiemi*, as “primarily, to send forth, send away. . .denotes besides its other meanings, to remit or forgive.”

The Old Testament associated forgiveness with an atoning sacrifice. Not only did the Israelite have to confess his sin to God and ask for pardon, but he also had to offer a blood sacrifice in order to receive forgiveness. The following passages explicitly define the condition that forgiveness depends upon a blood sacrifice: Leviticus 4:13-35; 5:7-18; 6:1-7; 19:22, Numbers 15:22-28, and Deuteronomy 21:1-8. At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon prayed that God would hear prayers offered there and forgive (1 Kings 8:30-50; 2 Chronicles 6:21-39). He did not mean prayer instead of sacrifice, but prayer associated with the Temple sacrifices.

In other Old Testament passages God promised forgiveness if His people would repent (2 Chronicles 7:14; Jeremiah 36:3), and His people often asked for forgiveness (Psalm 25:18; Daniel 9:19; Amos 7:2), but no verse repudiates the necessity of blood sacrifices offered sincerely and without hypocrisy. We can assume that the penitent cry was associated with the Temple sacrifices whenever possible. Hebrews 9:22 states, “*Without shedding of blood is no remission.*” Although animal sacrifices did not provide forgiveness in themselves, they pointed to Christ; the Old Testament saints demonstrated faith by obedience to God’s plan of blood sacrifices.

Many New Testament passages speak in general terms of the forgiveness one can obtain from God (Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 4:12; Luke 23:34; Romans 4:7), while others speak of forgiveness that man gives to man (Matthew 18:21; 2 Corinthians 2:10; 12: 13). Many speak of forgiveness that believers can receive for sins committed after conversion (Matthew 6:12-15; Acts 8:22; James 5:15; 1 John 1:9, 2:1), in which case prior water baptism is assumed.

In the New Testament two individuals expressly received forgiveness apart from water baptism – the man with palsy and the woman who washed Christ’s feet (Matthew 9:2-6; Luke 7:47-49). Both cases occurred during the transition from the old covenant to the new, before the founding of the New Testament church and before Christian baptism. Jesus expected those whom He forgave to follow the Law and wait for further revelation, but in no case did God grant forgiveness apart from obedience to His plan for that day. Even the repentant thief on the cross was saved under the old covenant, with Christ being both his high priest and his sacrifice.

(See table 6.1 for a summary of every occurrence of the Greek word *aphesis* in the New Testament.) The table

demonstrates that the following elements are part of New Testament forgiveness:

- The blood of Jesus
- Faith
- Repentance
- The name of Jesus
- Water Baptism

In the New Testament church we receive forgiveness by repentance and water baptism in the name of Jesus, both of which are made possible and effective by the blood of Jesus.

This explains an otherwise very difficult passage of Scripture. Jesus told His disciples, “*Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained*” (John 20:23). If forgiveness comes by confession alone, how could the apostles forgive sin? They could not take God’s place as the forgiver, nor could they assume Christ’s place as mediator, but those whom they baptized received remission of sins. The apostles could not arbitrarily refuse to baptize believers (Acts 10:47); all who accepted the apostles’ baptism received remission of sins while those who rejected it did not.

Faith Is Necessary at Baptism

True faith in God and His Word will lead to water baptism. Without faith in God, baptism is meaningless. Without faith it is impossible to please God, and baptism is no exception (Hebrews 11:6). Baptism in Jesus’ name is ineffective unless the candidate actually has faith in Jesus and the power represented by His name (Acts 10:43). Philip told the Ethiopian he had to believe in Jesus before he could be baptized (Acts 8:37). For God to remit sins at baptism, one must have faith in Jesus as Savior, looking to Him for forgiveness and not to the ceremony, the water, the works of the candidate, or the goodness of the administrator.

Repentance and Baptism Are Both Necessary

According to Acts 2:38 and other verses of Scripture, it takes both repentance and water baptism to receive the gift of forgiveness or remission: “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. . .*” (Acts 2:38). We can say that God deals with the present consequences of sin at repentance and with the eternal consequences at baptism. Repentance does play a crucial role in receiving forgiveness, but rather than saying we receive complete forgiveness at repentance alone it is more biblical to speak of forgiveness after repentance and water baptism together.

Repentance should precede baptism. John preached repentance first, and his converts confessed their sins to God at baptism (Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:5). When people came to be baptized, he demanded that they first repent and show evidence of repentance (Matthew 3:8; Luke

3:8). Baptism is a burial of past sins, but for this burial to have meaning there must be a death to sin by repentance. For sins to be remitted at baptism there must be repentance from those sins.

Baptism Without Prior Repentance

Since the Bible teaches repentance should precede baptism, a minister should carefully explain repentance to the baptismal candidate. If the candidate manifests a failure to repent, the minister could refuse baptism even as John did. Of course, he cannot demand a high level of spiritual maturity; that will take time and teaching to develop. Ultimately, each person must answer to God for himself, so the minister should usually respect a knowledgeable person's sincere statement that he has repented.

It is scriptural, however, for the minister to question the candidate as to his faith in Jesus Christ. Philip elicited a statement of faith from the Ethiopian eunuch before agreeing to baptize him (Acts 8:37), and the minister has the responsibility to receive such a confession prior to the baptismal act.

The Bible does not specifically state what to do when a person confesses that he did not repent until after his baptism. One option would be to re-baptize him, but the Bible does not teach this or record any rebaptisms for this reason. Since baptism is essentially an act of faith, it would appear that rebaptism is not necessary if the original baptism was motivated by faith in God and a sincere desire to live for Him. Faith and a desire for God indicate a measure of repentance. The validity of baptism depends upon faith, which involves an acknowledgement of sins and an acceptance of the Cross, not upon a complete list of sins a person has committed.

Here are some examples to demonstrate this position:

- If an adult is baptized for social rather than spiritual reasons, he should be re-baptized after he possesses personal faith and after he experiences repentance.
- When an adult sees his need of God and feels a desire to live for God, and is baptized, but he realizes later that he had not completely repented of his sinful lifestyle, there is no need for him to be re-baptized. Later he must repent of these sins and receive the Holy Ghost. He does not need to be re-baptized because his baptism was an act of faith in Christ. Although his baptism did not remit un-repenteds sins at the time, it became effective later as he repented.
- A man repents, is baptized, and received the Holy Ghost, but later he returns to a life of sin. When he repents of his backsliding, he does not need to be re-baptized because his baptism covers his subsequent sins when he repents.

In conclusion, one baptism is sufficient if done in the name of Jesus with faith in Him, but no sins (either before or after baptism) are remitted without repentance from those sins. Baptism's validity does not depend upon the faith, morality, or lack of either on the part of family, friends, or administrator, but rather on the candidate's repentance and faith in Christ.

Infant Baptism

As this discussion suggests, infant baptism is not valid and can never become valid later in life since infants do not have conscious faith. Some people suggest that God gives faith to infants to validate baptism. However, while God is the ultimate source of faith, man is responsible for using that faith and has the choice to do so or not. Saving faith is a conscious, voluntary response to God. The Bible teaches baptism for believers only (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:37) and for the repentant only (Luke 3:8; Acts 2:38). Infants can neither believe nor repent, and the Bible records no examples of infant baptism.

Some people point to household conversions as evidence for infant baptism. For example, Lydia's household and the Philippian jailer's household were baptized (Acts 16:15; 31-33). However, Cornelius' household received the Holy Ghost and spoke in tongues (Acts 10:24, 44-46; 11:14-17), yet it is evident that infants did not speak in tongues. The household literally included domestic animals, but no one contends that animals were baptized. The Bible explicitly records that the jailer's whole house believed and that Crispus' whole house believed (Acts 16:34; 18:8), but any infants present did not have conscious faith. We must understand household baptism to include only those scripturally qualified for baptism – those old enough to repent, have faith, and be saved.

Some persons teach infant baptism on the grounds that infants were circumcised in the Old Testament. However, baptism is a spiritual and not physical circumcision and it involves a spiritual and not physical cleansing. Past sins and the old lifestyle are cut away, which necessitates conscious faith and repentance. Colossians 2:11-12, the passage that describes baptism as a spiritual circumcision, teaches that this spiritual work takes place through our faith in the working of God. Furthermore, circumcision typifies both water and Spirit baptism; the candidate for water baptism should be ready to receive the Spirit.

In the Old Testament God dealt in a special way with a nation that was physically identified and separated from the world. Today God deals on an individual basis rather than on a national basis; His chosen people are those who have been born again and spiritually separated from the world.

Baptism for the Dead

Baptism on behalf of dead people is not biblical. The dead cannot have saving faith, nor can they repent; it is too late

for them: *"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment"* (Hebrews 9:27). The Bible does not teach that souls can be saved after death, especially by actions taken by others on their behalf.

The practice of baptizing on behalf of dead people is based on an erroneous interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:29. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul taught the resurrection of Jesus and the future resurrection of the dead. As part of his argument, he asked, in essence, *"If there is no resurrection why are some baptized for the dead?"* There are several theories as to what Paul meant, but this verse does not teach or approve of baptism on behalf of the dead, especially since this would contradict the rest of Scripture.

Here are three possible explanations of the verse:

1. Paul referred to those who became converts as a result of the death of Christian loved ones.
2. He referred to baptism by proxy, not to condone it, but to use it as an example of belief in the resurrection. Perhaps some Corinthians taught against the resurrection, yet they baptized on behalf of the dead, and he pointed out their inconsistency.
3. He meant baptism into Christ's death. "The dead" probably does not mean Christ since the Greek word is plural, but it may mean the old sinful selves that died in repentance. Baptism buries the dead ones with Christ so they can rise in newness of life as Christ did (Romans 6:3-5). Viewed this way, baptism is a confession of faith in Christ's resurrection, which is what Paul affirmed in this entire passage.

Sins After Baptism

As Christians, we can obtain forgiveness for sins committed after baptism (1 John 2:1). God simply requires us to repent and confess our sins: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). He does not require a second baptism; the original water baptism becomes effective with respect to subsequent sins when we confess those sins in repentance to God.

Why Did God Choose Baptism?

God is sovereign in His plans, and we have no right to question His choice of plans. Neither does our lack of understanding lessen our duty to obey. Nevertheless, we can understand some reasons why God designed water baptism and made it so important.

Water symbolizes death. Water causes great destruction and death through storms and floods, and a human being will drown after a few minutes of immersion in water. In Noah's day God used water to bring death to the entire unbelieving world.

Second, water is universally associated with washing and cleansing. For many reasons it is the most commonly used cleansing agent:

- It dissolves dirt.
- It is readily available.
- It can be used on almost anything without causing damage.
- As a liquid it is easy to use.
- It can be applied with great force.

Finally, water symbolizes life itself. No plant, animal, or human life can exist without water. A man can survive for several weeks without food but for only several days without water. Water dissolves many substances, making it possible for the necessary chemical reactions to take place in the body. Approximately sixty percent of the human body is water, and about eighty percent of the blood is water. Blood, which distributes oxygen and nutrients to every part of the body, could not flow without water in it; it would cease to be "the life of all flesh" (Leviticus 17:14). Even in the physical realm, water transports and applies life-giving blood to the body.

These three important truths about water make it uniquely suited to symbolize what happens at baptism. When we are submerged in the waters of baptism, God destroys, drowns, and buries the old man. During baptism, God applies Christ's life-giving blood to cleanse us from sin. When we emerge from the waters of baptism, we are ready for the new life in the Spirit.

Distinction Between Water and Spirit Baptism

Although water baptism and Spirit baptism combine to form one baptism, we must not equate the two events as some have done. Ideally, one will receive the Holy Spirit as he comes out of the water of baptism, but this does not always happen. There may be a lack of knowledge, faith, or repentance. The Samaritans are a good example (Acts 8:12-17). In other cases, people repent and receive the Holy Ghost before they are baptized in water. Cornelius is a good example of this (Acts 10:44-48). The Bible describes water and Spirit baptism as two distinct events even though they agree in one purpose.

Is Baptism Necessary?

Our answer to the necessity of baptism is in the affirmative. God could have chosen to remit sins apart from baptism, but His Word teaches that He has chosen to remit sins at baptism. The question is not what God could do but what He does. We do not question God's sovereignty, and we have no authority to teach remission of sins in this age apart from Christian baptism. The Bible does not discuss the possibility. We must avoid human speculation with respect to possible exceptions. Our task is to preach and practice baptism for the remission of sins. We know the Bible teaches us that God remits sins at baptism in the name of Jesus, and that is sufficient for our task.

The Significance of Water Baptism

Let us summarize what happens at water baptism:

God remits sins at water baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

- Sins are forgiven in the total sense of the word. God's record of us as sinners is wiped out, and the penalty for sin – eternal spiritual death – is removed.
- Our sins are washed away – gone forever.
- Remission applies to all sins from which we repent, no matter when they are committed.
- Remission occurs only when the person baptized believes and repents, but the validity of baptism does not depend on the spiritual condition of anyone else (such as the administrator of baptism).

Water baptism is part of the new birth (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). The baptized person is born of water, which simply refers to the spiritual work God performs in him.

Baptism identifies us with the death and burial of Jesus (Romans 6:1-4; Colossians 2:12). It indicates that we died to sin by repentance and are burying not only our past sins, but also the "old man" – the dominion of sins and the sinful lifestyle.

Water baptism is part of the one baptism of water and Spirit that places us into the body of Christ (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27). It is a personal identification with Jesus and part of our entrance into His family.

Water baptism is part of our spiritual circumcision (Colossians 2:11-13). God performs spiritual surgery, cutting away the "old man" with its sins. Baptism denotes our new covenant relationship with Him.

This chapter has discussed the importance and necessity of water baptism. In the next chapter we will discuss the scriptural formula for water baptism, its significance, and its importance for us today.

What Have You Learned?

1. List two (2) Scripture references that support the belief that Jesus commanded all believers to be baptized.

2. The word *baptism* comes from the Greek word *bapto*. How is this word defined by W. E. Vine? _____

3. What type of baptism did John the Baptist preach and administer? _____

4. Give four reasons why Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Support your answers with Scripture.

5. Name two (2) points about the baptisms performed by John the Baptist and the disciples of Jesus that were similar. _____

6. Historically speaking, what reason was given for sprinkling and pouring in baptism? _____

7. What is the only mode of baptism recorded in the Bible? _____

8. How did Paul describe baptism? Give at least two (2) Scripture references. _____

9. What takes place at baptism that is actually the purpose for being baptized? Support your answer with Scripture. _____

10. Paul compared baptism to what Old Testament act? Support your answer with Scripture.

11. The Greek word *aphesis*, is translated in what two ways? Give Scripture to support each answer. _____

12. In the Old Testament, forgiveness was associated with what? Give two (2) Scripture references to support your answer. _____

13. What five (5) elements are part of New Testament baptism? _____

14. What should come before baptism? _____

15. What does the validity of baptism depend on? Briefly explain. _____

16. List three (3) important truths about water that make it easier to understand why God designed water baptism and made it so important. _____

17. List 5 things that occur at water baptism. Support each answer with Scripture. _____

Chapter 7
BAPTISMAL FORMULA:
IN THE NAME OF JESUS

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. . .” (Acts 2:38).

What I Have Learned

Christian baptism is to be administered *“in the name of Jesus.”* This means to invoke the name Jesus orally at water baptism.

The Biblical Record

The Book of Acts contains five examples of baptism in the name of Jesus, while no biblical account mentions any other name or formula in connection with an actual

baptism. Below are six indisputable references in the New Testament to baptism in the name of Jesus.

1) After the first sermon of the New Testament church, Peter commanded baptism *“in the name of Jesus Christ”* with the support of the rest of the apostles (Acts 2:14, 37-38). Those who accepted his message were baptized according to this commandment – that is, in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:41).

2) After the Samaritans believed Philip’s preaching concerning *“the name of Jesus Christ,”* they were baptized *“in the name of the Lord Jesus”* (Acts 8:12,16).

3) After Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles received the Holy Ghost, Peter *“commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord”* (Acts 10:48). The most ancient Greek manuscripts contain the name *“Jesus Christ”* in this verse, as later translations indicate: *“So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ”* (NIV); *“And he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, the Messiah”* (TAB).

4) When Paul met certain disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus, he asked about their baptism. When he found out they had only received John’s baptism, he baptized them again, this time *“in the name of the Lord Jesus”* (Acts 19:5).

5) Paul himself was baptized in the name of Jesus, for Ananias told him, *“Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord”* (Acts 22:16).

6) In addition to these five accounts in Acts, 1 Corinthians shows that the Gentile believers in Corinth were baptized in Jesus’ name. The church there was full of divisions, with various groups claiming to be followers of Paul, Peter, Apollos, or Christ. When Paul rebuked them for their divisions, he asked, *“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”* (1 Corinthians 1:13). The obvious answer to his last question is, *“No, we were baptized in the name of Christ.”* Since the Corinthians were baptized in (literally, “into”) the name of Christ, not Paul, they belonged to Christ, not Paul. Paul was saying this: Jesus died for the whole church and the whole church was baptized in His name, so the church should unite in following Him. If the Corinthians were not baptized in Jesus’ name, Paul’s argument makes no sense.

We conclude from these six passages that the apostolic church always baptized in Jesus’ name. All believers – Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles – received baptism in the name of Jesus.

Burial with Christ

Baptism is a burial with Christ, or identification with His death and burial (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). Only

Jesus died and was buried on our behalf, so baptism is administered in the name of Jesus.

Identification with Christ

Baptism is a personal identification with Jesus, Christ, for we are baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). We are baptized in His name to identify ourselves personally with Him and to take on His name. To become part of the body of Christ, which is the church, we must take on Christ's name.

In the Old Testament God identified His Temple by investing His name in it (1 Kings 8:29). In the New Testament the church is God's temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17), and it must bear His name. The saints of God in the Book of Revelation have His name written on them as a mark of identification (Revelation 3:12; 14:1; 22:4).

That the name serves to identify us with Jesus becomes even more apparent when we study the Greek word *eis*, which the KJV translates as "into" in Galatians 3:27. This word also appears in Acts 8:16, Acts 19:5, and 1 Corinthians 1:13. In these three verses the KJV translates the relevant phrase as "baptized in the name," but the NIV conveys its true meaning more strongly by translating it as "baptized into the name." W. E. Vine explains the significance of this phrase: It "would indicate that the baptized person was closely bound to, or became the property of, the one into whose Name he was baptized." Another Protestant author wrote, "The Name stands for the person, authority, and power, so that baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus is into citizenship or membership in His Person, authority, and power." "To be baptized into the Name of Jesus means to be baptized into His Body, His Life, into citizenship and membership in His kingdom."

Baptism identifies us with Jesus, and it is specifically baptism in His name that identifies us with Him, makes us His property, and places us into His body. We should not be reluctant to identify with the One who dies for us, and to become His property by calling His name at baptism.

Taking on the Family Name

The Bible describes salvation both as a new birth and as an adoption. Viewed either way, we must take on the legal name of our new family. This occurs at baptism since it is part of the new birth and part of our identification with Christ.

A boy in the Old Testament officially received his name at circumcision (Luke 1:57-63; 2:21), and baptism is our spiritual circumcision (Colossians 2:11-12). Certain priests in the Old Testament were barred from the priesthood because they were not registered under their father's name and could not prove their genealogy (Ezra 2:61-62). However, we can claim our priesthood and our spiritual inheritance when we become "registered" in our Father's name.

Jesus came in the Father's name, having received His name by inheritance (John 5:43; Hebrews 1:4), so Jesus is the name by which the Father has revealed Himself to us. The whole spiritual family of God has taken on the name of Jesus (Ephesians 3:14-15). Clearly, then, Jesus is the name we take at baptism. If we expect to become part of His family at baptism, we must take on His name.

Remission of Sins in the Name

Baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and the name of Jesus is vitally connected with remission of sins. Peter proclaimed this about the name of Jesus: "*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12). He also preached, "*Through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins*" (Acts 10:43) and "*Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved*" (Acts 2:21). Ananias specifically associated the name of Jesus with the washing of sins at baptism: "*And now, why do you delay? Rise and be baptized and by calling upon His name wash away your sins*" (Acts 22:16, TAB).

Power and Authority in the Name

One Protestant writer stated, "To invoke the Name. . .invoked aid and protection." When we need a manifestation of God's power, we can invoke the name Jesus.

The invocation of a name also represents the authority behind that name; when a sheriff says, "Open, in the name of the law," he has invoked the authority of the law as well as its power. When we call the name of Jesus we rely upon the power and authority of Jesus. Here are some examples:

1) Jesus said, "*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name. . .*" (Matthew 28: 18-19).

2) The Sanhedrin council asked Peter and John, in reference to the lame man's healing, "*By what power, or by what name have ye done this?*" (Acts 4:7). Peter answered, "*By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*" (Acts 4:10).

3) The Lord promised, "*If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it*" (John 14:14).

God makes all His power and authority available to us when we invoke His name in faith (Acts 3:6,16). When we call the Lord's name at baptism we rely on His authority to perform the act and on His power for the spiritual work to be done.

Do All in the Name

"*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him*" (Colossians 3:17). Baptism consists of both word and

deed, so this verse applies. Of course, we do not orally utter the name Jesus before every statement or act in our lives. The verse primarily means to say or do everything with the power and authority of Jesus, as His representative, as His follower, and in dependence upon Him.

When it comes to specific spiritual acts that require the invocation of God's name, however, this verse applies literally. We pray, cast out devils, and lay hands on the sick in the name of Jesus, all by uttering His name, and water baptism should be no exception. One who lives by the spirit of Colossians 3:17 as Christ's representative and follower will certainly be baptized in His name.

Jesus Is the Highest Name

Baptism is an important spiritual act that requires the invocation of the Name of God. The highest, greatest, most powerful, and most self-revelatory name that God has ever made known to man is Jesus: *"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow"* (Philippians 2:9-10). For baptism we should certainly use the highest name. If we do not voluntarily accept the name of Jesus now, one day we will be forced to acknowledge the supremacy of this name anyway.

Acceptance of Jesus as Saviour

One writer wrote, "The invocation of a Name was the invocation of one's lord. . . . To invoke the Name was to swear allegiance to one's king and Lord." Baptism in the name of Jesus signifies acceptance of Him as Lord and Saviour.

- After Peter preached that Jesus was both Lord and Christ, he commanded baptism in His name (Acts 2:36-38).
- When His hearers accepted Christ's Lordship and Messianic role, they were baptized (Acts 2:41).
- When the Samaritans accepted Philip's preaching about Jesus, they were baptized in Jesus' name (Acts 8:12,16).

The conversion of John's disciples is especially significant in this regard. Paul told them, *"John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus"* (Acts 19:4-5). By being re-baptized, this time in Jesus' name, they expressed faith in Jesus and recognized Him as Messiah, Lord, Saviour, and the fulfillment of John's ministry.

Acceptance of Jesus as the Fullness of the Godhead

Baptism in Jesus' name also demonstrates faith that all the fullness of the Godhead is in Jesus and that everything

we need is in Him: *"For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him"* (Colossians 2:9-10). Paul associated this concept with water baptism, for only two verses later he said we are *"buried with him in baptism"* (Colossians 2:12). Not only do we recognize Jesus as our Saviour, but we recognize Him as our God and our Saviour (2 Peter 1:1; Jude 25). We recognize Him as the only way of access to God (John 14:6-11). Baptism in the name of Jesus emphasizes the full deity of Jesus and His all-sufficient role in our salvation.

Not a Magic Formula

The name Jesus is not a magical formula; the sound waves reverberating from the spoken name do not remit sin or bring other special powers. However, when we call the name Jesus in Faith, Jesus responds. The Name represents His presence and work. We must have personal faith in Jesus for the name to have any meaning and for anything to happen (Acts 3:16; 10:43).

The sons of Sceva could not cast out a devil even though they used the name Jesus, because they did not have a personal relationship with Him or faith in Him (Acts 19:14-17).

That the name of Jesus cannot be taken as a magical incantation does not detract from the need to invoke the name orally. Peter prayed for the lame man by saying, *"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk"* (Acts 3:6). When the man walked, Peter explained, *"And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong"* (Acts 3:16). It takes the name of Jesus called in faith. We cannot separate inner faith from obedience to God's Word. At baptism, when we invoke the name Jesus in faith as His Word commands, He comes and remits our sins.

For All People

Numerous arguments have been put forth in an attempt to avoid the teaching of Scripture relative to baptism in the name of Jesus. For example, some argue that only Jewish Christians were baptized in the name of Jesus in order to emphasize their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. However, this ignores the plain teaching of Scripture. The Samaritans, who were of mixed Jewish and Gentile descent, received baptism in the name of Jesus. Cornelius, his kinsmen, and his friends, who were all Gentiles, were also baptized in the name of Jesus.

Cornelius was obviously not a Jewish proselyte (Acts 10:28, 45; 11:1-3, 18). Proselytes were present at Pentecost (Acts 2:10, and one of the seven deacons was a proselyte (Acts 6:5). The controversy surrounding Peter's visit to Cornelius would not have existed had Cornelius been a Jewish convert.

In any event, other Gentiles, such as the Corinthians, were baptized in Jesus' name. In short, every conceivable class of believers was baptized in the name of Jesus.

All such attempts to explain the use of two separate formulas for baptism are doomed to failure. There can be only one biblical form of Christian baptism. There cannot be one way to baptize certain groups of people and another way to baptize other groups, for God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). There cannot be one way to baptize at one time in New Testament church history and another way for another time in church history. Nor can there be several different types of baptism at one time. There is only one baptism for the New Testament church.

Oral Invocation of the Name

Some contend that "baptism in the name of Jesus" means only in the authority and power of Jesus, and does not mean the name should be uttered orally as part of the baptismal formula. However, the following evidence shows that "*in the name of Jesus*" is the actual formula:

1) Baptism in the name of Jesus does mean baptism with His power and authority, but the way to invoke His power and authority is to invoke His name in faith. The authority represented by a name is always invoked by actually using the proper name. All the discussion of power and authority cannot obscure one point: when we actually use a name at baptism it should be the name Jesus.

2) The Bible reveals that the name Jesus was orally invoked at baptism. Acts 22:16 says, "*And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" Here is a biblical command to call the Lord's name (Jesus) at baptism.

Some argue that in this verse only the baptismal candidate called the name of Jesus, not the administrator. This is debatable, but even so the name Jesus was orally invoked. In general, the baptizer normally invokes the name, but the candidate may also call on the name of Jesus as well, for baptism's validity depends on the candidate's faith, not on the baptizer's faith.

An oral calling did occur, for the Greek word rendered "calling" is *epikaleomai*, which means "to call over" or "to invoke." This is the same word that describes Stephen's oral prayer to God: "*And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*" (Acts 7:59).

The same verb also appears in Acts 15:17: "*the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord,*" and in James 2:7: "*Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?*" Both passages imply a specific time when the name of Jesus was invoked over believers, which occurred at water baptism. Other translations of James 2:7 are as follows:

- "[Do] not they blaspheme the good name called on you? (*Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*);
- "Do not they defame the noble name which hath been invoked upon you?" (Rotherham);
- "Is it not they who slander and blaspheme that precious name by which you are distinguished and called [the name of Christ invoked in baptism]?" (*TAB*).

Thus the Bible states in one verse and indicates in several others that the name of Jesus is to be orally invoked at baptism.

3) The clear, common sense reading of the baptismal passages leads one to believe that "in the name of Jesus" is the baptismal formula. That is the natural, literal reading, and a person must use questionable and twisted methods of biblical interpretation to deny that the words mean what they appear to mean. If this is not a formula, it is strange that it appears so many times as if it were a formula without any explanation to the contrary.

4) In other situations, "in the name of Jesus" means orally uttering the name Jesus. Jesus told His disciples they would pray for the sick in His name (Mark 16:17-18), and James said we should pray for the sick "in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14). When Peter prayed for a lame man, he actually used the name, for he said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). Then he explained that the man was healed "by the name of Jesus" (Acts 3:16; 4:10). In other words, when the Early Church prayed for the sick in the name of Jesus, they actually uttered the name Jesus. Likewise, when the Early Church baptized in the name of Jesus, they actually uttered the name Jesus as part of the baptismal formula.

5) if "in the name of Jesus" does not represent a formula, then the Bible gives no formula for Christian baptism. The only other candidate for a baptismal formula would be the wording of Matthew 28:19. However, if "in the name of Jesus" does not each a formula, then neither does "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," for the grammatical structure is identical in both verses. If "in the name" means "by the authority of" without literally invoking a name, then neither verse gives a formula.

However, we do not believe Jesus left us without guidance on such an important subject. In Chapter 6, we demonstrated that water baptism is very important, so it is inconceivable that the Bible would not give adequate instructions as to its administration. If we do not have a formula, what distinguished Christian baptism from heathen baptisms, Jewish proselyte baptism, or John's baptism? If there is no formula, or if the formula does not matter, why did Paul re-baptize John's disciples in the name of Jesus? No reputable scholar holds that baptismal formula is irrelevant or that the Bible gives no direction

regarding a baptismal formula. Yet, if “in the name of” does not describe a formula, we have none.

6) Theologians and church historians recognize that the Book of Acts does give the baptismal formula of the Early Church. The *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* says with respect to baptism in the New Testament, “The formula used was ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,’ or some synonymous phrase: there is no evidence for the use of the triune name.” The *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* states, “The evidence of Acts 2:38; 10:48 (cf. 8:16; 19:5), supported by Galatians 3:27, Romans 6:3, suggests that baptism in early Christianity was administered, not in the three-fold name, but ‘in the name of Jesus Christ’ or ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus.’ “

Some argue that “in the name of Jesus” is not a formula since the various baptismal accounts use different descriptive phrases, such as “in the name of Jesus Christ,” “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” and “in the name of the Lord.” However, all these phrases are equivalent, for they all describe the same name, which is Jesus. *Lord* and *Christ* are simply titles that distinguish the Lord Jesus Christ from any others who might have the name Jesus, but the unique name of the Son of God is Jesus. Even Matthew 28:19 describes the baptismal formula as being in the name of Jesus.

Matthew 28:19

This verse records the words of Jesus just before His ascension: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” How do we reconcile this verse with all the later references to baptism in the name of Jesus, such as Acts 2:38? There are several views one could take.

First, one could say the two verses describe two different baptismal formulas. If so, they are contradictory. One must be right and the other wrong, for there can be only one form of Christian baptism. Since God’s plan of salvation in the New Testament church age is the same for all people, there cannot be two contradictory baptismal formulas. Since the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, it does not contradict itself. If the Bible gives two formulas, which is correct? Which do we trust?

Matthew recorded Matthew 28:19 and also stood with Peter when he preached at Pentecost (Acts 2:14). The question, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” was addressed to all the apostles (Acts 2:37). If Peter had given an incorrect answer, Matthew would have corrected him.

Some people say, “I would rather obey the words of Jesus than the words of Peter.” However, they must not realize that Peter heard Jesus speak Matthew 28:19, that Matthew heard Peter speak Acts 2:38, and that only seven to ten days separated the two events. If Acts 2:38 contradicts Matthew 28:19, then the first spokesman of the

church (Peter) was in doctrinal error, the other apostles (including Matthew) followed him in error, and we cannot trust anything the apostles preached or recorded. If that be the case, we might as well discard all the teachings of the New Testament.

A second solution is to say that Matthew 28:19 describes a formula while Acts 2:38 does not, or vice versa. This is unsatisfactory because the same words “in the name of” appear in both verses. If one does not describe a formula, neither does the other. We have already seen many reasons why Acts 2:38 does describe a formula.

A third answer is that neither Matthew 28:19 nor Acts 2:38 describes a formula, leaving us without any formula at all. This is very unlikely in light of the importance of baptism, the need to distinguish Christian baptism from other types of baptism, and the common sense reading of the passages in question.

This leaves only one remaining possibility: namely, that Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:38 both describe the same baptismal formula. If true, this solution is very attractive because it will both give a formula and preserve the harmony of Scripture.

A basic biblical principle is that truth must be established by more than one witness (2 Corinthians 13:1). Matthew 28:19 is the only verse in the Bible to use the baptismal phrase “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” while many verses reiterate the baptismal phrase in Acts 2:38, “in the name of Jesus Christ.” Apparently, Matthew 28:19 is the more indirect passage that we should harmonize and interpret in light of the others.

Comparison of the Great Commission Accounts

Matthew was not the only one who recorded the last words of Jesus to His disciples. Both Mark and Luke recorded the Lord’s last instructions, albeit in somewhat different language. Below is a comparison of their accounts (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:4-8).

The Great Commission		
Matthew	Mark	Luke
1. Go, teach all nations	Go to the whole world preach to everyone	Preach among all nations
2. Baptize	Belief and baptism	Repentance and remission of sins
3. In name of Father, Son, Holy Ghost	In my name	In his name
4. I am with you	Signs will follow	Wait for power from on high (the Spirit)

Matthew and Mark explicitly mention baptism. Since baptism is closely associated with remission of sin (Acts 2:38), Luke indirectly refers to it as well. Significantly, all three accounts describe a name. In each case, including Matthew, the name is singular. Mark and Luke both unquestionably describe the name Jesus. Apparently, Matthew 28:19 also describes the name Jesus.

The Singular Name

Matthew 28:19 describes only one name, for *name* is singular and not plural. (If one things this distinction is not significant, he should read Galatians 3:16 where Paul placed utmost importance on the singular in Genesis 22:18.) Matthew Henry recognized the significance of the singular here, for he wrote, "We are baptized not into the 'names' but into the name, of the Father, Son, and Spirit, which plainly intimates that these are one, and their name one." Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are not proper names but descriptive titles. Even if they were proper names, this verse specifically describes only one name, not three. We must still ask what is the one proper name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The Name of the Son

Without doubt the name of the Son is Jesus, for the angel told Joseph, "And she shall bring forth a son and thou shalt call his name JESUS" (Matthew 1:21).

The Name of the Father

Jesus said, "I am come in my Father's name" (John 5:43). He said to the Father, "I have manifested thy name. . . I have declared unto them thy name" John 17:6, 26). The Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would declare God's name (Psalm 22:22; Hebrews 2:12). Jesus received His name by inheritance (Hebrews 1:4). What name did Jesus come in, manifest, declare, and receive by inheritance? Jesus. Therefore, the Father has revealed Himself to man through the name Jesus.

The Name of the Holy Ghost

Jesus said, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things" (John 14:26). The Spirit is given and revealed through the name Jesus.

The Context of Matthew 28:19

The context of Matthew 28:19 gives further confirmation that the singular name of the verse is Jesus. In verse 18 Jesus said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Verse 19 continues, "Go ye therefore. . . ." Jesus did not mean, "I have all power; therefore, baptize in three different names (or in another name)." Rather, He was saying, "I have all power, so baptize in my name." A Baptist scholar has said, "A whole group of exegetes and critics have recognized that the opening declaration of Matthew 28:19 demands a Christological statement to follow it: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been

given to Me' leads us to expect as a consequence, 'Go and make disciples unto Me among all the nations, baptizing them in My name, teaching them to observe all I commanded you.' "

Because of this, many scholars have even thought that there must have been an earlier Christological formula in verse 19 that was changed to a trinitarian one by early Christianity. In support, they note that the church historian Eusebius, who lived in the 300's, often quoted verse 19 using the phrase "in my name." (He did this many times before the Council of Nicea but never afterwards.) Some say Matthew or an early copyist paraphrased Christ's words or borrowed words from another context. Others hold that verse 19 describes the nature of baptism and was not originally interpreted as a baptismal formula.

The textual debate of Matthew 28:19 is interesting but not crucial, for by applying accepted principles of interpretation we find that the verse refers to baptism in the name of Jesus. While some scholars see that the context demands a Christological formula, due to their trinitarian preconceptions they fail to see that the existing wording does in fact describe the formula of baptism in the name of Jesus.

The explanation of Matthew 28:19 in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* is very interesting in this regard: "It is often affirmed, that the words *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost* are not the *ipsissima verba* [exact words] of Jesus, but either the evangelist's words put into His mouth, or a later liturgical addition. . . . It may well be that the true explanation why the early Church did not at once administer baptism in the threefold name, is that the words of xxviii. 19 were not originally meant by our Lord as a baptismal formula. He was not giving instructions about the actual words to be used in the service of baptism, but, as has already been suggested, was indicating that the baptized person would by baptism pass into the possession of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

Jesus Is the New Testament Name of God

The meaning of Matthew 28:19 is very plain. The singular name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is Jesus. Father, Son, and Spirit are three different titles for God. The one God is Father of all creation, has come in flesh in the Son, and abides in our hearts as the Holy Ghost. The one name that reveals all of these roles is Jesus.

The Old Testament predicted that God would be revealed by one name: "Therefore my people shall know my name" (Isaiah 52:6); "In that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one" (Zechariah 14:9). The name of Jesus is above every other name (Philippians 2:9-10), so it is not surprising that Matthew 28:19 refers to the name of Jesus.

One can analyze the verse as follows. Who is the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? Of course, this describes God. What is God's name? In the Old Testament, Jehovah (or

Yahweh) was the unique name by which God distinguished Himself from all other gods (Isaiah 42:8). This analysis led a Presbyterian professor to say, "The 'name' not 'names' of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in which we are to be baptized, is to be understood as Jahweh, the name of the Triune God." However, the supreme name of God in the New Testament is not Jehovah but Jesus. Jesus supercedes all other names and specifically includes Jehovah within its meaning, since Jesus literally means "Jehovah-Saviour" or "Jehovah is Salvation."

In the Book of Revelation the servants of "God and the Lamb" shall have "his name" (singular) in their foreheads (Revelation 22:3-4). The name of the Lamb is Jesus, so the name of God is Jesus.

Many twentieth-century evangelicals have recognized at least partially the significance of Jesus' name. Essex Kenyon held that Jesus was the revealed name of God in the New Testament and the family name of God. He taught that using the name gives the Christian legal power of attorney in prayer and applies Christ's redemptive benefits in the present.

William Phillips Hall, President of the American Tract Society of New York, undertook a study of the name of God. In 1929 he published a booklet entitled *Remarkable Biblical Discovery of "The Name of God" According to the Scriptures*. His conclusion: The Name of the Lord Jesus Christ is the full revelation of God and the apostles correctly understood and obeyed Matthew 28:19 by invoking this Name. Furthermore, the words of Matthew 28:19 "were never used in baptism by the original apostles, or by the Church during the early days of its existence" and "all baptisms of those early days were commanded to be, or stated to have been, performed in, or with the invocation of, the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Conclusion About the Baptismal Formula

All biblical references to the baptismal formula, including Matthew 28:19, describe the name Jesus. To be biblical, a formula must include the name Jesus, not merely recite the Lord's verbal instructions. "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" or "I baptize you in the name of the Lord" or "I baptize you in His name" are all insufficient, because none of them actually use the name Jesus Christ commanded us to use. A correct formula would be, "I baptize you in the name of Jesus." It is also appropriate to add titles such as Lord or Christ to distinguish the Lord Jesus Christ from any others who have borne the name Jesus.

The Doctrine of the Trinity

In the face of these powerful points, the only practical reason why some insist on a formula that repeats the words of Matthew 28:19 (rather than actually using the name it describes) is their attempt to confess the doctrine

of the trinity. We should note, for their benefit, that many trinitarians see the correctness of baptism in the name of Jesus. For example, the first leader of the twentieth-century Pentecostal movement, Charles Parham, baptized in the name of Jesus although he never explicitly denied trinitarianism.

In recent years, a prominent independent pastor names James Beall wrote a book on baptism called *Rise to Newness of Life*, which advocates baptism in Jesus' name while retaining trinitarian doctrine. As already noted, many trinitarian scholars such as W. E. Vine, Matthew Henry, and James Buswell have recognized the significance of the singular in Matthew 28:19 although apparently not associating it with baptism in the name of Jesus.

We should also note in passing that there is no reason to use a trinitarian baptismal formula to uphold the erroneous doctrine of the trinity. The word *trinity* never appears in Scripture, and the Bible always emphasizes that God is one, not three. Furthermore, Jesus is the Father (Isaiah 9:6), the Son (Matthew 1:21), and the Holy Ghost (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). All the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily (Colossians 2:9). Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are simply three different manifestations of the one God who came in flesh as Jesus. There is no reason, then, to insist on a trinitarian baptismal formula when the Bible does not teach the modern doctrine of trinitarianism.

Matthew 28:19 Teaches Baptism in the Name of Jesus

In summary, below are nine reasons why Matthew 28:19 refers to the name of Jesus in baptism.

- 1) Its grammar designates one name (singular).
- 2) Its context shows that Jesus described His power and therefore told the disciples to baptize in His name.
- 3) Mark's and Luke's descriptions of the same instructions of Christ show that Jesus was the only name mentioned.
- 4) The Early Church, including Matthew, carried out Christ's instructions by baptizing in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16; 1 Corinthians 1:13).
- 5) The name of the Father is Jesus; the Father is revealed through the name Jesus (John 5:43).
- 6) The name of the Son is Jesus (Matthew 1:21).
- 7) The name of the Holy Ghost is Jesus; the Holy Ghost is revealed through the name Jesus (John 14:26).
- 8) God has revealed Himself in the New Testament by one name (Zechariah 14:9) and that name is Jesus (Revelation 22:3-4).
- 9) The Bible does not teach the doctrine of the trinity, so there is no theological justification for a triune formula.

The Witness in Church History

Not only did the apostles baptize in the name of Jesus, but the Christians of the early post-apostolic era did also. Most theologians agree that the Book of Acts describes the original formula. Church historians generally agree that Jesus' name was the older formula and that the triune formula was only gradually adopted.

Does the Baptismal Formula Really Matter?

Everyone should use the biblical formula. If the name Jesus was not called over someone at baptism, he should be re-baptized in the name of Jesus. Here are the reasons why:

1) The Bible places so much importance on water baptism that we should practice it exactly as the Bible commands.

2) We should follow the example of the apostolic church.

3) Tradition is an inadequate substitute for biblical teaching.

4) Obedience to and respect for God's Word will cause us to follow it exactly. We should obey the clear teaching of Scripture instead of inventing another method and attempting to justify it. Refusal to use the biblical formula could signify disobedience, rebellion, or a casual approach to God's Word.

5) John's disciples had already been immersed in water unto repentance, yet Paul baptized them again, this time in Jesus' name (Acts 19:1-5). The only physical difference between the two baptisms was the name, but this was significant enough to require rebaptism.

6) The name of Jesus is uniquely associated with all the purposes of baptism, such as burial with Christ, identification with Christ, and remission of sins.

Even if one has already received the Holy Ghost, he needs to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. As the story of Cornelius indicates, God will give the Spirit to all who repent and believe, even to those who do not understand baptism in the name of Jesus. He specifically said that He gives His Spirit to guide people into all truth (John 16:13), but they may subsequently ignore or reject the leading of the Spirit and the teaching of the Word. God does not stamp His approval on their doctrine by filling them with His Spirit; rather, this exhibits His grace and strict adherence to the promises of His Word. Regardless of someone's spiritual experience, continual obedience to God's Word is always necessary.

Some say that if one has faith in Christ the baptismal formula is an irrelevant technicality. By this reasoning, however, one could justify celebrating the Lord's Supper with cake and punch, performing baptisms by sprinkling with milk, or even omitting the baptismal ceremony altogether. We do not believe any teaching of Scripture is

irrelevant; in the case of baptism the Bible teaches it to be part of salvation and commands baptism in Jesus' name.

If the formula is irrelevant, baptism in any name would be valid Christian baptism, which is absurd. Obviously, the spiritual significance of baptism is expressed by the formula used and the name invoked. Using Jesus' name demonstrates faith in:

- 1) The person of Christ (who He really is)
- 2) The work of Christ (His death, burial, and resurrection for our salvation), and
- 3) The power and authority of Christ (His ability to save us by Himself).

This is the essence of saving faith.

A baptismal candidate does not need a fully developed understanding of the Godhead to be saved, for faith precedes complete knowledge. However, it is one thing to have limited knowledge but yet submit to the biblical formula out of faith and obedience; it is quite another thing to disregard the teaching of Scripture and use a man-made formula that confesses a false doctrinal system. Interestingly, Roman Catholics have traditionally taught that baptism is essential to salvation and that pronouncement of the words "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost" is necessary to its validity.

Simply put, the Bible teaches no baptismal formula other than one using the name Jesus. If any other formula will suffice, the Bible does not tell us. If we limit ourselves to the scriptural record, we must draw two conclusions:

- 1) Christian baptism should be performed in the name of Jesus, which means by His power and authority, by faith in Him, and by orally invoking His name;
- 2) No other baptismal formula has biblical validity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, below are the biblical reasons for baptism in the name of Jesus.

- 1) The Bible gives this formula and no other.
 - a) Matthew 28:19 describes this formula.
 - b) The apostolic church adhered to this formula (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16; 1 Corinthians 1:13).
- 2) Baptism is a burial with Christ and no one else (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12).
- 3) Baptism is a personal identification with Christ (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27), and His name identifies us as His possession.
- 4) At baptism we take on our new family name, as part of our new birth, adoption, and spiritual circumcision. The name God's spiritual family bears is Jesus (Ephesians 3:14-15).

5) Baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:380, and Jesus is the only name that remits sin (Acts 10:43).

6) The name of Jesus represents all the power and authority of God (Matthew 28:18; Acts 4:7, 10). When we invoke His name in faith, that power and authority become available to us (Acts 3:6, 16).

7) Everything we do in word or deed should be done in the name of Jesus (Colossians 3:17), and baptism is both word and deed.

8) The name of Jesus is the highest name known to man, and everyone must bow to that name (Philippians 2:9-11).

9) Baptism is part of our salvation, and Jesus is the only saving name (Acts 4:12).

10) Baptism in Jesus' name manifests complete faith in Jesus as our only Saviour and our only access to God (John 14:6-11).

11) It signifies belief that the fullness of the Godhead is manifested in Jesus (Colossians 2:9).

12) Jesus is the name by which God has revealed Himself in the New Testament (Matthew 1:21; John 5:43; 14:26).

13) Baptism in the name of Jesus demonstrates reverence for and obedience to the Word of God over and above human tradition.

In view of all the important things baptism in Jesus' name signifies, why would anyone refuse to use the name? Why would anyone reject the only saving name – the name that is above every name?

What Have You Learned?

1. List the six (6) indisputable references in the New Testament to baptism in the name of Jesus. Give Scripture reference for each. _____

2. What is the highest, greatest, most powerful, and most self-revelatory name that God has ever made known to man? _____

3. According to theologians and church historians, where do we find the baptismal formula used by the Early Church? _____

4. Write the Scripture in full that tells us the name of the Son. Be sure to include the reference. _____

5. Write the Scripture in full (with reference) which tells us the name used by the Father to reveal Himself to man. _____

6. Write in full the Scripture which gives the name used to give and reveal the Spirit. Be sure to include the reference. _____

7. In a short statement, explain the meaning of Matthew 28:19. _____
