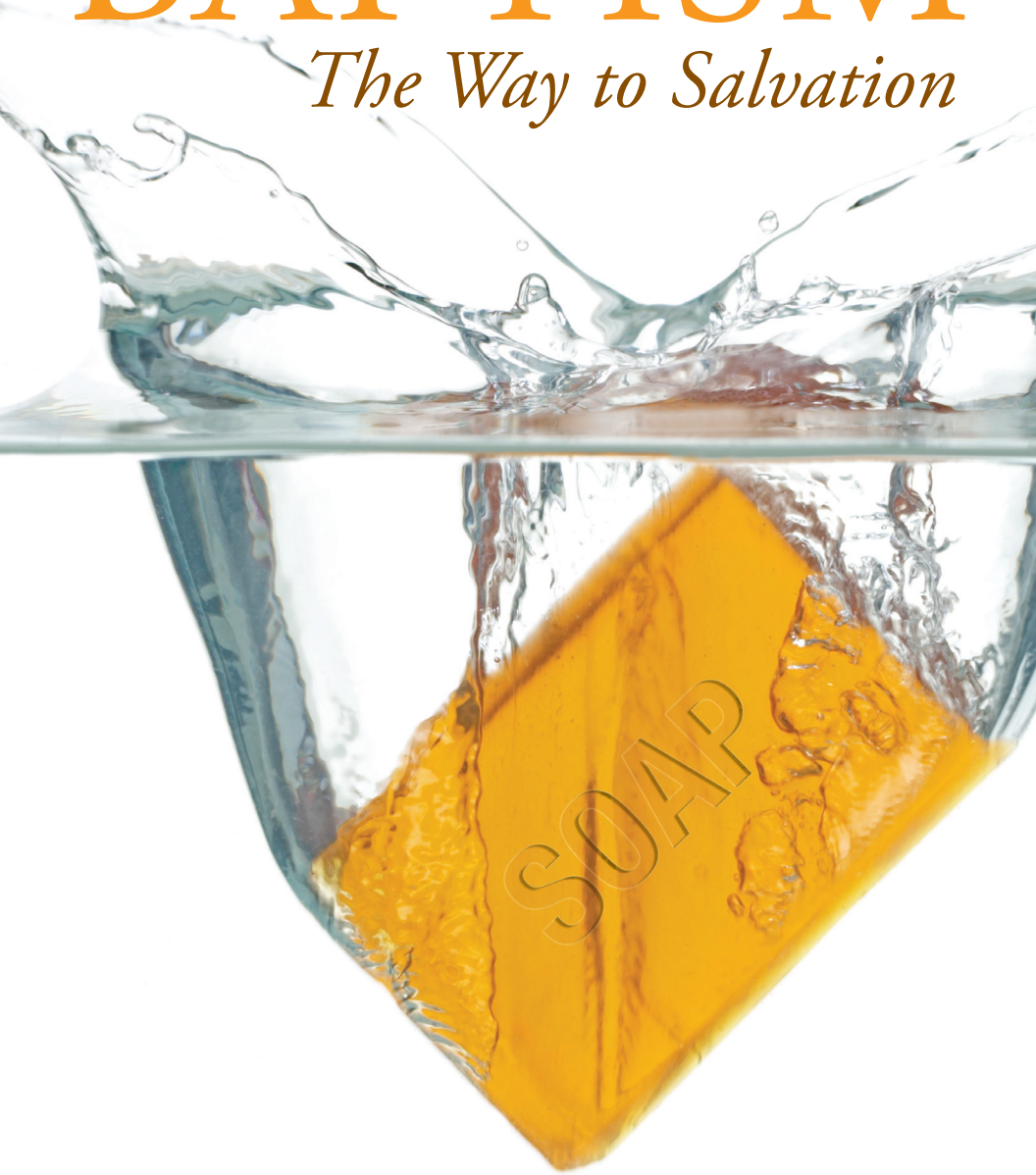


BAPTISM

The Way to Salvation



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Without exception, people are profoundly affected by the society in which they live. Whether we are a person who is a member of a close-knit family or we spend endless hours alone, our moral standards and personal beliefs are influenced by what goes on around us. No one is exempt. From the style of clothes we wear, the language we speak, or our religious beliefs, socialization has much to do with who we are and what we think—and its effects are not always positive. That is a sobering fact.

But does It have to be that way? The apostle Peter gave one of the best-known sermons in the Bible to thousands of Jews gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. It is recorded in the book of Acts, chapter 2. In it the final words of his sermon were: “Be saved from this ‘perverse’ generation” (verse 40). Like ours, his generation also had much that was wrong about it. Earlier, Christ had talked about a future

generation wherein “lawlessness” would abound (Matthew 24:12). Paul also warned about this by saying:

2 Timothy 3:1-4: But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God... NKJV

Peter’s message about the need to be saved from a perverse generation was not just for those present in Jerusalem at the time he was speaking. Rather, the word “generation” used in the scripture quoted above meant “age”. Peter was saying, save yourselves from this perverse age—of man. Peter was referring to this age of man’s rule on the earth—this present evil age. Here is what the Apostle Paul called it:

Galatians 1:4: Christ...gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, NKJV

Peter, in his admonition, was clearly telling his listeners their lives had been tainted by this world, and they were full of sin as a result. His listeners, Jews from various provinces, understood that sin brought a person under the death penalty of God’s Law. The Bible clearly states: ‘The soul that sinneth, he/she shall die’; and it further states, ‘sin is the transgression of the law.’ But knowing they had sinned, the question in their minds was, How can we be saved...from the death penalty levied against those who sin? Acts 2:41

provides one step in the answer. Following his admonition to be saved from this ‘perverse age of man’ three thousand people were baptized:

Acts 2:41: Then those who gladly received his word were baptized... NKJV

The people understood Peter’s indictment, accepted the truth of their sin, and followed Peter’s admonition to be baptized if they wanted to be saved. But How does being baptized help save someone?

In order to understand how being baptized helps save an individual, it is necessary to know what baptism is, what it depicts, and how It affects a Christian.

What Is Baptism?

The Greek word for baptize is ‘baptizo’. It simply means to immerse or to put into. In the case of baptism it means to fully Immerse or put the body down into water. Beginning with the work of John the Baptizer, the Bible gives a number of examples of Christians being baptized. John baptized around Aenon, which is near Jerusalem. Why did he baptize there? “Because there was much water there” (John 3:23). Christ himself provided the example for the only way to be baptized. He went down into the water and came up out of the water:

Matthew 3:16: When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water NKJV

As with all others, Christ's body was immersed in the water in the same way the Ethiopian Eunuch was baptized in Acts 8:38-39:

Acts 8:38-39: So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water; and he baptized him. 39 Now when they came up out of the water... NKJV

It is clear both Philip and the eunuch waded out into the water for the purpose of immersing (as in the meaning of the word baptizo). Philip put the eunuch down into the water: one does not go down into water to sprinkle or pour water over someone's head as is often done in many churches today. Full immersion is the prescribed method for a biblically commanded baptism. Although baptism by immersion is symbolic, the symbolism is of great importance and should be understood by the individual wanting to be saved.

The Symbolism Of Baptism

The Bible clearly tells us baptism pictures a type of burial of the person being baptized. Symbolically, immersing the person completely under the water pictures the burial of the old self in a watery grave—we bury the sinful person we were, who has been affected by the 'crooked and perverse generation'...or age of man. The old self, having been thus formed, is in opposition to the way of God and must cease to exist if we are to be saved. That person cannot yield him or herself to follow God:

Romans 8:7: Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. NKJV

This old self whom we need to bury walked in the course laid out by this world under the influence of Satan the Devil. Paul describes Christians in this manner:

Ephesians 2:2-3: ...you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air (Satan), the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath... NKJV

In the above scripture, Paul described those who were once walking according to this world as those who needed to repent, believe, and be baptized. But being buried beneath the water in a watery grave is only the first step in baptism.

We Are Saved By Christ's Life

The Bible tells us that Christ died so that our sins can be forgiven. Christ, through his death, paid the penalty for our sins in our stead. But Christ's blood only covered our sins; it does not give us life. It is the life of Christ that gives life:

Romans 5:10: For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. NKJV

If Christ had not risen from the dead back to life there would be no hope of our being saved:

1 Corinthians 15:16-18: For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile;

you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. NKJV

Man is mortal and does not have eternal life in himself. All mankind is under the penalty of death brought on by sin, just as the Bible clearly tells us: “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” All in this instance means all humans who have ever lived! There is nothing in any human that can last beyond the grave. But Paul states that following baptism God raises us up from that watery grave and makes us alive together with Christ:

Ephesians 2:4-6: “ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together...” NKJV

Thus the act of baptism represents the death and burial of the old sinning self, and the rising from the watery grave represents our being resurrected to a new life in Christ:

Romans 6:3-5: Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,... NKJV

Baptism is so important that with some of his last recorded words Christ commanded the apostles to:

Mark16:15: Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every

creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. NKJV

So, like Christ, we must experience baptism—being plunged down into a watery grave, and coming up out of the water renewed, cleansed from our sins, but still human, and, unfortunately, still able to sin...Yes, we are still in the flesh, not born again as some believe, but only renewed, cleansed of ours sins, and ready to follow Christ; but before we can fully turn to following him, something more is needed.

Repentance Required For Baptism

When Peter had finished with his sermon, in Acts 2:37 the crowd was cut to their heart and asked “What shall we do?” Peter answered by telling them to Repent! This is what Peter had heard Christ teach. When Peter echoed Christ (see Mark 1:15), he meant that they should not just forsake what they had done in the past. He also meant that they should change their comprehension of how they were living and come to a deep understanding of the evil consequences of living the way of this world. They had to learn to hate sin! They had to completely turn from living the way of sin to living the way of God—they had to repent. Then they were to be baptized in order to be saved. These were not just Peter’s ideas. Christ often admonished people to repent:

Luke 13:5: I (Christ) tell you...unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” NKJV

Repentance, then, is a key element in being baptized. But many today do not know what they should repent of. They

have become so confused by the trend in modern society to call “evil good and good evil”, they have become unsure of what evil really is. Living in a society that seeks to justify every evil act, they are afraid to label anything as being “bad”, let alone evil! Thus having strayed so far from being able to discern right from wrong, they need to have sin defined for them.

What Is Sin?

When approaching baptism, as stated earlier, Christians must be convicted of their need to turn from sin. They may not understand everything that is wrong in their lives, but they will surely know they have been going the wrong way, according to the way of this evil age under the influence of Satan; and they will wholeheartedly desire to turn their lives around in order to follow Christ. They must be convicted they need a savior.

What is sin? The King James version of the Bible gives a straight answer:

1 John 3:4: Whoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law. KJV

What is the law this scripture is referring to? The Bible is a book of law. There are many scriptures in it that lay down various laws that govern social behavior; but for now, the Ten Commandments make a good starting point. Christ explained this in the following passage:

Matthew 19:16-19: Now behold, one came and said to Him,

“Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” 17 So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” 18 He said to Him, “Which ones?” Jesus said, “You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ 19 ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” NKJV

Christ did not list all the commandments, but mentioned enough of them that the young man and all those who were listening would understand. He was telling them that the great moral code God had given to mankind was to be respected and observed if anyone hoped to have eternal life.

Instead of upholding such laws, however, this present “evil age” of man tells us laws that are against lying, stealing and adultery are outmoded and old-fashioned; and some “Christian” preachers even proclaim such laws have been done away with. That’s incredible, but true! But that explains why so many professing Christians don’t even know what sin is today. On the whole, our society doesn’t really know God, and many don’t care to know Him—we are living in a godless age. This is the age from which Peter said a person must be saved. Do you need to be saved? Paul thought so! He said:

Ephesians 2:1-3: And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air (Satan the Devil), the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh

and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. NKJV.

Paul is saying in these verses that true Christians were once “sons of disobedience”—disbelieving and disobeying God’s laws—no different from all other people on this earth.

All of us are infected with wrong thoughts and attitudes that have been handed down to us from the societies in which we live. They have been implanted in our hearts and minds without our even realizing it. Jesus said, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies (Matthew 15:19). We must seek to change our motives and attitudes. With the help of God our most inward thoughts must be cleansed. That is why Peter stated in Acts 2:38 that we must first repent then be baptized. In order to be baptized, we must repent of being disobedient to God’s laws. Once we have come to genuine repentance, we should go on immediately to seek baptism. Then something truly amazing happens.

God’s Holy Spirit

As stated earlier, as human beings we do not have eternal life inherent in us. We are fleshly, made from the dust of the ground. There is nothing lasting about us. The Bible simply states, “the soul that sinneth (that’s all of us) shall die.” That is, we go back to the dust from which we came. But the Bible also talks about being saved from the “eternal” death that awaits us all. Besides being baptized, then, what more do we need in order to be saved from this certain death?

After coming up out of the watery grave, something wonderful happens. Let's take a look at what happened to Christ once he came up out of the water:

Matthew 3:16: When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. NKJV

While Christ was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth, his baptism was the example he set for all of us, to show us how we were to receive God's Holy Spirit! The scripture above shows that the Holy Spirit descended upon Christ. In this instance, and so that we could understand, it appeared to settle upon him as though it were a white dove (While this manifestation of the Holy Spirit as a dove did not happen again, it gave those watching Christ's baptism the certainty he had received it).

Once baptized, God's Holy Spirit is given to us also. It is the helper Christ told his disciples he would send to them—the helper that enables true Christians to live the way of God and to keep His laws (John 16:7):

John 16:7: Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him (it) to you. NKJV

Without baptism and the receipt of the Holy Spirit, which is the power God gives a Christian to help him or her live a godly life, one cannot hope to keep God's laws perfectly. And even having the Holy Spirit dwelling in us will not prevent us from sinning again. We can still fall back into our

old ways, the ways of this world, and we can sin. But it does give us the strength to resist sin! Therefore, we must always be on our guard against sin, even after baptism, and must be quick to repent if we do sin, claiming the sacrifice of Christ to cover our sin.

Without God's Spirit, God's laws are not easy to comprehend because they are spiritual laws—that is they are laws that express the character and nature of God; and they define every human behavior, whether it be good or evil. The spiritual laws are to govern not only our acts, but also the motives and attitudes behind our actions—God's Spirit even gives us control over the workings of the mind! Christ made it clear we can break the commandments in thought alone. No action is necessary:

Matthew 5:28: But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. NKJV

Breaking God's law starts with the wrongful thought, because it is the thought that gives life to the wrong actions that follow it:

James 1:14: But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. NKJV

The sinful thought ends in wrongful actions, which bring us under the death penalty again, unless we claim Christ's sacrifice as payment of our sin, and repent of our wrongdoing:

James 1:15: Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. NKJV

It is the Spirit of God dwelling in us that gives us the power to resist and overcome sin. It is the very nature of God dwelling in us, and it is through the Holy Spirit that Christ lives his life in us. It is the power of the Holy Spirit working in our minds that brings us to “perfection” in character so that we can attain eternal life. Without the Holy Spirit, we are not of Christ—we are none of his. We must be baptized to receive this amazing and powerful Spirit:

Romans 8:9: But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. NKJV

What You Must Believe

In Mark 16:16 quoted earlier, Christ told his disciples that those who believe and are baptized will be saved. What is it that they must believe? They must believe Christ! Many believed in Christ when he was on this earth, and they believe in Christ now; but they do not believe what he said, what he taught. Neither do they believe they must do the things he taught:

Matthew 7:21-26: Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

Christ also said we must believe the Gospel:

Mark 1:14-15: Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." NKJV

What is the gospel Christ said we must believe? It is HIS gospel, the Gospel of the Kingdom of God – the kingdom he is going to establish upon this earth when he returns (For more understanding of this topic, download or request our free booklet *The Gospel According To Christ* from our website at Wonderfulworldtomorrow.org). To understand Christ, you must understand his gospel message!

Much of Peter's sermon in Acts 2, given on the day of Pentecost, describes the time that is just ahead at the end of man's age. Peter's admonition to heed his words (Acts 2:14) was to impress upon the crowd that the end of the age of man is coming, and the age of Christ's rule over the earth will replace it, making mention of the throne Christ will occupy.

It is for certain that if we desire to be saved, we must also desire to be in the Kingdom of God because that is what Christ's gospel tells us, and we are to believe him! He tells us he is returning to this earth to establish his Father's kingdom and that all who are saved will enter into that kingdom, for all eternity. We must believe Christ when he said the Kingdom of God would one day rule the earth. We must believe in the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of all mankind. And perhaps the most important thing of all, we

must believe in the resurrection of Christ so that we can be saved. Today he sits on the throne of God, from which he will return to establish the Kingdom of God on this earth. Believing this message gives us the motivation to repent and be baptized. There cannot be a true baptism unless we believe Christ died for our sins, that he has risen and that he is returning to establish his Father's kingdom on this earth—that he was and is the true son of God:

Acts 8:36-37: Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" 37 Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." KJV

A Brief Review

At this point it would be good to recap what has been explained so far: To escape the perversity of this evil age of man, a person must believe in Christ and his Gospel and all that it means; and one must also repent of the breaking of God's commandments, and must commit to striving to live according to all of God's laws. Once this point is reached, it is critical to be baptized by full immersion in water. There should be no delay if at all possible.

How does this bring salvation? Upon coming up out of the water, the baptized person is cleansed of sin, completely renewed. Then he or she is ready to receive the Holy Spirit of God; and as shown, the Holy Spirit is given to the individual, much in the same way the 'white dove' descended upon Christ.

Something More Is Still Required

To complete the baptismal ordinance that starts the person on the road to a new life in Christ, there is yet one more symbolic act that must be performed. This final act is most easily described by the example recounted in Acts 8:14-18:

Acts 8:14-18: Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, 15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16 For as yet He (better translated it) had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. NKJV.

The laying on of hands and praying over the person following their total immersion in water is symbolic of setting the person apart . What is meant by the laying on of hands? It is simply the placing of the baptizer's hands upon the head of the individual being baptized as a symbolic act. By this act, the person is set apart from the "unbaptized", and is presented before God with a short prayer for the purpose of receiving God's Holy Spirit. The receiving of the Holy Spirit is the receipt of the "earnest payment" of the gift of eternal life.

Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. NKJV

Ephesians 1:13-14:after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, 14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased

possession, unto the praise of his (Christ's) glory. KJV

As shown earlier, without the Holy Spirit you are not Christ's (Romans 8:9). And as explained in the scripture above, the Holy Spirit is the earnest or down payment of eternal life that will be given to us in full when we are resurrected into the Kingdom of God. Without having received the gift of the Holy Spirit, a person cannot enter the Kingdom of God!

An Unbreakable Promise

The receiving of God's Spirit by the laying on of hands is conditional. God's Spirit will only be given if you repent, believe, and are baptized—fully immersed—then experience the laying on of hands (upon your head) by the one who is baptizing. If these prerequisites are met, the gift of the Holy Spirit is a literal, unbreakable promise from God:

Acts 2:38-39: Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." NKJV

Upon receiving the Holy Spirit, the convert is on the road to the Kingdom of God.

After Baptism, Then What?

Receiving the Holy Spirit at baptism is only the beginning for a Christian. Once baptized, the Christian is set upon a

path that takes him or her through the conversion process. Conversion means becoming Christ-like: growing in grace and knowledge over your lifetime, overcoming sin, and remaining faithful and obedient to God, until the end of your natural life. Those who are to receive eternal life in the Kingdom of God must overcome the evils of this world now, in this life. They must overcome the rebelliousness of their human nature within, and the influence of the perverse generation without, and the temptations of Satan, the god of this world, who preys upon our weaknesses. These three enemies of righteousness are weak in comparison to God's powerful Spirit, delivered to us at baptism. They can all be overcome, and we can receive eternal life. To him who overcomes, God promises eternal life in the kingdom and an inheritance of "all" things (Revelation 21:7, Revelation 3:5, Revelation 3:12, and Revelation 3:21). And our salvation all begins with baptism when the Holy Spirit is received.

As mentioned earlier, at baptism the Bible states you are sealed with the Holy Spirit, which is an earnest payment or down payment towards eternal life.

The Holy Spirit actually dwells in the new Christian to give him or her the strength to be like Christ—the strength needed to overcome. It is a gift of power, and in some ways is similar to the energy we have from our human bodies that gives us the strength to live our physical lives. Receipt of the Holy Spirit provides us with spiritual power that develops in us a spirit-led mind that others cannot possess. It works in us to root out evil and build up a sound mind within us—a mind that has the strength to turn away from the former ways and live according to God's commandments, which are the way of love (2Timothy 1:7). God's Holy Spirit imparts

the very nature of God to us, developing in us a mind centered on living a way that produces spiritual fruit, not the fruit of this perverted, rebellious age:

Galatians 5:19-23: Now the works of the flesh (without God's Spirit) are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the (Holy) Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control (the very nature of God and Christ). Against such there is no law. NKJV

Only by living a spirit-led life can one expect to receive immortality in the Kingdom of God. Christ will only recognize those who have received the Holy Spirit when he returns. All those who have not received it in this age, will have an opportunity to do so in the Kingdom of God when they turn to Christ. All those who have already died without knowing Christ will be resurrected to life and given an opportunity for eternal salvation. Eventually all mankind will have an opportunity for salvation! Paul attests to this resurrection in the book of Acts when he says:

Acts 24:15: I have hope in God,...that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. NKJV

A description of this resurrection is found in the Book of Ezekiel, chapter 37.

Counting The Cost

Some of this world's churches teach that children should be baptized. But can a child truly repent? Can an infant know about sin? Would it be possible for a child to understand his or her human nature is contrary to the laws of God? Also, Christ tells us to count the cost when we consider baptism. A child cannot "count the cost." What does it mean to count the cost? Christ used the following illustration:

Luke 14:28-33: For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it — 29 lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. 33 So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. NKJV

Everyone who seeks to be baptized must count the cost of following Christ. It is not easy for a mature person to do so, let alone a child. A child cannot take on such a heavy responsibility.

Baptized Into The Body

When considering baptism, a person may mistakenly think they are being baptized into a certain Christian denomination. But this is not correct. Rather than being

baptized in order to become a member of a certain physical congregation or denomination, the Bible tells us we are baptized into and thus put into the spiritual Body of Christ:

1 Corinthians 12:13 and 27: For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.....27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. NKJV

Once a person has repented of his or her sins and determined to live a life of overcoming—keeping God’s laws—being guided by the Holy Spirit, baptism can occur. Then, and only then, the individual becomes a member of God’s household; and in the Bible that household is referred to as the Church of God—it is God’s church, not the church of any person or organization:

Ephesians 2:19: Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, NKJV

God’s household bears his name:

Ephesians 3:14-15: For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, KJV

Acts 20:28: Therefore (you ministers) take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. NKJV

The Church of God—that is God’s own church—is where God has placed His true ministers to feed his children so that they may grow in grace and knowledge about spiritual matters and God’s way of life. The ministry of the church is admonished to give great diligence as being overseers of the church of God, which is God’s own household.

Yes, there is a Church of God—a body of believers who are organized and taught by those chosen by God to be ministers. They are called by God’s own name, and the individual members are admonished to congregate together when and where they can on a regular basis for fellowship and instruction. God’s message about His household is clear. He personally adds members to it and then provides instruction for them through His ministers so that they can continue to grow in His ways. A baptized member needs the teaching, fellowship, and strengthening that comes with being part of the Church of God:

Hebrews 10:24-25: ...let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. NKJV

In 2 Peter 3:18 the Christian is admonished to continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the ongoing lifetime work of a Christian, and it is enhanced by the assembling together with the household of God—the Church of God—wherever possible, to be taught and guided in spiritual matters by a chosen minister of Jesus Christ. (For more information about the Church of

God, please request our free re-print article, GOD'S TRUE CHURCH – What is it, Where is it? We offer the article in both hard copy and as an email attachment.)

Not all churches, however, that call themselves the Church of God are in fact God's church. Some have usurped that name, masquerading as God's church. They are counterfeit. Because of that, it is important to understand God's church bears a direct resemblance to the way Christ showed Christians they were to walk. They will follow his example. The true Church will keep God's laws, they will be obedient, humble people demonstrating sound-mindedness; and will, above all else, demonstrate the fruits of God's Holy Spirit in their lives. They will meet together in a decent, orderly fashion to learn quietly from the ministry God has given to them for their edification.

Are You Ready?

Isn't it amazing that the process by which mankind may receive the gift of the Holy Spirit is **COMMANDED** by God. Mankind is commanded to receive eternal life! God desires that for every human being, past and present. Christ commanded his disciples to preach the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God and to baptize those who believed. Believed what? The message of the coming Kingdom of God. Those who didn't believe were to be condemned to a later resurrection (Mark 16:15 and 16). Those who were baptized were to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In one unusual circumstance, Peter saw that the household of a gentile named Cornelius had received the Holy Spirit

before being baptized. However, once Peter arrived, the Spirit of God led them to be baptized as well (Acts 10:48). Such exceptions to the normal order are very rare.

It is amazing that much of the professing Christian world teaches the meaningless exercise of “giving your heart to the Lord” as opposed to repenting and being baptized in the manner already discussed. They teach sprinkling a little water over one’s head is sufficient for baptism, missing the entire point of the symbolism that is so rich and important. It is imperative to understand God does not recognize such baptism ceremonies, nor does He promise to give His Holy Spirit to those who do anything other than what the Bible teaches us. Following His ordinance of baptism is the only way to truly become a disciple of Christ—one in whom Christ is living his life through the power of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 2:20).

After reading this booklet and understanding the ordinance of baptism, you may ask, “When should I be baptized?” The answer is obvious. A person should be baptized when he or she has come to true repentance and desires with a whole heart to turn to Christ. When a person truly repents and believes in Jesus Christ as their personal savior, and believes the message of the Kingdom, which Christ preached, they should be baptized as soon as a true servant of God is available to baptize them. In Acts 16 there is an account of Paul being jailed in Philippi. In this account, the jailer and his household were brought to repentance after witnessing certain miraculous events. Upon explaining God’s word to the jailer and his family, they were baptized in the middle of the night. It is an amazing and inspiring story that should be read by one who is considering baptism.

It should also be understood that a person is not ready for baptism simply because he or she has experienced a temporary human sorrow over something they have done wrong that evokes an emotional reaction. Emotion should accompany repentance, but a temporary or fleeting emotion that is drummed up or is merely a reaction to some situation is not a manifestation of true repentance. As discussed earlier, repentance is a deep and abiding awareness of sin that generates a commitment to turn away from the past sinful life one has led in this perverted evil age. It is a real change in the mind and the heart toward obeying God's Word. It is not just sorrow over having an awareness you have been sinful. However, when one has come to repentance and a true representative of God is contacted who can perform the baptism, there is no further reason to wait.

Seeking Counsel

Having read through this booklet, if you believe God has led you to repentance, and you feel you are now ready to be baptized, you should seek counseling from a minister of God in preparation for your baptism. If you would like to counsel for baptism with one of our ministers please e-mail us at:

webmaster@wonderfulworldtomorrow.org

Or you may write us at:

The Church of God

P.O. Box 3332

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You may also leave your telephone number with our answering service and we will return your call. Our telephone number is a toll free call—**1-877-449-6753**.

Also, we invite you to join us on the Worldwide Web at:

Wonderfulworldtomorrow.org

When you visit us there, you will have an opportunity to gain more insight into what God requires for Christians today. Also, you will be able to listen to our daily broadcast, The Wonderful World Tomorrow, as Steven LeBlanc explains today's news in light of Bible prophecy. And, you will be invited to download free literature explaining much more about God's way of life. We hope to see you online on the web, and soon!

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