

The True Meaning of Christian Baptism

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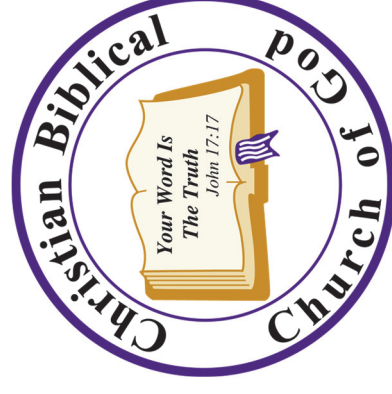
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Recommended:
*The Holy Bible in its Original Order—A Faithful Version with
Commentary*

Sermons Available on Baptism:

The True Meaning of Christian Baptism

According to Scripture, baptism is one of the most profound events that will ever take place in a person's life. As a uniquely symbolic ceremony, baptism is full of deep spiritual meaning and marks a key turning point in the new believer's life.

Unfortunately, mainstream Christianity's view of water baptism fails to accurately represent the biblical teaching on the subject. Tainted by the traditions of men, this sacred ceremony has become a mere "religious experience." Indeed, as with many doctrines of the Bible, men have misused and distorted the Scriptures in order to reflect their own viewpoints.

Properly understood, baptism is much more than a public demonstration of one's faith in Christ as personal Savior—for baptism expresses the believer's fundamental *covenant pledge* necessary for the forgiveness of sin and the granting of the Holy Spirit of God. As such, it marks the beginning of a life-long personal relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ! Moreover, as this booklet will emphasize, baptism pictures the *end* of one's ungodly, sinful way of living and the *beginning* of a new spiritual way of living.

If you are being called by God to become a true follower of Christ, you will in time desire to be baptized. Thus, it is absolutely essential to come to a correct understanding of this benchmark event. What exactly does baptism picture? How is it performed? How does one prepare for this crucial occasion? This booklet will answer these fundamental questions!

Chapter One

Repentance— The Foundation for Baptism

The most important prerequisite for baptism is that the believer experience genuine, profound *repentance*. Simply put, to “repent” means to *turn around* and go the other way! When John the Baptist began his ministry, he baptized believers unto *repentance*: “Now in those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’ ” (Matt. 3:1-2). Many were baptized “confessing their sins” (verse 6). Reacting to the highly corrupt Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, John demanded that they “produce fruits worthy of repentance” (verse 8).

John was asking these pious Jewish leaders for *evidence* of repentance—evidence that they had begun to *change* their lives. Repentance means coming to the knowledge and understanding that you are a sinner—that you have not only *lived in sin*, but that you *are*, inherently, a sinner (Rom. 3:23; 5:12). True repentance will be apparent by *changes* in the way a person thinks and lives. As we will see, baptism marks the beginning of a new way of life *free from sin*. Thus, repentance—*turning away from sin*—is the foundational first step.

In order to fully understand repentance, we must understand *sin*.

Letting the Bible Define Sin

Exactly *what* is sin? Sin is defined in the Bible as the *breaking* of God’s laws and commandments. Anything a person does that is contrary to the laws and commandments of God constitutes sin. The apostle John wrote, “Everyone who practices sin is also practicing lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4)—or “sin is the transgression of the law” (*KJV*).

Contrary to what you may have been taught, Jesus said He did *not* come to abolish the Law: “Don’t think that I’ve come to destroy the law or the prophets. I’ve not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17). To “fulfill” means to magnify or amplify the

If you have read and understood the information in this booklet and feel you are ready for baptism, please contact us. We will be most happy to assist you in this life-changing event.

God bless you as you prepare for this most wonderful and momentous occasion!

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then ask you some important questions concerning your commitment and readiness for baptism. You will be told that you are not being baptized into any organization, but into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (because it comes from the Father).

Following a prayer affirming your commitment to God, the immersion takes place. After you come up out of the water, the minister will apply the laying on of hands and ask God for the begetting of His Holy Spirit—commending you as a newly begotten Christian into the hands of God the Father and Jesus Christ. The baptism is complete, and there is great rejoicing over you as a new brother (or sister) in Christ.

God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the angels will be rejoicing as well. Jesus said, “I tell you likewise, there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, more than over ninety-nine who have no need of repentance” (Luke 15:7).

You may prefer to have only a few close friends and family members attend, or you may choose to invite many brethren and family members. You may prefer to be alone with the minister, which is proper as well.

Some have asked about being *re-baptized*. Re-baptism is strictly administered on an individual basis and depends on the circumstances involved. For example, a person may be a candidate for re-baptism if they have come to see that they were not properly prepared at the time of their original baptism. Perhaps they did not understand baptism, or did not truly repent from the heart. Sometimes it is simply a case where the person baptized was too young and immature, but they have subsequently come to a greater level of understanding and preparedness because God still is working with them. Or, perhaps they were pressured into baptism, which should never be the case. Perhaps some have not had the required laying on of hands.

If one feels strongly that he or she needs to be re-baptized, this is between them and God—and they should not be denied such a request.

God’s greatest desire for you as an individual is that you become a member of His spiritual family—and baptism is the first step in that direction. If you are considering baptism, ask God for His wisdom and guidance. He earnestly desires to help you!

meaning of God’s laws—making them even more binding! Verse 18 shows that as long as heaven and earth remain, the Law would remain in force. “Therefore, whoever shall break [even] one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whoever shall practice and teach them, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19). Jesus also taught, “If you love Me, keep the commandments—namely, My commandments” (John 14:15). God’s laws and commandments are of the utmost importance to Him. The apostle Paul was inspired to remind us of what God said through the prophet Jeremiah: “I will [write] My laws in their hearts, and I will inscribe them in their minds” (Heb. 10:16). These passages clearly prove that the laws of God have not been abolished, as some wrongly assume. The fact is, God’s laws and commandments are designed to *protect us* from harm by *defining* sin (Rom. 7:7). Without the laws and commandments of God, we would never *know* what is sin and what is righteousness (Psa. 119:172).

Understanding the significance of sin is vital in understanding the purpose of baptism. Sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:2)—and brings us under the penalty of death (Rom. 6:16, 23; James 1:15). You must come to realize that the sacrifice and blood of Christ is the *only payment* for such sin (John 3:16; Rom. 3:24-25). Only upon genuine, godly repentance of sin and the acceptance of Christ as personal Savior for the forgiveness of sin can the new believer be baptized (Acts 2:38). This brings about the complete remission of the believer’s sins and his or her full reconciliation to God.

Does this mean that after you are baptized you will never again sin? No, for we all stumble from time to time. But after you are baptized and have begun to strive to live God’s way, you will *no longer live in sin*, as does much of the world. Because of God’s love, He has provided a Savior Who takes away the sins of the world. John wrote, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And yet, if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate [one who takes our side] with the Father; Jesus Christ the Righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2). *Propitiation* means a continuous atonement or ongoing condition of mercy.

Repentance Begins with God's Calling

In mainstream Christianity, many new believers begin their “religious experience” by attending an “evangelistic campaign” or a “church revival.” In all likelihood, they are told that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”—that “the wages of sin is death”—and that they need to “give their heart to the Lord” so they can “get saved.” They are no doubt warned that if they delay “accepting Jesus” they might miss out on going to heaven and end up in an ever-burning hell. Participants at such meetings typically respond, “Yes, yes, I need to give my heart to the Lord.” They are urged to “invite” Jesus into their lives: “Lord Jesus, enter my heart!” They are then assured that they are “saved.” *Wrong!* This is a *false* “conversion” based on *emotion*, the misapplication of Scripture, and a misunderstanding of salvation itself. Such a person is no more “saved” than the proverbial church mouse!

To begin with, you cannot “invite” Jesus into your life. Rather, God *invites you* to enter into a personal relation with Him through Christ. Notice: “No one can come to Me unless the Father, Who sent Me, *draws him...*” (John 6:44). Jesus repeats this vital point in verse 65, stating that “no one can come to Me unless it has been given to him from My Father.”

God has to do the calling—*first*—or you, of yourself, cannot come to Christ. God stirs up your heart and mind to desire the truth, to desire to know Him, to desire to understand why you are the way you are—why your life is such a mess. He helps you to see that you *can repent* and change. As a matter of fact, the Bible says “many are *called* but few are *chosen*.” And if *many* are called and *few* are chosen, how is it that there are millions of professing Christians?

Contrary to what is taught in the churches of this world, God is *not* offering salvation *at this time* to the whole world (He *will* at Christ's return). Rather, God must presently call *individuals* as He sees fit—“as many as the Lord our God may call” (Acts 2:39). But how does God call? He reaches down and draws you to Him through His Spirit and through circumstances in your life. He opens your mind to understanding. He helps you to see how desperately you need a *real relationship* with Him.

Has God begun to call you? Has God given you a desire to

Chapter Three

Are You Ready For Baptism?

Baptism is one of the most profound events that can take place in a person's life. As an irrevocable *covenant* wherein the believer *symbolically dies* in a watery grave, baptism is your *pledge* to be faithful to the end. If you are faithful to the end, you will receive eternal life, with eternal glory and splendor, at the first resurrection when Jesus returns.

Baptism is *not* an initiation, nor does it signify that you have joined some organization. Rather, in baptism you are immersed into the very *body of Christ*. Thus, baptism is a serious undertaking to consider.

In preparing for baptism, you need to carefully reflect on your life, examining how you have lived—and foster a deep desire to change your former ways. You can accomplish this by making God a part of your daily life *now*—praying, studying the Bible, and yielding to Him in every way. *Count the cost*. Ask yourself: Are you willing to *give up your whole self* in the “death” of baptism to receive the Holy Spirit and the promise of eternal life? Are you willing to commit yourself to a life of obedience to God's commandments, to growth and to overcoming?

If you desire to be baptized, you should be *properly counseled* to determine whether you have truly repented to God and have accepted Christ as your personal Savior. Such counseling is important in determining whether an individual has the *fruits of repentance* and a genuine desire to live God's way of life. Of course, *only God* can know the heart. A minister cannot truly know your heart—but can only offer counsel and come to a reasonable conclusion that you are truly repentant in your desire to be baptized.

If you are being called by God, you must respond by stepping out in faith and beginning to live His way of life. *Then* He will lead you to repentance and baptism.

What Takes Place at Baptism?

At baptism, you and the minister will both enter the water, which must be sufficient for total immersion. The minister will

despised has God chosen—even the *things that are counted as nothing*—in order that He might bring to nothing the things that are.”

God is going to bring all of this world’s so-called wisdom, might and high-mindedness to nothing. “So that no flesh might glory in His presence [we are to glory only in God]. But you are of Him in Christ Jesus, Who was made to us wisdom from God—even righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; so that, as it is written, ‘The one who glories, let him glory in *the Lord*’ ” (verses 29-31).

seek Him, to understand His Word? Has God caused you to want to know the *purpose* of life? Indeed, the fact that you are reading this booklet is an indication that God *may be calling you*.

As God calls, He begins to reveal the need for *repentance*. In Acts 2, the apostle Peter was preaching on the Day of Pentecost: “Therefore, let all the house of Israel know with full assurance that God has made *this same Jesus, Whom you crucified*, both Lord and Christ” (verse 36). What was their reaction to Peter’s words? “Now after hearing this, they were *cut to the heart*”—or “*pricked in their hearts*” (verse 37). They no doubt understood that the Christ Peter was preaching was the *same* Jesus they had both known and *rejected*. They realized that *their sins* killed the Christ—because Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. In response they asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (same verse). For them, it was time to *take action* on what they had come to see.

God’s Solution to Sin: Repentance

Peter responded in verse 38: “*Repent* and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you yourselves shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (We’ll cover more on the Holy Spirit later.) Indeed, God must bring about circumstances in your life—in your heart and mind—that *lead you* to repentance, which here in Acts is called being “pricked” in one’s heart. You come to the understanding that you are a *sinner*—that you not only *have* sinned, but that you *are* a sinner. You develop a deep sorrow that leads to a *change* in your way of life—*repentance*—wherein you resolve in your mind to *turn* and go the other way. And *God* is actually causing this. Romans 2:4 says that it is by God’s goodness that you are *led to repentance*.

But ordinary human remorse over sin is not necessarily repentance. One must be wary of the “sorrow of the world” (II Cor. 7:10), which is really a passing emotional response resulting from the fact that one has been “caught” in some sin. Godly sorrow means you understand that the *wages* of your way of life, being sinful, are *death*—and that your sins have killed Christ. God’s graciousness is extended to those who have such real sorrow and repentance.

True repentance before God comes from a person's innermost being and results from wanting to change one's life completely. Genuine repentance is vital if you are to establish a relationship with God—for God is not interested in those who are superficial, but in those who truly desire a close and personal relationship. Recall that John the Baptist looked for “fruit worthy of repentance.” This means that if you are truly repentant, there will be evidence—*real change* in how you live your life. You will demonstrate an earnest desire to change your life completely and live according to God's will. By earnestly seeking genuine repentance, God will grant you the *gift of repentance*, teaching you how you should live. You will certainly have much sin to overcome—but you will demonstrate by your actions that you have sincerely repented in your heart and mind. Only those who have evidence of repentance should be baptized.

It is also essential that you go to God the Father and confess your sins before Him. If you are honest and sincere in your quest for forgiveness, He will not only forgive your sins but will also forget them. When you come to God in genuine humility, remorseful for the sins you have committed, He will forgive your sins—and cast them away. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psa. 103:12). Upon godly repentance, God is able to remove your sins even from His mind. Notice Isaiah 43:25: “I, even I, am He who blot out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins.” God is indeed *rich in mercy* toward those who truly repent of their sins (Psa. 86:5).

To better understand godly repentance, study the example of King David of Israel. His prayer of repentance in Psalm 51 is a prime example of deep repentance. Also study Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9:3-19, another fine example.

Repentance is also an *ongoing process* which takes place daily. A repentant attitude demonstrates humility and shows God that we *fear Him*—which means to stand in awe of His almighty power. Repentance means that we are willing to fully submit to God's will—to keep the commandments of God. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep the commandments—namely My commandments” (John 14:15).

Repentance and baptism result in the believer's *justification*. The term “justification” simply means to be *made*

tests—and the ever-present struggle to overcome our carnal nature and the influences of Satan's world. Make no mistake, you *will* face tests and trials. Why? Because God must *prove* your faithfulness; He must *see* your obedience; He must come to *know* your character.

But as Psalm 23 so wonderfully demonstrates, God will be with us. Indeed, we can have this absolute confidence in God:

“The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want [I shall lack nothing]. He makes me to lie down in green pastures [fed spiritually, from His Word]; He leads me beside the still waters [He will bring peace to you]. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake [the good works we are to have]. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death [sore trials], I will fear no evil, for You are with me [Jesus said, “I will never, no not ever, leave you or forsake you.”]; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies....” (verses 1-5).

The reference to “enemies” refers to being under adverse circumstances, even persecution from others. Most *true* Christians experienced persecution in some form—so you can expect it. But *whatever* the circumstances that come upon us, God will be there.

Continuing: “You anoint my head with oil [symbolic of the Holy Spirit]; my cup runs over [because nothing can bring fulfillment to your life like having a close relationship with God]. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (verses 5-6).

Always keep in mind that to the world, we, as God's called and chosen ones, are *nothing*. But God takes that which is *nothing*—those *rejected, despised*, and considered to be the *least*—and transforms them, through the power of conversion and the resurrection, into eternal sons and daughters. Notice I Corinthians 1:26-28. “For you see your calling, brethren, that there are *not many who are wise according to the flesh, not many who are powerful, not many who are high-born [royalty] among you*. Rather, *God has chosen the foolish things of the world so that He might put to shame those who are wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world so that He might put to shame the strong things*. And the low-born of the world, and the

repented, been baptized, and received the Holy Spirit of God, you walk in grace, you live in grace, you continue to confess your sins to Him, and continue to *keep His commandments*. Verses 4-6: “The one who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. On the other hand, if anyone is keeping His Word, truly in this one the love of God is *being perfected* [a lifelong process]. By this means we know that we are in Him. Anyone who claims to dwell in Him is obligating himself also to walk even as He Himself walked.”

A Life of Overcoming, Trial and Testing

God does not expect anyone to be perfect in knowledge before they are baptized; rather, we are to “grow in grace and knowledge” *after baptism* (II Pet. 3:18). But He does want us to enter into baptism with our eyes wide open. As previously mentioned, we are to *count the cost* to see if we are willing to finish the course (Luke 14:28). We must be willing to “bear our own cross” and put God before all others (verses 26-27). You signify to God, by going through with your baptismal *covenant*, that you *will* finish the course—that you will remain true and faithful to God in all circumstances.

We are told to “take up our cross daily” (Luke 9:23). This means you may be confronted with problems and trials even on a daily basis. And Christ expects you to be faithful in everything—to never turn back on Him. *But know that God is always there with you*. Just as we have committed ourselves to Christ, He has committed Himself to us. He said, “In no way will I ever leave you; no—I will never forsake you in any way” (Heb. 13:5). What a wonderful promise! Regardless of circumstances, God will never abandon us! David prayed, “When I am old and gray, forsake me not.” God will be with us throughout our lives—even into old age. In times of terrible trial and testing, God will be there. *He will never leave you!* God has committed Himself to you, and you have committed yourself to Him in a *covenant relationship* for eternal life. Always love Him, seek Him, and obey Him, and He will be at your side.

In time, every Christian comes to realize that their walk with God has not been exactly what they anticipated. The reality sets in that the Christian life is one punctuated by trials and

right with God. Justification takes place when the believer’s sins are removed by the blood of Christ and he or she is *put into right standing* with God. In order to receive God’s gift of justification, a person must *repent* toward God, *believe* in the sacrifice and blood of Christ for the remission of sins, and be *baptized* by immersion. The believer is then cleansed from sin and is without condemnation before God.

In Galatians 2:16, we read: “Knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but through the faith of Jesus Christ, we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by works of law; because *by works of law shall no flesh be justified*.” Justification, being put in *right standing* with God, cannot be accomplished through law-keeping—*of any kind*. No amount of law-keeping or obedience can erase one’s past sins. And even after conversion, Christians still sometimes sin. That fact alone makes *ongoing justification* by obedience impossible. Simply put, no work of *any* law can replace the atoning blood of Christ—or of Jesus *living in us* (verse 20).

Thus, Paul clearly states that we are justified by *faith* in Jesus’ sacrifice. But faith implies so much more than mere *belief*: You repent from the heart, are baptized, and enter into a covenant relationship with God. Yes, you *do* keep the commandments of God. Romans 2:13 states that “the hearers of the law are not just before God, but *the doers of the law shall be justified*.” Indeed, one cannot continue in a state of justification and *live* in sin.

Counting the Cost for Baptism

Worldly Christianity teaches a “come as you are” approach to following God. But baptism as defined in Scripture is not to be taken lightly. It represents a person’s *lasting commitment* that he or she will turn away from the ways of the world, with all of its lusts and enticements, and wholly follow God’s ways. In considering baptism, be *absolutely certain* that you have made a definite determination in your heart to follow the will of God. You should *not* be baptized if you have any doubt as to your belief in God or that His Word is the standard by which we are to live.

In preparation for baptism, you must “count the cost”—

understanding that such a commitment to God is for *life*. There can be no turning back. At baptism, *you enter into a covenant with God*. Thus, baptism becomes the most crucial decision you will ever make!

Jesus requires His followers to *give up everything*—including the self—in order to truly become His disciples. Christ used the example of “counting the cost” to demonstrate what is involved when contemplating a major decision in life. Baptism is just such a decision, involving *total* dedication to God. In Luke 14, Jesus said, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate [love less, by comparison] his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers and sisters, and, in addition, his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” (verse 26). Obviously, Christ is not telling us to *hate* anyone. This figure of speech means we are to put God *first*, above all else. This is part of our baptismal covenant—to love God *more than* anything or anyone else. Otherwise, it is *impossible* to be Jesus’ disciple. In verse 27, He added: “And whoever does not carry his [own] cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple”—again demonstrating the need to *do whatever is necessary* in our commitment to God’s way.

Jesus then refers to “counting the cost” to determine if one’s *level of commitment* is sufficient to the task. “For which one of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and *count the cost*, whether he has sufficient for its completion; lest perhaps after he has laid its foundation [he] is not able to finish.... Or what king, when he goes out to engage another king in war, does not first sit down and take counsel, whether he will be able with ten thousand to meet him who is coming against him with twenty thousand?... In the same way also, each one of you who does not *forsake all* that he possesses cannot be My disciple ” (verses 28-33).

To “forsake all” means that *nothing* can stand in the way of your commitment to God. You put God *first*. You are to love God with all your being. God wants you to *totally surrender* yourself to Him. When you accept Christ as personal Savior, you proclaim your willingness to change and obey God in *all* things. Your earnest desire must be this: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

“Counting the cost” for baptism is something you need to

Father—so when you slip up and sin, *you go to God and repent!* Notice I John 1: “If we [who are baptized] proclaim that we have fellowship with Him, but we are walking in the darkness [living in sin], we are lying to ourselves, and we are not practicing the Truth [the Word of God]. However, if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ, His own Son, *cleanses us from all sin*. If we say that we do not have sin [or that we do not have a *sinful nature*] we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our own sins [to God, not to some man], *He is faithful and righteous, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us” (verses 6-10).

When you sin, get on your knees in a private place and repent to God. Ask Him to forgive you and grant you more of His Spirit; ask Him for strength to help you overcome; ask Him to help you “bring every thought into captivity” (II Cor. 10:5). *Resolve to never repeat the sin*.

Above all, *do not become discouraged*—for that will allow Satan a foot-hold into your mind! Remember, *overcoming is a lifelong process*. Many years after baptism, Christians still struggle with sin. We all will. But we live under God’s grace. We don’t *live in sin*, but we do sin. When this happens, we confess our sin to God and more diligently seek His help to overcome.

Look at I John 2:1: “My little children, I am writing these things to you *so that you may not sin*. And yet, *if anyone does sin*, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous.” Christ is advocating for you. He sits at the right hand of God right now to intercede for all believers. And remember, *repentance* continues all through your Christian life. Verse 2: “And He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” The term *propitiation* means *constant atoning sacrifice*. Jesus’ sacrifice is *continually* applied (this was pictured anciently in type by the “continual” or “morning and evening” sacrifice—Ex. 29:38-39; Num. 28:3; Dan. 8:12).

Every time we come to God and repent and confess our sins, Jesus’ sacrifice is applied.

Continuing in verse 3: “And by this standard we know that we know Him: if we keep His commandments.” After you’ve

As we grow in understanding—as we study the Word of God and use the Spirit of God—our lives continue to change—sometimes slowly, imperceptively—but there is growth. As a new believer, remember that you belong to God and to Christ—for they are *in* you. As you build a close, loving relationship with God, His Holy Spirit will guide you in all things—giving discernment, wisdom, knowledge, and a true understanding of the Scriptures. With the help of the Holy Spirit, you can go forward and build on the foundation laid in Christ.

The Christian Struggle Against Sin

One of the things that plagues new believers is, “Whoops! I’ve sinned! Have I committed the unpardonable sin?” Some assume that once they are baptized they ought to be perfect. *No*—you are baptized *because you are imperfect*, because you are a sinner. And now you have to start *learning God’s way and learn to be led* by the Holy Spirit. *It is a process.*

The fact is, even after baptism you will not overcome human nature all at once. You no longer *live* in sin—but, because of human nature, you will find that you do sometimes sin. But we have, upon repentance, God’s promise of forgiveness. And only those who are truly *in Christ* have that forgiveness available.

Paul discusses the Christian’s *struggle* against sin in Romans 7. In verses 7-14, he essentially shows that once you are baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, you become hyper-aware of sin in your life. It is as if sin becomes “exceedingly sinful” (verse 13) or magnified—because now you are *convicted* of it in your mind. In verses 15-25, Paul says there were times he would sin—yet he didn’t want to sin; and there were times he wanted to do good, but couldn’t. In effect, he said, “There is this *conflict in me*, and only Christ can save me!”

Paul said this years *after* his baptism! He understood that his own nature was inherently evil and that only God could change it and help him overcome—through the Holy Spirit.

What should you do when you find that you have sinned? First, realize that you, as a baptized believer, are *under God’s grace*. Grace covers you like an umbrella—you live and walk in grace; you have faith through grace; you are continually led to repentance through grace. This grace gives you *access* to God the

think deeply about before making any commitment before God. You must genuinely want to change your life and be obedient to God—regardless of circumstances. If you fully understand this and are absolutely repentant before God—and you accept Jesus as your personal Savior—then you are well on the road to baptism.

Chapter Two

Your New Life in Christ

As we have seen, baptism requires that a person be called of God, experience genuine repentance, and thoughtfully examine their level of commitment by “counting the cost.” But what does baptism itself picture? As noted earlier, baptism is a turning point in the life of the new believer. It marks the *beginning* of a new way of life, and the *end* of an old way of life. In fact, it symbolizes the *death*—in a watery grave—of the “old man” of sin. This is why baptism is by *full immersion* in water—not a sprinkling.

By definition, *baptize*—from the Greek *baptizo*—means: “to immerse into.” This is why John baptized in the Jordan, where there was “much water” (John 3:23). At Jesus’ baptism, note that He “came up immediately out of the water” (Matt. 3:16). (Jesus, of course, did not need to be baptized, as He had no “old man” of sin; He was baptized as an example for us to follow.)

This immersion in a watery “grave” symbolizes the *death*—the absolute end—of the repentant believer’s former carnal life of sin. When the believer comes up out of the water, he or she *rises to newness of life*.

The Death of the “Old Man”—And ‘Newness of Life’

Paul explains the wonderful truth of baptism in Romans 6: “What then shall we say? Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound? MAY IT NEVER BE! We who *died to sin* [in baptism], how shall we live any longer therein?” (verses 1–2). Baptism is a *burial*, which is why you go all the way under the water, like being put into a grave. So infant baptism by sprinkling is a *false baptism* on two counts: sprinkling does not picture burial, and an infant has no idea what it is doing. Baptism is for mature adults who have “counted the cost” and are truly repentant.

When you enter into baptism, you *die to sin*—you must not “live any longer therein.” As noted earlier, we still sometimes sin, but we do not *live* in sin as a way of life.

Our abode with him.” The meaning is that the Father and Christ come to *dwell within you*.

When you are baptized and receive God’s Spirit, you become a *complete* person—and begin to possess the power needed to lead a godly life. This profound *gift* will guide you in your spiritual life, enabling you to overcome all things. When you receive the Spirit of God, you are receiving some of the power of God—not to make you better than anyone else, but to give you the strength to overcome human nature, to fight this world, and to fight Satan.

The new believer is to be *led* by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14) to walk in loving obedience to God through faith in Christ; to *develop the mind* of Christ; to keep the commandments and laws of God through the power of the Spirit; to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus; and to ultimately be faithful unto death.

Under the New Covenant, the laws and commandments of God are written in our minds—inscribed in our hearts through the Spirit (Heb. 8:10; 10:16). Paul wrote, “*Let this mind be in you*, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). Over time, the Holy Spirit imparts the very *mind* of Jesus to us—but only as we yield to God and draw close to Him in much prayer and study of the Bible.

In fact, when God’s Word is coupled with God’s Spirit, a unique thing happens. Notice I Cor. 2:10-12: “But God has revealed them [the truths of His plan] to us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things—even the deep things of God. For who among men understands the things of man except by the spirit of man which is in him? In the same way also, the things of God no one understands *except by the Spirit of God*. Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is of God, so that we might know the things graciously given to us by God.” (Also note verses 13-14.)

Indeed, if we hunger and thirst for the Word of God, we will be filled—because God has *opened our minds* to understanding. God freely gives it—and He freely gives His Spirit. But He requires *all of you*—your whole being *given to Him*. The key to personal growth is putting God *first*—loving Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength—which is the “first commandment” (Mark 12:30). Paul adds that we are to set our minds “on the things that are above, and not on the things that are on the earth” (Col. 3:2).

the heart—and cannot lead to salvation. As a ritual, it only pointed toward *spiritual circumcision*—which under the New Covenant is required of both Jew and Gentile for salvation.

Thus, baptism pictures the *death and burial* of the “old self”—and, in coming up out of the watery grave, it pictures *newness of life* for the believer. As a ceremony, baptism is the token of your *spiritual circumcision*—being converted in heart and mind. The believer then goes on to grow in grace and knowledge and overcome the pulls of the flesh through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God Leads Us to Personal Growth Through His Spirit

As God begins to deal with you—drawing you, leading you to repentance—the Holy Spirit is *with* you. But after baptism and the laying on of hands, the Holy Spirit is *within* you, in your mind. This is the circumcision of the heart—your *initial conversion*. Receiving God’s Spirit also constitutes your *begettal*—thus, you are like a newly begotten child. Now you must grow in grace and knowledge, grow in the mind of Christ, overcome your human nature—and that is the life-long *process of conversion*.

In order to become a new person in Christ, each baptized believer must be begotten with the Holy Spirit through the *laying on of hands*. Looking again at Acts 2:38, we see that, following repentance and baptism, the believer is to receive the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:17 shows that this final step is accomplished through the “laying on of hands.” Paul admonished Timothy to “stir up the gift of God”—the Holy Spirit—that was in him through the laying on of his hands (II Tim. 1:6). Thus, the *end result* of a proper baptism is the receipt of the Holy Spirit.

Just prior to His death, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit: “If you love Me, keep the commandments—namely, My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and *He shall give you another Comforter* that it may be with you throughout the age: even the Spirit of the truth, which the world cannot receive because it perceives it not, nor knows it; but you know it because it dwells with you, and *shall be within you*” (John 14:15-17). In verse 23, He adds, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and *make*

Paul continues: “Or are you ignorant that we, as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were *buried with Him though the baptism* into the death...” (verses 3-4). But just as Christ was raised to *life* by the Father, we are to walk in “newness of life” (verse 4) after coming up out of the water. Our life changes. We no longer live to the self, *we live to God*; we no longer live to please ourselves, *we live to help and serve others*; we no longer live our way, *we live God’s way*.

Continuing in verses 5-7: “For if we have been conjoined together in the likeness of His death [through baptism], so also shall we be in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this, that *our old man was co-crucified* with Him [in baptism] that the body of sin might be destroyed [through the process of growing and overcoming] so that we might no longer be enslaved to sin. Because the one who has *died to sin* [by baptism] has been justified from sin.”

The new believer is no longer a *slave* to sin, but is not entirely *free* of sin. Romans 7 (which we will examine later) deals with the Christian’s struggle with sin, showing that we still have human nature. Why does God leave the human nature in us? Because it is only through *overcoming* that we develop godly character and *prove to God* that we will always follow His way. Through this struggle we come to thoroughly hate sin! And while we have already experienced an initial repentance, we actually come to a *deeper repentance* as we continue to walk in the way of God. You begin to love God more, you understand what God is doing in your life, and you understand more deeply what Christ did for you by giving His life.

Continuing: “Now if we died together with Christ [in baptism], we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has any dominion over Him. For when He died, He died unto sin once for all; but in that He lives, He lives unto God. In the same way also, you should indeed *reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God through Christ* Jesus our Lord. Therefore, do not let sin rule in your mortal body by obeying it in the lusts thereof” (verses 8-12).

Before baptism, we were “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). God calls you from a world filled with sin—

having, for the most part, no true understanding of God or His spiritual way of life. But in baptism, after rising from the watery grave, God “makes you alive” (verse 1). Paul goes on to say that we “walked in times past according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air [Satan the devil], the spirit that is now working within the children of disobedience, among whom also we all once had our conduct in the lusts of our flesh, doing the things willed by the flesh and by the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as the rest of the world. But God, Who is rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses, has *made us alive together with Christ*. (For you have been saved by grace.)” (verses 2-5).

Look at verses 8-10: “For by grace you have been saved [from your sins and Satan] through faith, and this especially is not of your own selves [you didn’t find God, He found you]; it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto the good works that God ordained beforehand in order that we might walk in them.” We become the *workmanship* of God the Father—He is creating us *anew*, in the image of Christ. Thus, we are to live by every Word of God, *producing good works*—obedient to God’s laws and commandments, and loving others as ourselves.

This is the “newness of life” pictured by baptism. But as we will see, it is *not* an easy life.

Circumcision of the Heart

In baptism, the “old self” dies and the believer enters a whole new life in Christ. This turning point in the believer’s life is called becoming *converted*. Jesus said that unless we became *converted*—fully *changed* in our way of life—we could not enter the Kingdom of God (Matt. 18:3; Acts 3:19). This turning point is likened to being *circumcised*—in the heart, the spirit, as opposed to the flesh.

When God entered into an eternal covenant with Abraham, He designated physical circumcision as the token or *sign* of that covenant. “And God said to Abraham, ‘And you shall keep My covenant, you and your seed after you in their generations. This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between

Me and you and your seed after you. Every male child among you shall be circumcised. And you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin. And it shall be a *sign of the covenant* between Me and you. And a son of eight days shall be circumcised among you, every male child in your generations; he that is born in the house, or bought with silver of any foreigner who is not of your seed. He that is born in your house, and he that is bought with your silver, must be circumcised. And *My covenant shall be in your flesh* for an everlasting covenant” (Gen. 17:9-13).

But physical circumcision did not solve the problem of sin. Through animal sacrifices Israel experienced a *figure* of “justification”—but were not truly justified before God. In fact, throughout the Old Testament we see that without the *circumcision of the heart* Israel was never able to be faithful to God. This is a vital lesson—that without genuine conversion and the help of the Holy Spirit one cannot truly live God’s way. Thus, through Moses, God admonished the children of Israel to obey Him in everything—adding, “*circumcise the foreskin of your heart*, and be no longer stiff-necked” (Deut. 10:16). God was already pointing to the future New Covenant wherein the nation of Israel would become converted, circumcised in heart, and faithful always to His covenant (see Jer. 31:31-34).

Thus, physical circumcision was a type of the *spiritual circumcision* to come as a part of the New Covenant. Baptism can be likened to the token or sign of our *spiritual circumcision*—of our conversion. Just as the Israelites carried God’s covenant *in their flesh*, we enter into a covenant with God *in our spirit*—our hearts and minds. Baptism becomes the outward sign of this inward covenant. In Colossians 2, we read of Jesus “in Whom you have also been circumcised with the *circumcision not made by hands*, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ” (verse 11).

Paul also describes this circumcision of the heart in Romans 2: “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is external in the flesh; rather, he is a Jew [that is, a spiritual Jew] who is one *inwardly*, and *circumcision is of the heart, in the spirit* and not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God” (verses 28-29).

Physical circumcision, which under the Old Covenant was required of Jews (and also of Gentile proselytes), *does not change*