

Ten lessons on Christian Baptism

Should I be Baptized?

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First Spanish edition: 1997

English edition 2010

Source: www.philipnunn.com

We have prepared these pages to help new Christians understand the symbolic meaning of Baptism. It answers some of the common questions and then encourages obedience to the Lord Jesus: to get baptized.

The material can also be rearranged and used to teach a series of baptism classes.

Alternatively, the ten lessons in this course may be studied in the presentation of a Emmaus correspondence course.

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Scripture references are quoted from the NKJV

Ten Lessons on Christian Baptism

God has given us His Word to show us the way. That is why the Psalmist would sing: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105). As you progress through this course, ask the Lord to open your heart to respond to the truth you discover in His Word. We strongly suggest you look up, read and think about the Bible texts referred to in each lesson.

Lesson 1

Why do we baptize a Christian?

In the early stages of His ministry, the Lord Jesus taught and baptized (John 3:22-23). Later, He appears to have delegated the act of baptizing to his disciples (John 4:2). But let’s stop a moment and ask ourselves: Why were the followers of Jesus being baptized? Who invented the Christian baptism? Before He departed, the Lord Jesus gave his disciples some clear instructions: “Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). This is the baptism referred in this course as “Christian baptism.”

It is worth noticing that the practice of baptism begun much earlier. John the Baptist, for example, baptized. We find a number of baptisms in the Jewish tradition. In this course we shall make reference to some of these baptisms but only to distinguish them from the “Christian baptism,” which is the baptism that Christians should practice today. In this lesson we shall look at:

1. What is the meaning of the “Christian baptism”?
2. Why should you be baptized?
3. Why should you be a believer before you are baptized?

1. What is the meaning of the “Christian baptism”?

Christian baptism is a symbolic act through which a person that has received the Lord Jesus shows publically that he or she is a disciple of Lord Jesus. Baptism is, therefore, an external symbol representing an internal transformation. It consists in being immersed under water and then being lifted out, confessing that that he has died and raised with Christ.

The word “baptize” comes from the Greek word “BAPTIZO,” which means “submerge” or “plunge under.” This Greek word was also used by those who died cloth. The piece of cloth was submersed or “baptized” totally in the ink in order to die it. We understand, therefore, that baptism symbolizes a close identification. When a believer is baptized, he is visibly “submersed” in Christ (Romans 6:3) and in the Body of Christ which is the Church (1 Corinthians 12:13). This means that the person who is being baptized identifies himself visibly with the Lord and His Church.

2. Why should you be baptized?

A simple, basic and powerful answer is that you should be baptized because the Bible makes it clear that the Lord Jesus Christ wants every believer to be baptized. The words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 28:19 express baptism as a commandment for you and for me. The Lord Jesus desires and expects every Christian to be baptized.

The Lord Jesus does not talk about two types of believers: the baptized and the non-baptized. All believers seek to be baptized. If you are a Christian and you have not yet been baptized, your situation is not normal.

The apostles and the first believers took these instructions of the Lord Jesus very seriously. They preached the Word of God, and “those who gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:41). A little further on, in Acts 8:35,36, we read that Philip “preached Jesus” to an Ethiopian who returned from a visit to Jerusalem. At the end of this conversation, the Ethiopian asks Philip, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Why does the Ethiopian ask such a question? We must conclude that when Philip “preached Jesus,” when he shared the gospel message, he included teaching about baptism. In other words, if we do not preach, teach and promote Christian baptism, we are not communicating the complete gospel message. If we look at the examples that we find in the book of Acts, we find that, without exception, every new believer was baptized as soon as possible after his or her conversion.

We conclude, therefore, that the clear will of the Lord Jesus is that every Christian should be baptized.

3. Why should you be a believer before you are baptized?

Water baptism is simply a symbol; it is a representation of what occurred on the day of your conversion. When someone sincerely decides to yield his life to the Lord Jesus, he receives the Lord Jesus in his heart. From that very moment that person “dies” with Christ, is “buried” with Christ, and is “raised” with Christ. This is what is referred to as “identification with Christ.” When Jesus died and rose again, he carried the punishment that I deserved. It is as if I died and rose again with Christ. From God’s perspective, He considers that every believer has been crucified, has died, has been buried and has raised in Christ. That is why there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). Isn’t this wonderful? This identification occurs by God’s decree and becomes effective for every believer on the moment of his conversion. Nobody can undo or cancel it.

In the very instant that you and I yield our lives to the Lord Jesus, God identifies us with Christ, and He also identifies us with the Church, which is called the Body of Christ. The Church is not a denomination but the collection of all the true believers in the whole world. These two identifications (with Christ and with the Church) are spiritual acts, and they occur by God’s decree on the moment of our conversion. Once they happen, no-one can reverse them.

Baptism represents what occurs when we are converted. It is a visible symbol of an invisible internal transformation. In a symbolic way, a person is “buried” in the water, and comes out

“resurrected” from the water. It is like a short “drama” of a spiritual reality that occurred on the day of our conversion.

Once this symbolism is understood, what reason could there be to baptize someone who has not yet believed? The Biblical order is: first believe and then be baptized. Make disciples and baptize them. Surely only those who have the spiritual experience of new birth are in a position to represent their conversion in the waters of baptism. If a person has not been born again, they would be representing before God, the Church and the world something they have not yet lived. It would be something false.

A personal question

Perhaps this is the right moment to ask you: are you a true believer? Have you given your life to the Lord Jesus? Have you received eternal salvation and the forgiveness of all your sins through the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross? If your answer is “yes,” we thank God for His abundant grace, and then ask: and have you already been baptized?

Lesson 2

How are we saved?

Can a person be saved if he dies without being baptized? What is the relationship between salvation and baptism? What exactly do we have to do in order to become children of God? Let's look for clear answers in the Word of God. In this lesson we shall study:

1. Sin and eternal condemnation
2. God's plan to save humans
3. That which cannot save
4. What must I do to be saved?
5. What is the relationship between Christian baptism and salvation?

1. Sin and eternal condemnation

Most of us do not like to take medicine. I have not met the first person who enjoys an injection! But when we feel weak and become convinced that we are sick, we welcome the necessary injection. Sometimes we even pay someone to inject us! What changes our attitude towards the needle and the syringe is our sense of need. Something similar occurs in the spiritual world. In the Bible God tells us that we are all desperately ill. Our sickness is our desire to rebel against God. We chose to live ignoring the will of our Creator. The Bible calls this “sickness” SIN. God does not like this attitude of independence and rebellion that exists in our heart. Frequently we compare ourselves with other people who are also sinners and we conclude that we are not really that bad. But God statement is clear: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). With great sadness the prophet Isaiah exclaimed, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6). We are all sick. God's pure eye, which penetrates into the most intimate parts of my being, reveals that I sin often against Him. Daily we offend His holiness.

What is so terrible is that our “sickness” leads to eternal death, our sin condemns us. God, being holy and just, finds himself obliged to judge and punish the offending sinner. “For the wages [salary] of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). The punishment we deserve is eternal condemnation. Have you ever thought seriously about this? If Christ has not yet saved you, you are condemned (John 3:16). You are moving rapidly on the road towards Hell.

2. God’s plan to save humans

How can a sinner be saved? How can a holy God forgive a person that has offended Him so much? Let’s turn to the Bible to find the plan that God designed to solve this problem.

We, as filthy and lost sinners, cannot come close to a holy and pure God. Moved by His own great love, God himself took the initiative to save us. “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). By sending His beloved Son, that which was most precious to Him, God the Father has shown us how much He desires to save each man and each woman. Our many sins did not stop Him from loving us. Christ himself “bore our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24). The Lord Jesus carried in his body my sins and the punishment they deserved: the righteous anger of God. On the cross of Calvary, the Lord Jesus was punished for my sin, he cancelled my debt, he paid the penalty for my sin: he died for me.

3. That which cannot save

Some think that the good things we do can make amends for the bad things we do. They imagine a large scale where our bad things are on one side and our good things on the other, and as long as we have more good things than bad things we “pass the test.” Do not be deceived. God does not work that way. It doesn’t matter how many good works we do, they shall never be able to save us. “For it is by grace [God’s goodness] you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, NOT BY WORKS, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

If someone could gain God’s forgiveness and God’s salvation by his own efforts, the redeeming death of Christ would not be necessary. The fact that the Lord Jesus had to die is clear evidence that our own efforts will never be sufficient to save us. Regular assistance to a good Christian congregation will not save you. Neither will reading the Bible, saying prayers, being baptized, celebrating the Lord’s Supper or helping the needy. We are not saying that these things are wrong. What the Bible does say is that practicing these things will not save you, even if you do them in a serious and sincere way. We read in the Bible that Christ saved us, “NOT BY WORKS of righteousness [good works] which we have done...” (Titus 3:5). Are you trying to earn God’s forgiveness through your good behaviour? Consider this carefully: you will never be able to deserve God’s forgiveness.

4. What must I do to be saved?

Many of us with sincere hearts have asked this question. Praise God, in the Bible we find a clear and firm answer. The desperate jailor at Philippi asked Paul and Silas: “What must I do to be saved?” and the apostle replied “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:30-31). What does it mean to believe on the Lord Jesus? Of course it in-

cludes believing that Jesus existed as a person, but it means much more. Yes, believe on the Lord Jesus involves recognizing that the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is valid and effective for me, that He carried all my sins, that He was punished because of me, and that He is the only one that can save me. True faith in Jesus always involves sincere repentance and a movement away from all that displeases God (Acts 3:19).

If you are not yet saved, the Lord Jesus is right now knocking at the door of your heart. He is speaking quietly to your conscience encouraging you to admit you are a sinner and to invite him to come into your life, to forgive you, to clean you and to govern your life. Jesus is saying: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him..." (Revelation 3:20). Do you want to be born again? Express this sincere desire to the Lord. You could pray to Him and tell Him something like:

"Lord Jesus, I admit that I am a sinner and that I have offended you with my behaviour, my attitudes and my thoughts. Thank you for dying on that cross for me. Thank you for taking the punishment that I deserve. Now I invite you to come into my heart. Forgive me. Clean me. I give myself to you. Govern my life. Lord Jesus, thank you for your complete forgiveness. Help me now to move away from everything that displeases you. Please change me and transform my life so that it will be pleasing to you. Amen."

If you have expressed the content of this prayer to the Lord with humility and in reality, the Lord has heard you and accepted you. You have been saved. You may affirm with confidence that you are now a child of God!

5. What is the relationship between Christian baptism and salvation?

Christian baptism is an external symbol that reflects an internal change. It symbolizes that we have been born again. The Scriptures that we have looked at during this lesson clearly promise eternal life to those who believe (trust) in the Lord Jesus. Take note that these verses do not mention baptism. Consider another verse, John 1:12. "But as many as RECEIVED Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who BELIEVE in His name." It is evident that our salvation does not depend on whether or not we are baptized.

Given that in many cases baptism followed very soon after conversion, there are some texts in the Bible that seem to indicate that baptism is necessary for salvation. We shall look at some of these verses later on. Consider the instructions the Lord Jesus gave his disciples in Matthew 28:19-20. He told them to make disciples (believers committed to the Lord Jesus), to baptize them, and to teach them. This same order can be seen in different occasions in the book of Acts. Baptism didn't save these people. Their baptism was a public demonstration that they had been saved.

If salvation depended on baptism, there would be no hope for those who could not find someone to baptize them, or for those who are dying without any access to water. In the Bible we find an example of one of those exceptional situations: The thief on the cross next to Jesus asked the Lord to remember him in his kingdom. He received from the Lord himself a fantastic promise: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." This converted thief did not have the possibility of being baptized and yet he was saved (Luke 23:42-

43). If this converted thief would have been given the opportunity, we would naturally expect him to be baptized – as is normal. But he is a clear example of a person saved without being baptized.

A personal question

What we have now studied requires that you examine yourself before the Lord. Have you invited the Lord Jesus into your heart as your Lord and Saviour?

Lesson 3

Baptism and the security of our salvation

In the previous lessons we have looked at the purpose of baptism and the way in which God saves a repentant sinner. In this lesson we shall look at:

1. Can a true Christian lose his salvation?
2. What happens when you or I sin?
3. A few common misunderstandings about baptism

1. Can a true Christian lose his salvation?

This is a serious and an important question. How sure is our salvation? If our salvation would depend to some extent on our behaviour, we could never have the certainty of going to heaven. We could never know if our way of life was considered by God as faithful enough to guarantee our salvation. We would also live with the possibility that we could lose our salvation if we sinned moments before dying. No. **Our salvation does not depend on our behaviour but on the perfect and complete work of Jesus on the cross.** We cannot add anything to what the Lord Jesus has already accomplished.

Let us now consider a couple of Scriptures: In John 3:36 we read: “He who believes in the Son HAS everlasting life.” It does not say that he will have everlasting life if he is faithful or endures until the end of his life. It affirms that he HAS eternal life. The Lord Jesus said the same in John 5:24: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me HAS everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” The promise for the believer is secure: He “Shall not come into judgment;” he will NEVER be condemned! In Hebrews 7:25 we read that the Lord Jesus “is also able to save to the uttermost [forever] those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” The Lord Jesus does not only save us while we exhibit good behaviour. He has declared us saved, and saved for ever. “For by one offering He [Jesus Christ] has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.” (Hebrews 10:14).

Think about your salvation this way: Who can annul or cancel what God has decreed? Who can add or take away from the perfect work of the Lord Jesus at Calvary? Who can find a debt when all has been paid? Salvation through Jesus Christ is so secure that it seems

nearly impossible. It is true that we would never be able to earn such a great salvation. If our salvation were to depend on our own faithfulness, surely no human would attain it.

The Lord Jesus said: "He who endures [stands firm or perseveres] to the end will be saved." We find this expression 3 times in Scripture (Matthew 10:22; 24:13 and Mark 13:13). In each case the Lord Jesus is referring to the believers who will be living in a time called "the tribulation" and not to Christians in the Church age. The "end" referred to in these texts is not the end of a person's life but the end of the great tribulation period on earth (see Matthew 24:14 and Mark 13:7). The term "saved" in these texts does not refer to the eternal salvation of our souls but to the survival through the great tribulation and the entering the millennium alive (Matthew 24:22). These words of the Lord Jesus are addressed primarily to the 144,000 Jewish witnesses who will preach to gospel of the kingdom during that time (Revelation 7:1-8). Of course, the Lord Jesus does want you and me to stand firm in our faith and to persevere with a good Christian testimony today, but, as we have already seen, our salvation is a gift from God which does not depend on how well we persevere.

We humans find it difficult to rest completely on what the Lord Jesus has done for us. We would like to contribute something with our own efforts, either to help Jesus save us or to help Jesus to keep us saved. In the early church, we also find some Christians who were uncertain about their own salvation. The apostle John writes a letter in order to help them. He first explains, in a very simple way, what people have and what people do not have eternal life. He writes in 1 John 5:12-13: "He who has the Son [that is, has Jesus in his heart] HAS life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." Then, in the following verse he explains why the believers need this information: "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may KNOW that you HAVE eternal life" (1 John 5:12-13). The Lord Jesus saves us but he also wants us to know that we are saved. He wants us to know with certainty that we shall spend eternity with him. Have you received the Lord Jesus as explained in the previous lesson? If so, you have the Son. And he who has the Son has eternal life. Believe and rest on this promise.

If you would like to know more about what happens when a believer turns way from the Lord, we encourage you to study the appendix 1 at the end of these studies.

2. What happens when you or I sin?

God does not want Christians to sin, and it is always very sad when a Christian does sin. When a Christian sins, the communion or the harmony he enjoys with the Lord is broken. What should we do once we have become aware that we have sinned? As soon as possible, and with a repentant heart, we should CONFESS that sin to the Lord, that is, tell God about it with a repentant heart. God promises that: "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). Repentance and confession restore our communion or friendship with the Lord.

Consider the similarity with a marriage relationship. A few years ago, my wife and I got married. Since that day, she and I live happily together. But sometimes I behave towards her in a bad way. I lose my patience and raise the volume of my voice. After I have done so, I sense that something keeps us apart. The harmony we normally enjoy in our relationship is interrupted. She no longer smiles and we feel bad. What can I do to correct this situation? Should we get married again? No! We remain husband and wife. The problem is that we are no longer enjoying that relationship. What I need to do is to recognize that I am guilty, repent

and confess to my wife my bad behaviour. This action will restore the harmony in my home. When I sin against my Lord, I also lose the joy of being a son of God. Should I invite the Lord Jesus again to enter my heart? No! I remain a child of God. I have lost the joy of my salvation and not my salvation. What I need to do is to recognize that I have sinned, repent and confess my sin to the Lord.

3. A few common misunderstandings about baptism

(1) “I want to be baptized to be more sure of my salvation.” We have already seen that baptism is not required in order to be saved. Similarly, baptism does not add to the certainty of our salvation. If you have doubts before you are baptized, you shall continue to have doubts after you are baptized. Our salvation rests completely on the finished work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Our doubts disappear and certainly will grow as we learn to trust and rest on the promises of God.

(2) “I want to be baptized so that I may receive the Holy Spirit.” Every Christian receives the Holy Spirit immediately on conversion. “In Him [the Lord Jesus] you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13). Every true believer has received the Holy Spirit. “And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ” (Romans 8:9). There is no such thing as a Christian without the Holy Spirit.

(3) “I want to be baptized to feel closer to God.” Baptism is simply a step taken in obedience to the Lord. We should not ascribe to baptism some special power, something that is not stated in Scripture. But the act of being baptized does generate joy (Acts 8:39). There is always joy when we decide to obey the Lord!

(4) “I would like to be baptized so that I won’t have so many temptations.” Actually the Bible teaches us to expect the opposite! “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Our fight is not against “flesh and blood,” that is, it is not against humans but against Satan and his demons. Therefore, it is well possible that the struggle may intensify after your baptism. Remember that even the Lord Jesus was targeted for temptation after being baptized. God has not promised to reduce or eliminate temptations from the life of the obedient believer, but he has promised to provide a “way out” for every temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Lord promised the apostle Paul, and also promises us today: “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). We should not fear what may happen to us after we are baptized. We can always trust our Lord Jesus completely to help us and strengthen us whenever we obey His commands, and this also holds when we obey Him by getting baptized.

(5) “I want to be baptized in order to become a member of a church or denomination.” The only membership we read about in the New Testament is membership to the Body of Christ (the Universal Church). We become members when you and I surrender our life to Jesus. Baptism, therefore, cannot turn us into members of the Body of Christ because we are already members. Furthermore, the Christian baptism does not make us a member of a denomination, because the Bible does not recognize denominations. That said, when a believer is baptized, he publically identifies himself as a follower of Jesus Christ, and therefore identifies himself visibly with other followers of Jesus Christ - a Christian congregation.

In conclusion, a believer chooses to be baptized because he wants to obey a commandment of the Lord Jesus. It is a visible and public way to show that he is a Christian. The security of our salvation rests on the finished sacrifice of Jesus carried out on our behalf, a perfect work that no-one can improve, add to or complement.

A personal question

In this lesson we have considered together the basis of our faith. Have you received Christ but are still tormented by doubts concerning your salvation? Memorize God's promise in 1 John 5:12: "He who has the Son has life." Believe these words of God with all your heart. Learn to rest on the trustworthy Word of God.

Lesson 4

What instructions did the Lord Jesus leave about baptism?

After his death and resurrection and shortly before he ascended into heaven, the Lord Jesus gave his disciples some instructions about baptism. "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'" (Matthew 28:18-20). The Lord's instructions are commandments and not merely suggestions. They carry with them His own authority. In this lesson we shall look at the instructions of the Lord Jesus left his followers about baptism:

1. Baptism is only for believers
2. "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"
3. The Lord Jesus expects every believer to be baptized

1. Baptism is only for believers

Jesus starts by commanding them to go and make disciples. His desire is that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His [Christ's] name to all nations" (Luke 24:47). All other teaching should be considered secondary to the message of salvation. Conversion has to come first. With the new birth begins the new life. The Word of God contains many instructions as to how we should live our new life. One of these instructions has to do with baptism. Therefore, it is not correct to baptize a person before their conversion. Christian baptism is only for those who have converted to Jesus Christ.

Christians in the New Testament understood this and that is why they baptized those who believed. "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41). Philip preached the gospel in Samaria, and "when they believed Philip... both men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12).

Later Philip evangelized an Ethiopian, who, after he believed, was also baptized (Acts 8:36-39). Ananias baptized Saul after his conversion (Acts 9:17-18). Peter ordered the first group of gentiles to be baptized after they converted to Christ (Acts 10:46-48). We read that “many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).

Should we baptize our babies and children?

When a child is mature enough to repent from sin, believe and receive the Lord Jesus in his heart, he can be baptized. The New Testament narrates five instances where a complete family turned to Christ: Cornelius and his house (Acts 10:44-48 and 11:12-18), Lydia and her family (Acts 16:14-15), the jailor from Philippi and his house (Acts 16:30-34), Crispus and his house (Acts 18:8) and the family of Stephanas (1 Corinthians 1:16). Considering these five situations together, we may observe the following order of events:

1. They listened to the message
2. They repented and believed in Christ
3. They received the Holy Spirit
4. They were baptized

It is reasonable to expect that each member of these households or families had the sufficient age and maturity to consciously participate in these four things.

What should I do with our new baby?

We read that Mary and Joseph presented baby Jesus in the temple according to the Law of Moses (Luke 2:22). A few years later, we read that many brought their children to the Lord Jesus so that he would lay his hands on them and bless them (Matthew 19:13). As a local church we may ask God’s blessing over a baby and its family, asking the Lord for wisdom for the parents so they may instruct the child in the ways of Lord. As the child grows, he will reach the stage where he himself is mature enough to take a voluntary and responsible decision concerning the Lord and concerning baptism. If you are worried about what might happen to a baby that dies without being baptized, we suggest you study appendix 2.

When considering the possibility of baptizing a child or an adolescent, it may be wise to wait a prudential time in order to ascertain his degree of maturity and see some evidence of his new life in Christ (Matthew 7:17-21). It is not wise to rush a baptism. But neither is it wise to delay it unnecessarily. Care is recommended to ensure that the symbol continues to represent a reality. “Do not lay hands on anyone hastily” (1 Timothy 5:22).

2. “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”

These words come from the mouth of our Lord Jesus when He gave His disciples instructions about baptism (Matthew 28:19). When a believer is baptized, he is identified with the God of the Bible, the only true and wise God, who has revealed Himself in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is interesting to notice that the Lord Jesus used this phrase when teaching about the baptism of gentiles (the non-Jews). Pagan nations were engaged in idolatry and were completely ignorant of the one and only true God, the one who has revealed Himself in three distinct persons. The word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible. It is a new word that has been created to represent a truth that we do find in the Bible: “tri” (meaning

three) and “unity” (meaning one). If interested, you may study further the Biblical basis for the doctrine of the Trinity in appendix 5.

It is instructive to observe how the three persons of the Godhead were involved when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Jesus (the SON) was in the water. The HOLY SPIRIT descended on Jesus like a dove. And the FATHER spoke from heaven saying “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:15-17). We observe here three distinct Divine persons, and yet they are one.

It is also important to notice that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are involved in our salvation. God the FATHER loved us so much that he took the initiative and sent his Son into the world (John 3:16). The SON, the Lord Jesus, carried our sins on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). And the HOLY SPIRIT is the one who convinced us of our sin, that we need Jesus, and is instrumental in our being “born again” (John 3:8; 16:7-11,13; Titus 3:5). Perhaps this is the reason why the Lord Jesus commanded that the Christian baptism should be carried out in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. He did not say “in the names of” but “in the name of,” since it is only one God, manifest in three persons.

3. The Lord Jesus expects every believer to be baptized

We understand from the Lord’s command that every believer should be baptized. Baptism is a normal step for every Christian. The message of the gospel includes some teaching about baptism, so that “those who gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:37-41). From the Biblical examples we learn that the baptizing of a new believer occurred very soon after conversion. Clearly those who were baptized understood what they were doing. From the Lord’s command and these Biblical examples we conclude that it is not Scriptural for a believer to wait a long time before he is baptized.

The fact that baptism normally occurred immediately after conversion and represented that conversion is reflected in the close connection between baptism and salvation in some Bible texts. For example, in Mark 16:15-16 we read: “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.’” Notice that he who does not believe is condemned. It is by believing that we are saved (Acts 16:30-31). The new believer will seek to be baptized as soon as possible after conversion. The text in Mark 16 and other similar texts make it quite clear that it is normal that every believer should be baptized.

A personal question

Perhaps you have been converted a long time ago but are still not baptized. Maybe this is the right moment for you to consider before the Lord what is hindering you from being baptized. Determine to set right anything that may be hindering you, and actively seek your baptism. Baptism is the Lord’s will for you.

Lesson 5

Baptism and the forgiveness of sins

We shall continue exploring the meaning of Christian baptism and also clarify some misunderstandings that sometimes cause some concern. In this lesson we shall look at:

1. Different kinds of baptism
2. What cleans us from our sin?
3. What do Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16 and 1 Peter 3:21 mean?
4. From which sins are we forgiven when we become Christians?

1. Different kinds of baptism

The careful Bible student will soon discover that Bible makes reference to different kinds of baptism. It is important to distinguish the Christian baptism from the other baptisms. Some of these baptisms involve the use of water while others do not.

Baptism by John the Baptist

John the Baptist began his ministry before the Lord Jesus began His. John's objective was to prepare the way for the Lord (Luke 3:4), that is, prepare the people so that they would be in the right condition to receive the Lord Jesus, the promised Messiah. John preached the "baptism of repentance" and baptized in the river Jordan all those who repented, those who produced "fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:3,8). The forgiveness of sins which John preached came through repentance and was a temporal forgiveness similar to that obtained through animal sacrifice under the Law (Hebrews 10:4). All the people who were baptized by John were then guided to the Lord Jesus, "the Lamb of God who TAKES AWAY the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). After believing in Jesus for salvation they were baptized again with the Christian baptism (Acts 19:3-5).

Baptism with the Holy Spirit

After his death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus promised his disciples that "they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5). This baptism took place a few days later, on the day of Pentecost, the day in which the Church began (Acts 2). This historical event benefits all believers for that day onwards (Ephesians 1:13). Today, every believer participates in that baptism with the Holy Spirit at conversion, that is, when he becomes a part of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). If you have further questions about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, please study appendix 3.

Christian baptism (in water)

As observed in lesson 4, this is the baptisms which the Lord Jesus instituted and was practiced by His disciples. This is the baptism in water that the Lord Jesus expects from every Christian. It is a symbolic act that demonstrates our conversion, an act in which the believer

is immersed briefly in water, identifying himself publically with the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Other baptisms

If we look carefully in the New Testament, we shall find even more baptisms. The baptism of the Lord Jesus by John the Baptist was a special baptism, since Jesus did not have any sin from which to repent. We also find a "baptism by fire" (Matthew 3:11), which is a baptism of judgment which is yet to come - as is explained in the following verse (Matthew 3:12). We also notice that the death of the Lord Jesus is referred to a number of times as a baptism (Luke 12:50; Matthew 20:22).

2. What cleans us from our sin?

Some teach incorrectly that Christian baptism is need so that we can be forgiven, that the water of baptism is God's instrument to clean us from sin. This idea may arise if we confuse the purpose of the different baptisms. The Christian is baptized because HE HAS ALREADY BEEN FORGIVEN.

Under the Law, God demanded of the Jews the blood of a sacrificed animal in order to forgive sin. The act of sacrificing an innocent animal would re that "the wages [consequence] of sin is death" and would also prepare them to understand the supreme sacrifice of the Son of God, who was "offered [as the] one sacrifice for sins forever" (Hebrews 10:12). Word of God is very clear: it is the blood of our Lord Jesus that cleans us from all sin and not baptism. Consider 1 John 1:7, "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin," and "Jesus Christ... washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Revelation 1:5).

3. What do Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16 and 1 Peter 3:21 mean?

These are texts that sometimes cause some confusion. In this lesson we shall provide brief explanations. For a more detailed study of these texts we encourage you to read appendix 4.

Acts 2:38. We have already observed that in the time covered by the book of Acts, it was normal for believers to be baptized immediately on conversion. In this verse the apostle Peter is encouraging his listeners to take two steps which for them would be simultaneous:

- 1) Sincere repentance (as a first and necessary condition), and
- 2) Christian baptism.

Taking these two steps at the same time, they publically demonstrate their identification with Christ as their personal Saviour. Two consequences would then follow:

- 1) Their sins would be forgiven, and
- 2) They would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 22:16. Ananias said to Saul: "And now what are you waiting for? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Saul's conversion, his internal change, occurred a few moments after he fell to the ground on his way to Damascus, when he had a personal encounter with Christ (Acts 9:4-6). That is why, a few days later, Ananias

visits him and calls him “Brother Saul” (Acts 9:17). Before Ananias’ visit, Saul had already believed and therefore had already received the forgiveness of his sins. In this visit, Ananias encouraged Saul to get up and be baptized, to demonstrate his repentance, forgiveness and salvation, to identify publically with Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 3:21. This verse mentions salvation from the flood, a salvation enjoyed by Noah and his family, and this event is used to explain something about Christian baptism. In this comparison, the flood represents baptism, and baptism represents salvation. The apostle Peter makes it very clear that baptism does not take away “the filth of the flesh” (that is, our sins), but does demonstrate the desire the baptized person has to walk well before God (Romans 6:4).

4. From which sins are we forgiven when we become Christians?

When we become Christians, we recognize and admit that Christ carried our sins on that cross, that with His blood He cleansed us from our sin. The question now is, from which sins has he cleansed us? Has Christ only forgiven us from the sins we committed before our conversion? If that were the case, how do we obtain forgiveness for the sins we have committed this week and those we may commit next week? Could it be that Christ only forgives us from the sins we specifically confess? If that were the case, what would happen to those sins we have not confessed and now forgotten? The beautiful and impressive reality is that “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from ALL sin” (1 John 1:7).

Let’s think about this for a moment. The Lord Jesus carried on the cross ALL our sins. This includes the sins we committed before we became Christians, the sins we have committed since our conversion (including those we cannot remember and those we have not confessed), and the sins we may commit in the future (from today until the end of our life on earth). Consider the words of the apostle John: “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 2:1,2). This means that all the forgiveness that we need for the future is assured because of the same sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Every new sin of ours is covered by the perfect work of Christ at Calvary. For every new sin of ours, Jesus Christ will speak to the Father on our defence. May the Lord be praised forever!

When we sin as believers, we lose the joy of our salvation. Every day we need to be clean in order to live in harmony with our Lord. Jesus referred to this spiritual regular cleaning as “washing feet” (John 13:5-10). This daily cleaning comes through the study of God’s Word and through confession: “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). Take note that we are to confess our sins to God, that is, when we become conscious that we have sinned, we should sincerely repent and confess our sin to our heavenly Father. You may find the exhortations in James 4:8-10 useful in this context.

What happens when I repent and sincerely confess to the Lord a sin I have committed? 1 John 1:9 says that God is “faithful and just,” that is, God will always remember that Christ has already paid for our sin on the cross. He will not require another payment. Then it adds “will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We have, therefore, total certainty that God has forgiven our sin. There is no need to do penance or anything else to gain

God's forgiveness. Rather we should thank the Lord and praise him for his free and full forgiveness!

A personal question

Are you allowing the Word of God to clean your way of living? Are you conscious of a sin in your life that displeases the Lord? This may be the right moment to stop reading and respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in your heart. Truly repent and sincerely confess that sin to the Lord. Then learn to believe, accept and rejoice in the Father's wonderful forgiveness.

Lesson 6

What does Christian baptism symbolize?

(1) Identification with Christ in His death and resurrection

The gospels contain the command to practice Christian baptism and the book of Acts contains a number of examples of Christians being baptized. To understand the meaning of baptism, we must search in the rest of the New Testament, especially in the epistles. Some refer to baptism as "a step of obedience" because the new believer who asks to be baptized is showing his love to the Lord and obedience to the Lord's command. But why did Jesus choose this practice of immersing people in water? Isn't there a simpler way to show our love and obedience to the Lord?

The Old Testament contains a large number of symbolic acts or little "dramas" to illustrate spiritual realities. We read of the Passover and other feasts, the circumcision of every Jewish male, cleansing rituals and the sacrifices carried out by priests in Israel, and many more. The New Testament refers to these visible activities as "shadows" of spiritual realities (Hebrews 10:1). In the New Testament we also find a few symbolic acts, and we should also take them seriously. Baptism is one of them. It is a little "drama" that Lord asks of every Christian when or soon after he believes. It should be carried out only ONCE, as an illustration of something that occurred once at the moment of conversion.

A number of things happen when we become Christians: at that moment our sins are forgiven, we are declared just, we are born again, we receive the Holy Spirit, we are made children of God, we form part of the Body of Christ (the Church), and much more. The way the Christian baptism is practiced is designed by God to represent or "dramatize" specially two of these changes. These are:

- 1) Our identification with Christ in His death and resurrection, and
- 2) The end of the old man and the beginning of a new life.

The first of these represent a change in our POSITION in the eyes of God, of Satan and of the whole spiritual realm. In this lesson we shall explore this new position. The second represents a change in our INTERNAL CONDITION. We shall study this change in more detail in the next lesson. We shall now look at:

- 1) What does it mean to be “in Christ”?
- 2) Dead and buried with Christ.
- 3) Risen with Christ.

1. What does it mean to be “in Christ”?

We find the most extensive explanation on the meaning of baptism in Romans 6:1-14. In verse 3, as in Galatians 3:27, we are told that we are “baptized into Christ Jesus.” The expression “into Christ” or “in Christ” occurs many times in the New Testament and is usually associated with the many blessings we have received as believers because of our identification with Christ.

Imagine a bus journey between two cities. When the bus leaves the bus terminal, I also leave the bus terminal because I am “in the bus.” When the bus crosses a bridge, I also cross the bridge, because I am “in the bus.” If on a curve the steering fails and the bus falls down a ravine, I also suffer the sad consequences because I am “in the bus.” If the bus arrives on time at its destination, I also arrive on time. By having my POSITION “in the bus,” whatever happens to the bus affects me.

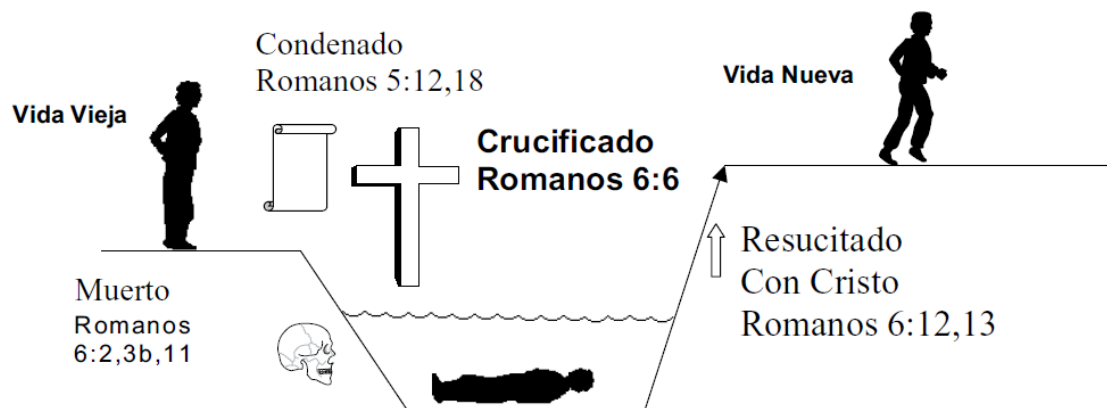
Similarly, when we believe in Jesus, God automatically gives us a new POSITION “in Christ.” Since every believer is “in Christ” and Christ is holy, God the Father sees us also as holy people, he calls us “saints” or “holy” (1 Corinthians 1:2), and therefore assures us that “there is no condemnation to those who are **in** Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Since every believer is “in Christ” and there is only one Christ, God the Father sees us all as one body, “so we, being many, are one body **in** Christ” (Romans 12:5). God does not recognize the different denominations and human groupings. We know that when Christ died on the cross, he was punished for our sin. Since we are “in Christ” our sin has been dealt with, our debt has been completely paid for. Therefore we read that “God **in** Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

When a believer is baptized, he is giving a public testimony that he is “in Christ.” He is “dramatizing” his complete identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection: that when Christ died and rose again, he also died and rose again, because he is “in Christ.”

2. Dead and buried with Christ.

This is one of the marvellous decrees of God. When we believe in the Lord Jesus, God considers us as “crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20), as “buried with Christ” (Colossians 2:12) and as “united together in the likeness of His death” (Romans 6:5). That is, God counts the new believer as dead and crucified in the death and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus suffered in the place of the sinner who has believed in His name. This glorious fact is symbolized in baptism, as the person is submerged in water. He is for a short moment “buried” showing that his death has already taken place when the Lord Jesus died.

Diagram 1 (Sorry – in Spanish!)



Muertos al pecado y vivos para Dios

Romanos 6: 11

When a person dies, a number of things happen. For example, if he is married, when he dies his wife is free to marry another person. If he has a farm, on the moment of his death the farm stops being his and belongs to his heirs. Similarly, our having died with Christ has a number of consequences. Let's look at two of them:

(1) We no longer have a debt: By having died in Christ, the believer has “been freed [or justified] from sin” (Romans 6:7). This means that Christ paid the complete price for all our sins. What a wonderful consequence! Who can now come accuse us or to charge us? We have no debt! We are free!

(2) We are set free from the law: “The law has dominion over a man as long as he lives... Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ” (Romans 7:1, 4). This is another marvellous consequence! Free from the law! The laws described in the Old Testament, together with their punishments, have no power over dead people, and in Christ, the believer has died. Our new POSITION in Christ, frees us from the heavy demands of the law. Nothing has escaped the attention of our God and Father! May He be praised forever! As Christians we seek to obey and please our Lord because we love him and not because we are under the laws given to Moses for the nation of Israel. We should value and protect this freedom we have “in Christ” and be careful not to allow ourselves to return to “bondage” (Galatians 4:9), with rules and regulations which God never designed for the Christian.

3. Risen with Christ.

When we are baptized, we are first submersed in water, representing the fact that we have died with Christ and have been buried with him. Then we are taken out of the water, representing the fact that when we received the Lord Jesus as our personal Saviour we also rose with him (Ephesians 2:6). See diagram 1.

The Lord has left many instructions for those of us who have been “raised with Christ.” Having died with Christ frees us from the law and from our debt of sin. Having been raised with

Christ introduces us into a new life. So, what does the Lord say to those who have been “raised”?

(1) “Seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-3). In another words, the “resurrected” person should live in accordance with his new POSITION. “I... beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:1-2). Just as a new minister or president should behave in accordance with his POSITION as minister or president, so we as believers should behave in accordance with our new POSITION. We should behave and act bearing eternity in mind, seeking to build our treasures in heaven and not on earth.

(2) There is now no need to fear Satan and his demonic hosts, since they are defeated enemies. With His resurrection, the Lord Jesus defeated Satan and his team once and for ever. As Christians we share in this victory. Satan knows very well that every believer is firmly established in the victorious team of Jesus. Do you sometimes fear Satan or demonic influences? Remember your POSITION. You are “in Christ.” After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus said: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). We are told to “be sober” and to “be vigilant,” because Satan does seek to harm the distracted Christian (1 Peter 5:8). But we should never fear Satan or any other fallen angel.

A personal question

Are you enjoying the security of being “in Christ”? Do you live a life worthy of your special position? Does your daily life show that you are seeking the things above?

Lesson 7

What does Christian baptism symbolize?

(2) The end of the old man and the beginning of a new life

In the previous lesson, we studied the first symbolic meaning of the Christian baptism: a demonstration that the believer has died and risen with Christ, that he has a new POSITION in the eyes of God and of Satan. In this lesson we shall study the second symbolic meaning of Christian baptism: To show that our “old man” has died and that we are now a “new creation.” We shall look at this change in our INTERNAL CONDITION as follows:

- 1) What is the “old man” like?
- 2) What is the “new man” like?
- 3) The struggle between the two natures
- 4) We must live our new life

1. What is the “old man” like?

The Bible uses the term “old man” (or “old self”) to refer to the sinful nature we inherit from Adam. This is also called the “flesh” and sometimes it is simply called “sin.” This is what moves us to sin, to do evil, to transgress. The Bible compares it with a bad tree which can only produce bad fruits. Our “old man” can only produce sins; it cannot produce anything pleasing to God. The most beautiful and noble acts of our “old man” are considered like “filthy rags” in the eyes of God (Isaiah 64:6).

“The old man... grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Ephesians 4:22). The “old man” cannot do anything good; it only does what is evil. The “old man” does not improve when we become Christians. At conversion, the “old man” loses dominion over our life, but continues just as bad. Although the “old man” will accompany the believer until the Lord’s return, we must not let it control our life.

From God’s point of view, our corrupt old nature has been judged and has died. It has received the treatment it deserved: to be condemned and punished. When? On the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, where “our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with” (Romans 6:6).

In our experience, this corrupt old nature still exists. It still can influence the way we live. But this “old man” no longer has authority over the life of the believer (Romans 6:14). This is why the believer no longer needs to be enslaved to his sin. In the Lord the believer may find the strength to maintain this perverse old nature crucified. The believer is no longer a slave to the sin that used to control him, but is now a slave to righteousness (Romans 6:18). His victory is assured in Christ!

2. What is the “new man” like?

The “new man” is “born” of God (John 1:12, 13). It is the very nature of God implanted in us through new birth. It is completely new and completely divine (2 Peter 1:4). When a person accepts the Lord Jesus as his Lord and Saviour, he is “born again,” but not in a visible way as in his first birth, but in a spiritual way (John 3:5-8). The Word of God states that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

This truth is so extraordinary that it is easy to confuse it with something else. It is true that we receive the Holy Spirit when we are converted but the Holy Spirit is not the “new man.” The Holy Spirit is God, and it is He who creates this new being (John 3:5). Some think that at conversion God takes our “old man” away and replaces it with the “new man,” making it impossible for the genuine believer to sin. If we think this, we “deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8). Others think that God gradually transforms the “old man” into the “new man,” but the truth is that we inherit the “old man” from Adam but receive the “new man” from Christ. As Christians, we shall have both natures as long as we live on earth. They are in conflict and struggle continually for dominion.

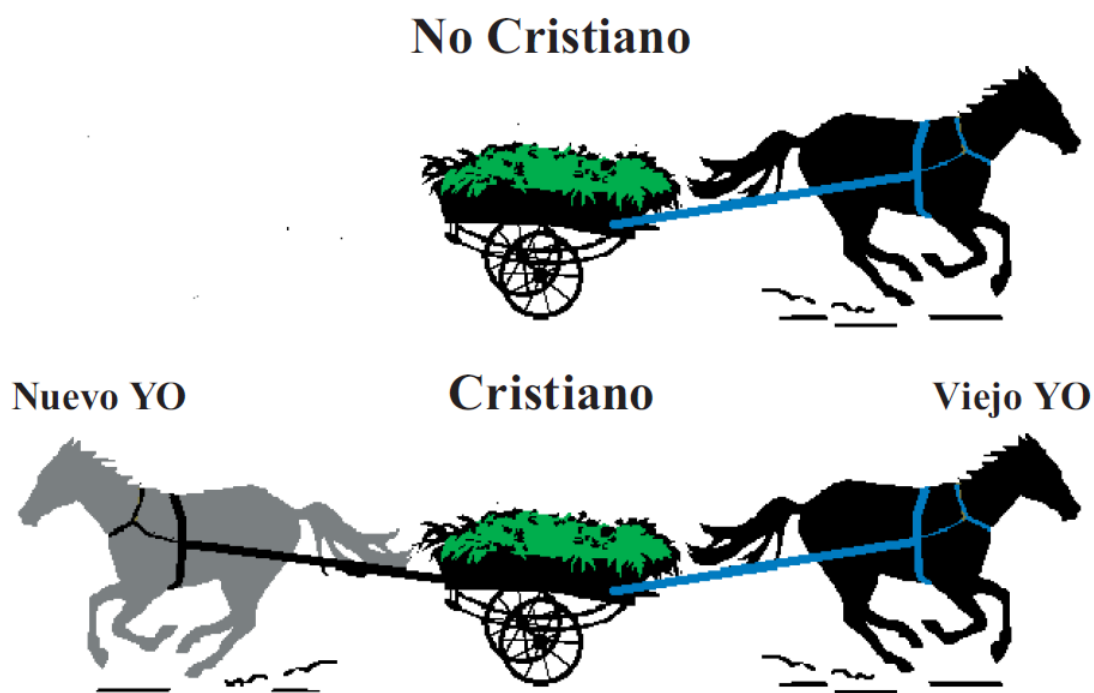
The “new man” is a new being with a divine nature, which is born at the very moment of our conversion: a new Peter, a new Martha. The “new man” does not practice sin, it cannot practice sin because it is born of God (1 John 3:9). That is why the “new man” overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). Isn’t this wonderful? Our loving Father has definitely given us in his Son

much more than what we could ever ask or imagine. It is good to live conscious of these realities.

3. The struggle between two natures

Perhaps you are now asking yourself: if I am a new creature why do I still sin? Is my “new man” does not sin, why do I sometimes yield to temptation? Romans 7:21-25 tells us that there is a permanent struggle between our “inward man” (which is the same “new man”) and the “flesh” (which is the same as the “old man”). These continually oppose each other. We notice this internal conflict when we face a temptation: I feel a force that encourages me to go ahead and sin, and another that encourages me not to sin. The believer who lives a life in harmony with his “new man” is called “spiritual” Christian, and the believer who allows his “old man” to dominate is called a “carnal” Christian (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). Now the question is: what can I do to live in victory over my flesh?

Diagram 2 (Sorry, also in Spanish!)



Imagine that life is like a cart being pulled by a horse. The horse represents our “old man” which pulls the cart. From the days of our childhood, this “old man” determines the speed and direction of our life (see figure 1). On conversion, we receive from Christ our “new man.” It is as if a new horse is attached to our cart. Now we have two horses attached to our cart, but they are facing opposite directions. In which direction will the cart move? The answer is quite simple: in the direction of the strongest horse. If your “old man” is the strongest, your carriage will move in that direction. Your way of life will be very similar to that of non-Christians. When the “new horse” is pulling the carriage in its desired direction, this will be reflected in new desires, new ambitions, new priorities, a new way of looking at life, a new way of looking at sin, new goals. In short, a new way of living.

We would love to get rid of that old horse. But that sinful tendency will be with us during the rest of our life on earth. Only after we have gone to be with the Lord will we be free from that

wicked old nature. How happy will be our existence in heaven with the Lord! But until that moment comes, the struggle will continue. To help us live victorious lives, a few things are necessary:

(1) Feed your new nature: The old horse strengthens itself by feeding on all sorts of rubbish. If you look at a bad film or magazine, your “old man” is strengthened. Ungodly friendships and conversations, visits to improper places, material ambitions, many television programs and secular songs feed and strengthen our “old man.” In fact, his world is full of things that feed the old horse. That is why we should live carefully. We should not provide our flesh with food (Romans 13:14). The new horse, however, is completely different. The new nature feeds on the things of the Spirit. It is nourished on the Word of God, on the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, on communion with God.

That is why it is so important for you to form part of a healthy Christian assembly or local church, to read the Bible every day, to meditate on it, to memorize portions of Scripture, to study your Bible – just as you are doing with this course. Good friendships with other sincere believers also feed and stimulate your new nature (2 Timothy 2:22). If we feed it well, our new nature will be strengthened in its struggle against our old nature. This internal conflict is continuous, and the strongest nature one wins. Are you disciplined in the regular feeding of your new nature?

(2) Ask the Lord for help: When the struggle intensifies, when we feel the strong pull of temptation, we cannot depend on our own wisdom and strength. Direct a short and earnest prayer to the Lord: “Lord help me do what I know is right!” “God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

(3) Flee from temptation: We must avoid or move away from that which may weaken us or encourage us to sin. “Flee sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18). “Flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14). “Oh man of God, flee from these things [greed, love of money, materialism]” (1 Timothy 6:8-11). “Flee also youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22). It is true that we should “resist the devil,” but we are not told to resist temptation but run away from it.

4. We must live our new life

New birth is the beginning of new life. With baptism we “dramatize” the fact that our “old man” no longer governs, that we have been born again, that we have received from God a “new man.” The challenge before us is to live that new life. In the Bible we find helpful and healthy guidelines:

(1) Don't try to be popular in the world: The world without Christ is dominated by “old men.” To be popular in this world we shall have to deny some of God's principles, we shall have to let our “old man” dominate. How did the apostle Paul view the world? “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14). Do not forget that it was the world which rejected and crucified our Lord Jesus. Do not try to imitate or be popular in this world (Luke 6:26). You no longer belong to it (John 17:14-16).

(2) Allow your new nature to express itself: God does not call us to be hypocrites or to live what we are not. In fact, it is completely the opposite! The Lord calls us to live out what we are, to take off our old self with its practices and put on the new self (Colossians 3:9-10).

That is, we should no longer behave as we used to before the Lord saved us. As the days go by, our new nature should be more and more dominant in our thoughts, actions and words.

(3) Serve your new Owner with love and devotion: Before we used our abilities and resources to please our “old man.” Now, we present our “members as slaves of righteousness for holiness” (Romans 6:19). This means we obey a new master, a new owner. Before, we used to faithfully serve sin and Satan. Now, with greater devotion and enthusiasm, we should serve the Lord with our body, our mind, our profession, our family, our time, and our material resources. Let’s serve our Lord with everything we are and have!

(4) Don’t take sin lightly: The Word of God teaches us in Galatians 6:8 not to sow to please the sinful nature (the “old man”). If you know that something is not convenient, move away from it! Be radical! Sowing to please the flesh, dedicating time to sinful things and attempting to enjoy them, will only strengthen your “old man.” It will control your way of living and eventually produce a bitter harvest. Occupy yourself with the Spirit, with celestial things, with the Lord Jesus Himself. Spend time in prayer and in the Word. These things are “life and peace” (Romans 8:6). This is the life the Lord Jesus designed for His followers, and it is the only way to experience real happiness.

(5) Seek to be guided by the Holy Spirit: In Romans 8:14 we learn that every Christian should be guided by the Holy Spirit. In other words, we should seek the direction of the Holy Spirit in our daily decisions.

A personal question

Is there a temptation to which you regularly yield? What are you going to do the next time you are tempted? Do you tolerate a friendship or some practice which feeds your old nature? Are you trying to be popular among non-Christians?

Lesson 8

What responsibilities do I acquire when I get baptized?

Most of us are afraid of taking on more responsibilities. We prefer to live a free life without too many commitments and obligations. We do not like the idea of someone else telling us what to do. Some people ask: “If I get baptized, do I acquire new responsibilities?” There are those who do not get baptized so as not to feel obliged to obey the Lord. Is this a correct way of thinking? Clearly not! In this lesson we shall look at:

- 1) The relationship between privilege and responsibility
- 2) What responsibilities do I acquire when I am baptized?
- 3) What responsibilities did I acquire when I gave my life to the Lord Jesus?
- 4) With whom do I acquire these obligations?

1. The relationship between privilege and responsibility

Every privilege carries with it an obligation or a degree of responsibility. To enjoy a good job it is usually necessary to be punctual and deliver on agreements. To enjoy a happy family, to be part of a family that functions well, both the husband and the wife will have to fulfil some obligations. Both the lazy worker and the irresponsible parent have responsibilities. The problem is that they are not aware of them or chose to ignore them.

Our salvation is an unconditional privilege. It depends, as we have already studied, on the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus on our behalf and not on our efforts or behaviour. But there are some clear conditions if we want to grow, if we want to produce fruit for God, if we want to experience peace and joy in our Christian life.

2. What responsibilities do I acquire when I am baptized?

Look at it this way: When does a Christian become responsible to leave his bad habits and live a clean life? Is it when he gives his life to Jesus or when he is baptized? Clearly at conversion! When does a believer become responsible to meet regularly with other believers? Is it when he gives his life to Jesus or when he is baptized? Clearly at conversion! When does a Christian become responsible to care for the needs of others? Is it when he gives his life to Jesus or when he is baptized? Clearly at conversion! This is interesting. Notice that a Christian acquires ALL his responsibilities at the moment of his conversion. Therefore, when a believer is baptized, he acquires NO NEW responsibilities.

Let's suppose that Peter wants to be a traffic warden. The fact that he has purchased a whistle does not make him a traffic warden. Neither would Peter become a warden by standing in the middle of the traffic blowing his whistle. No! To become a traffic warden, Peter has to sign a work contract with the Ministry of Transport. When he signs the contract, Peter becomes a real traffic warden and immediately acquires a number of privileges and responsibilities with the Ministry of Transport. But the drivers outside on the road will not know he is a traffic warden until he puts on his traffic warden uniform. Similarly, Jennifer does not become a Christian because she has purchased a Bible, neither because she tries to imitate the behaviour of Christians. She has to give her life to the Lord Jesus – as we have seen in lesson 2. The act of baptism is like the putting on of the uniform. Jennifer acquires her responsibilities with the Lord Jesus on the moment of her conversion. When she is baptized, she publicly shows that she has given her life to the Lord Jesus.

3. What responsibilities did I acquire when I gave my life to Jesus?

When we are baptized, we do not acquire new obligations or responsibilities. What changes is that the responsibilities we acquired at conversion become more public. Let's consider some of these responsibilities.

(1) Obey the Word of God: Our heavenly Father guides us through His Word. That is why it is important that we should make time to read it and think about it, so that the word of Christ may “dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16). If we really love the Lord Jesus we shall seek to obey his Word (John 14:21). As obedient Christians, we shall grow in holiness and do good works, and we shall bring honour to the name of the Lord.

(2) Pray regularly: Our heavenly Father is interested in every detail of the life of his children. The Bible says: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God... will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6, 7).

(3) Meet with other believers: The Body of Christ (the Church) is not a human invention. God designed the Christian life so that it should be lived together with other believers in a Christian assembly or local church. The apostle Paul exhorted Timothy to "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). In Hebrews 10:24-25 we are also exhorted to meet together with other believers "in order to stir up love and good works." From the moment of your conversion, you should make it a priority to meet regularly with other believers to praise God, to be receive help and to try to help others. To find the time to meet regularly means that you will probably have to sacrifice something else. How seriously do you seek to meet with fellow believers? Remember that the Lord Jesus promises to be present where "two or three" come together in his name (Mathew 18:20). To meet together as a local church is an important part of our new life.

(4) Share the gospel with others: The word "gospel" means "good news." This good news about forgiveness, salvation and the Christian life is not something only for a privileged few. God desires to save and reconcile sinners and he has chosen us, the believers, to be his ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)! The apostle Paul understood the wonder of the gospel message and wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). Are you looking for opportunities to share the gospel with your friends and family? God loves your friends and would also like to save them. You could use the content of lesson 2 to share the message of salvation with other people.

(5) Administer well the resources the Lord has given: When we give our lives to the Lord Jesus, everything we own should be submitted to his Lordship (1 Chronicles 29:14). As consequence, it is normal that every believer sets aside part of his or her income to offer it to the Lord. Our heavenly Father desires that each of his children should give back to Him a proportion of what He has given them during the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). God loves and blesses those who have learned to give thankfully, happily and sacrificially (2 Corinthians 9:7).

All these responsibilities continue to hold after your baptism. They don't become more serious after baptism since they have always been serious. That said, the baptized believer should be aware that his baptism has made his Christian confession more public, and that he openly represents Christ before the eyes of many people. What a great privilege! And what a great responsibility!

4. With whom do I acquire these responsibilities?

The believer acquires his responsibilities with the Lord Jesus himself. It was he who died for the Christian. It was he who bought us with His precious blood. Therefore we should avoid becoming enslaved to men, to a church or to a denomination. The believer, who submits to the rules and laws of men, soon begins to lose the joy and vigour in his Christian walk. This does not mean that we should live independently from our fellow brothers and sisters. Neither will we want to ignore the Biblical counsel they may give him. But it does mean that I

decide to be baptized because the Lord Jesus is asking me to do so. I meet with other believers because that is what the Lord Jesus wants me to do. Only to Christ do we owe this loyalty and obedience. It is to Christ that we will give account of our behaviour: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). May the Lord help us to take our responsibilities seriously!

A personal question

Are you setting time aside to read God's Word, to pray and to meet regularly with fellow believers in a local church? Do you regularly set aside some of your income to offer to the Lord? Have you shared the good news about Jesus with someone recently?

Lesson 9

How should the Christian baptism be practiced?

In this lesson we shall consider a number of practical matters connected with Christian baptism.

- 1) The method of baptism: Immersion
- 2) Where can a baptism take place?
- 3) What should a person wear for his baptism?
- 4) Who can baptize someone else?
- 5) Are baptism classes required prior to baptism?
- 6) What words are spoken when a person is baptized?
- 7) When is it necessary to baptize a person again?

1. The method of baptism: immersion

There are at least three good reasons why Christian baptism should be practiced by immersion, that is to say, by submerging a person momentarily in water. These are:

(1) The meaning of the word translated "baptism." The Holy Spirit chose to us a Greek word which means "sink," "submerge," "plunge" or "dye." This suggest total submersion.

(2) The symbolic meaning of baptism. Christian baptism represents our identification with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. These acts are well illustrated in going into the water, being submerged, and later coming out of the water. It is also a good "drama" of the death and burial of our old life and the beginning of the new life.

(3) The Biblical examples. The narratives of baptisms in the New Testament point towards baptism by immersion. For example, the experience of the Eunuch in Acts 8:38, 39: "... both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water..." We read that baptism was practiced "in" water and not "with" water.

John, for example, baptized “in” the river Jordan (Mark 1:5). The Biblical examples suggest a baptism by immersion where there was “much water” (John 3:23).

2. Where can a baptism take place?

The Word of God does not indicate a specific place where baptisms should take place. Therefore we should feel free to baptize in any adequate place where there is enough water. It could be a tank, a river, the sea. The apostle Paul, although he was a Jew, was not baptized in Jerusalem neither in the Jordan River. He was baptized in Damascus, the capital of a gentile nation (Acts 9:18). The jailor was baptized in Philippi, at night time, in his own house (Acts 16:33). The baptism of the Ethiopian took place next to the road on the journey back to his country (Acts 8:36-39). It looks like Lydia and her family were baptized in the river next to which a number of ladies accustomed to pray, and this river was not the Jordan (Acts 16:13-15).

These and other examples show that the baptism normally was practiced close to the area of conversion. This has its logic. The first place where a person should make public his conversion is in his own home, his own town, where the person is known.

3. What should a person wear for his baptism?

The Bible remains silent on this matter. Given this silence, it is somewhat foolish to insist on some particular form of dress. Perhaps what could be said is that it should be “modest apparel, with propriety and moderation” (1 Timothy 2:9), not only for ladies but also for men. Therefore, it is advisable to avoid clothe items that become indecent when wet, and skirts made of light material that float in water.

4. Who can baptize someone else?

Here we also do not have specific Biblical instructions. Sometimes we notice that the evangelist himself baptizes (Acts 8:38). That said, the person who baptizes does not have to be a specially gifted brother, nor an elder, nor a full-time Christian worker (Acts 9:18; 1 Corinthians 1:14-17). Naturally, it is expected that he who baptizes is a brother of good testimony and that he knows what he is doing.

5. Are baptism classes required prior to baptism?

In the Bible we don't read that a set of classes are required prior to baptism, neither do we find an example of a preparatory class for those who wish to be baptized. Evidently teaching on baptism was included in the gospel message, so that those who believed were soon baptized: “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them” (Acts 2:41). At conversion, the Ethiopian asks: “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36). They immediately stop the chariot, go down into the water, and Philip baptizes him. As to the jailor at Philippi, we read that “... he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:33).

Without doubt, it is necessary to explain God's plan of salvation and the purpose of baptism before baptizing someone. We should baptize intelligently. Since in different places a degree

of confusion exists in the mind of many over this topic, some believers feel that it is wise to teach a short “baptism course” before the act of baptism. The objective is to clarify the basics and answer people’s concerns. Usually such a course can be a considerable help. But we depart from Scripture if we insist that such a course is a requirement before baptism. Such lessons can only be recommended. There should not be too many classes, so as not to excessively prolong the time between conversion and baptism. Remember that after baptism there will be a whole life with opportunities to teach and learn!

Some believers feel that prior to baptism a believer should make good some failures (or at least initiate a process) that mar their Christian testimony, for example, on issues such as living together without being married, stagnant interpersonal conflicts, addictions to drugs or alcohol, etc. To start correcting such matters pleases the Lord and is a fruit that shows the reality of the new life (Colossians 3:5-10). If you have doubts over some of these issues, it is recommendable that you talk this over with mature believers in your local church before you are baptized.

6. What words are said on the moment of baptism?

The Lord Jesus said very clearly: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). But in the book of Acts, we notice that the believers were baptized “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). Why this difference? Some think they have found a contradiction. But that is not the case. To simplify the matter, some choose to ignore some of these verses. But that is not acceptable, since all Scripture is God’s Word. Let’s consider some possibilities:

(1) Some Bible students notice that in the book of Acts, all the people that were baptized already knew the true God as revealed in the Old Testament. What they lacked was to recognize the Lord Jesus, the Messiah God had sent, and to receive Him. That is why they baptized in the “name of the Lord Jesus.” It would be very different for new gentile believers converted from idolatry and the worship of other gods. These converted gentiles needed to recognize the only true God, the triune God, who has revealed Himself in three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For further study on the theme of the Trinity, we suggest you study the appendix 5.

(2) Other Bible students point to the teaching which influenced the behaviour of the first Christians: “And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17). Since they were to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, it is no surprise to read that these believers also baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

(3) There are also those Bible students who ask themselves: “What does it mean to baptize in the name of Jesus?” They conclude that it is to baptize with the authority of the Lord Jesus and following the instructions of the Lord Jesus, that is, to baptize according to Matthew 28:19.

Regardless of which of these interpretations is more correct, it is good to remember that in the Lord Jesus Christ “dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). When the new believers were being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, they were being baptized in the name of “the fullness of the Godhead.” For this reason we should be careful not to in-

vent our own rules and forbid baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus, provided they believe in the only true God revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The believer who simply obeys the instructions of the Lord Jesus and is baptized “in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” has nothing to fear. He is being baptized using the phrase Jesus gave to be used for Christian baptism.

7. When is it necessary to baptize a person again?

It is Biblical that every believer should be baptized correctly with the Christian baptism. In some cases this involves a second baptism. In the Bible we also find an example of a second baptism. The disciples of John the Baptist recognized that their understanding of God was incomplete, since they had not even heard about the Holy Spirit. They recognized that they had not yet received the Christian baptism so they were baptized again (Acts 19:2-5). Christian baptism is the baptism which takes place after believing and receiving the Lord Jesus. Were you baptized as a baby or before you gave your life to Christ? You now have the opportunity to ask someone to baptize you with the Christian baptism.

We should also take note that any baptism practiced by a group that does not recognize the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit denies Matthew 28:19 and therefore cannot be recognized as a Christian baptism. Some people are baptized in the name of Jesus while denying the Father and the Holy Spirit. Others are baptized recognizing only the Father as God. In these cases, the new believer should acknowledge this serious doctrinal error and be baptized again with the Christian baptism.

A personal question

Have you received the Christian baptism? What steps can you now take to obey the Lord Jesus in this matter?

Lesson 10

What is holding me back from being baptized?

We have now arrived at the last lesson. If you have not yet done so, now is the time to reflect seriously about your personal situation before the Lord. If you have already given yourself to the Lord Jesus but have not yet received a Christian baptism, now is the time to take the decision to obey the Lord in this important matter. In this last lesson we shall look at:

- 1) Christian baptism: Summary
- 2) What happens after baptism?
- 3) Baptism and the Lord's Supper
- 4) Who should take the initiative in baptism?
- 5) Should I or should I not get baptized?

1. Christian baptism: Summary

We have noticed that the Bible makes reference to a number of different baptisms. The Lord Jesus expects every believer to be baptized with the Christian baptism. This is a little symbolic “drama” in which the believer is submerged briefly in water representing that he has died and has been buried with Christ. It represents the end of the dominion of the “old man,” the end of the old life. Then the person comes out of the water, representing that he has risen with Christ, that he has begun a new life.

We must remember that baptism DOES NOT SAVE. We seek to be baptized because the Lord Jesus said we should, and NOT because it may clean sins, cause us to be born again, make us more holy, make us more saved or reduce temptations.

The Lord Jesus instructed that once converted, we should be baptized “in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” This baptism can be carried anywhere where there is enough water, and by any brother in Christ of good testimony. When possible, it may be recommendable to carry out the baptism near where the person lives as a testimony before the people who know him.

2. What happens after baptism?

“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:41-42). After their conversion, these first Christians publically showed their commitment to Jesus by being baptized. But that was not the end! We are told that these believers persevered. As is normal, these Christians had their problems, their temptations and their frustrations, but continued firm and faithful to the Lord.

Notice that these believers devoted themselves to four things:

(1) The doctrine of the apostles. They worked together to learn and practice the Word of God. After your baptism, there is much more to learn. Don't let yourself be deceived by Satan into thinking that you know enough and that you do not need any more study of God's Word.

(2) Fellowship with each other. These believers actively related one with another. They would meet together and would encourage each other to love God and their neighbors. They did good works together, they cared one for another. Every baptized believer should form part and be active in an assembly or local church.

(3) The breaking of bread. The Lord's Supper is the only meeting or celebration that the Lord Jesus explicitly asked for. In it we remember the Lord's death, we worship him, and look forward to his soon return. The invitation from the Lord Jesus Himself to every believer still stands today: “Do this in remembrance of Me” (1 Corinthians 11:23, 24). Are you responding to this loving invitation? It is very important that we should persevere in doing this.

(4) Collective prayer. Time of personal prayer is very important. And yet we find the believers in the New Testament practicing and persevering in prayer meetings (Acts 1:14). To-

gether they would ask for God's resources to be strengthened as they faced the enemy's attacks.

3. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Many of us have asked if it is necessary to be baptized in order to participate in the Lord's Supper. In order to answer this question, let's compare the meaning of these two symbolic acts. Notice the differences: Baptism is a visible testimony of conversion while the Lord's Supper is a memorial of the Lord's death. Baptism is about "me" while the Lord's Supper is about "Him." Baptism is a personal responsibility while the Lord's Supper is a collective privilege among believers. Baptism is carried out only once, while the Lord's Supper is a regular celebration "until he comes." They have in common that both baptism and the breaking of bread were instituted by the Lord Jesus Himself. It is normal and it is expected that every believer participate of both (Matthew 28:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-30).

You will not find in the Bible a text that prohibits a non-baptized person from participating from the Lord's Supper, however, it is normal for a believer to participate from the breaking of bread after he or she is baptized. Consider the following reasons:

(1) This order is logical: Baptism is carried out first to show publically that we have believed, then Lord's Supper to express our gratitude to the Lord together with fellow brothers and sisters.

(2) Biblical examples: After the birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost, we notice that all believers were baptized on conversion or soon after. It is reasonable to expect that every believer who joined the apostles and other brothers and sisters to celebrate the Lord's Supper was already baptized (Acts 2:41-42).

(3) Pastoral considerations: If a believer does not want to obey the Lord by being baptized but does want to participate from the Lord's Supper, he could be asked: "Why have you not been baptized?" If there is "something" that hinders his baptism, that same "something" will probably also hinder his participation at the Lord's Supper.

Are you regularly partaking of the Lord's Supper? Are you responding positively to the Lord's loving invitation: "Do this in memory of Me"? It is a privilege but also a responsibility.

4. Who should take the initiative in baptism?

In other words, should I ask someone to baptize me? Or should I wait for someone to come and encourage me and offer to baptize me? In Matthew 28:19 we notice that the responsibility rests with the person who preaches the gospel. We are sent to make disciples and to baptize them. Is this clear? If you share the gospel message with another and do not encourage the practice of Christian baptism your message is incomplete. Our calling and task is to evangelize, baptize and teach them. We should actively promote Christian baptism.

On the other hand, the new believer also has the responsibility to seek to be baptized. If we read carefully the encounter of Philip with the Ethiopian in Acts 8, we notice that it is the Ethiopian that takes the initiative in asking to be baptized. Firstly Philip explains the gospel (v.35), a message that must have included some teaching about baptism, because when

Philip is finished the Ethiopian asks: "What hinders me from being baptized?" Have you asked yourself this same question? You should not passively wait for someone to come and encourage you to be baptized. If you love the Lord, the responsibility is yours. Take the initiative! Share your desire to be baptized with the person who told you the gospel or with some responsible person in your local church. Simply go and ask "What hinders me from being baptized?" Yours is the responsibility to obey the Lord and be baptized.

5. Should I or should I not get baptized?

Now that you have seriously studied the Biblical teaching concerning Christian baptism, the Lord expects you to respond. It is not a fellow human being who is asking you to act, it is the Lord Jesus Himself, the One who purchased you with his precious blood, the One who has freed you, the One who has saved you from eternal condemnation. Obedience requires a degree of personal sacrifice but always brings joy. After he was baptized, we read that the Ethiopian "went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). Lift your eyes up to heaven and calmly ask your Saviour: "Lord, what about my baptism?"

The Lord Jesus states clearly in John 14:21,
"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me."

Do you love him?

Appendices

Additional material for those students who wish to deepen their understanding

Appendix 1

What happens when a believer turns away from the Lord?

In lesson 3 we considered some of God's promises that show that our salvation is firm and secure. Sadly some think that these beautiful promises are a licence to live as they please. The apostle Paul corrects this perverse way of thinking. He asks: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!" (Romans 6:1, 2). Our new birth rests on the finished work of Christ on our behalf and is irreversible. But after being made members of the family of God, our heavenly Father expects to see some changes in our way of living. We are urged to "walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (Ephesians 4:1).

Should a Christian do good works? Yes! Of course! In Ephesians 2:8,9 we read that the believer is saved by GRACE, that is, we do not deserve salvation. It also says that we cannot do good deeds in order to earn our salvation. Our good behaviour and our good works are very important AFTER we have been born again, since by these changes we show that we are children of God and encourage others to praise our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16). But, as we have already seen, these good works cannot save us neither can they keep us saved.

You have probably met someone who says he is a Christian but has now turned away from the Lord. Some of such people have been baptized, others have participated at the Lord's Supper, and some have even been teachers of the Word of God. Could it be that such people lose their salvation once they turn away from the Lord? Each situation is different, and each is very painful. But each person that falls away fits into one of the following two categories:

(1) He was not a genuine Christian: For a couple of months or years, this person tried to behave like a believer. Then he grew tired and turned back to the world. Although such a person appeared to live like a Christian, participating in Christian activities, songs, prayers and studies, he never surrendered his heart to the Lord Jesus. An example of this type of person is Judas Iscariot. He never was a true believer. In a moment of crisis he chose to live externally what he had always been internally: an unbeliever. These people are those described by the apostle John as those who "went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:19).

(2) He was a carnal Christian: The other possibility is that the person is a genuine child of God but has been tempted and has fallen in sin. He is a Christian who is currently walking badly, following his own desires and not the will of God. Such has not ceased to be child of God. The Bible refers to such believers as "carnal," (or "worldly" or "fleshly") Christians (1

Corinthians 3:1-3). These people do not lose their salvation because it depends on the perfect work of Christ on their behalf, and not on their own behaviour. They do lose blessings God desires to give them. They lose the joy of walking with Christ. But they lose even more. In 1 Corinthians 3:15 we read: "If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." The carnal Christian loses what he is building with his life, but by the grace of God, "he himself will be saved." What a sad prospect to arrive in the presence of our Lord and Saviour without having done anything useful for Him! Our heavenly Father never takes our salvation away from us, but sometimes he may choose to punish his "carnal" child with sickness or even with death (1 Corinthians 5:4, 5; 11:29, 30). We should not treat this lightly.

When a person who says he is a Christian turns away from God's ways we cannot know for sure to which of these two categories he belongs. Perhaps he never was a true believer, or maybe he is living as a carnal believer. But God does know. It is not our task to judge such a person. The Lord Jesus, the good Shepherd, knows who are his sheep (John 10:27). We should pray for this person's true conversion or for his restoration.

Appendix 2

What happens with a baby that dies without being baptized?

Some have wrongly understood verses such as John 3:5, "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." They equate the word "water" used here with "baptism." There are some Christian communities that, based on this interpretation, hasten to baptize all babies as soon as possible. Others have created a state called "limbo" where the souls of babies go who die without being baptized. The Bible only speaks of Heaven and Hell. We do not find a single reference in Scripture to limbo nor purgatory.

The Bible teaches plainly that the children belong to the Lord (Luke 18:16). After the 7 day old child of king David died, he said: "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:23). David, as a believer, and his non-baptized baby would meet again at the same place: Heaven. For the figurative meaning of "water" used in John 3:5, see appendix 4.

Appendix 3

To be filled with the Spirit and being baptized in the Holy Spirit

This theme has caused much confusion among the people of God especially during this last century. In whom does the Spirit of God dwell? How can I know if I have the Holy Spirit? When are we baptized with the Holy Spirit? What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Let's turn to the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit dwells in the believer from the moment of his conversion

When a person becomes a Christian, on that very moment he also receives the Holy Spirit. Having “heard the word of truth.. [and] having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13). The Bible does not allow the possibility of a Christian without the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul explained it like this: “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His” (Romans 8:9). Some Christians in the city of Corinth did not know that the Holy Spirit lived inside them, that is why the apostle Paul asked them: “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Without them asking for it, without them knowing it, the Holy Spirit lived within them. The writers of the New Testament take it for granted that God has given his Holy Spirit to all believers (see for example, 1 Thessalonians 4:8; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). God promises to give us His Holy Spirit when we believe. If God says that the Holy Spirit lives inside each born-again believer, we should simply accept and believe His Word.

Baptism with the Holy Spirit is an historical event

The expression “baptism with (or in) the Holy Spirit” appears only seven times in the New Testament. We shall understand its meaning as we study these seven references.

- The expression is used four times by John the Baptist as he made reference to the ministry of the Lord Jesus: Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33.
- Once is it used by the Lord Jesus when He made reference to the prophecy of John the Baptist: Acts 1:5-8). Here He explained that this “baptism with the Holy Spirit” would take place “not many days from now.” And it did, at the day of Pentecost described in Acts 2.
- It is used once by the apostle Peter in Acts 11:15-16. Here he remembers the words of the Lord Jesus quoted in Acts 1:5. He shows that now the gentiles (the family of Cornelius) were also made participants of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, in the same way as the Jews did at Pentecost.
- The seventh and last time this baptism is mentioned is by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:13. It reads: “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.” The church at Corinth was made up of believers who were mature and immature, spiritual and carnal, and yet the apostle Paul affirms that “we were all baptized.”

Putting these verses together, we conclude that “baptism with (or in) the Holy Spirit” is the initial event that took place when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers on the day of Pentecost. This baptism united all the believers in one Body, thus initiating the Church. When a sinner repents and surrenders his life to the Lord Jesus, in that very moment he receives the Holy Spirit and he becomes participant in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit places the believer in the Body of Christ which is the Church. That is why every believer can say with certainty “I have been baptized with the Holy Spirit.” When? “On the day of my conversion.”

It is worth noticing that nowhere in the Bible are we told or encouraged to seek or ask for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But we are told to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Every believer should seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit

The Bible uses the expression “filled with the Holy Spirit” in three different ways.

(1) It is used to refer to a continuous experience, a normal characteristic of the life of the believer. For example, it was a characteristic of the seven men chosen in Acts 6:3, 5; also of Barnabas (Acts 1:24); and of the believers in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:52).

(2) The expression is also used when God gives a special power for a specific ministry, calling, or service. This was the case with John the Baptist (Luke 1:15-17) and with the apostle Paul (Acts 9:17-22).

(3) There are occasions when “being filled with the Spirit” is given to face an immediate task or crisis. This is the case with Zacharias and Elizabeth: being filled with the Holy Spirit allowed them to prophesy (Luke 1:41, 42, 67). In Peter’s case, being filled with the Holy Spirit prepared him to present the gospel before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:7, 8). Upon being filled with the Holy Spirit, the believers in Jerusalem received power to preach under persecution (Acts 4:29-31), and Stephen received courage to face martyrdom (Acts 7:55-60). Upon being filled with the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul received power to deal with the satanic opposition through Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:8, 9).

The Word of God does exhort every believer to be filled with the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 5:18, we read, “...but be filled with the Spirit.” The Lord wants us to surrender to the direction of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This is a daily experience, and it is the Lord’s command. Sadly there are many Christians who live their lives their own way and do not allow the Lord to direct their decisions and life through the Holy Spirit.

To live full of the Holy Spirit is also referred to as “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16), “walking by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25), and also “worship God in the Spirit” (Philippians 3:3). The evidence of being controlled by or filled with the Holy Spirit is a Christ-like character, a holy lifestyle. How did they know that the seven men mentioned in Acts 6 were full of the Holy Spirit? Because of the fruit of the Holy Spirit evident in their lives. The characteristics of a life filled with the Spirit of God are found in Galatians 5:22, 23. Perhaps we could ask you a personal question: how are you living? Are you seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in your decisions? Are you allowing the Spirit of God to control your life?

The example of the believers at Corinth

The believers in the local church at Corinth illustrate what we have studied so far:

- (1) The Holy Spirit lived inside all believers (1 Corinthians 6:19).
- (2) Every believer had been baptized with (or in) the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- (3) Every believer had received at least one gift from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 1:4-7; 12:7-11).
- (4) The apostle Paul classified these believers in two groups: carnal and spiritual (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). Believers in both groups had received the Holy Spirit and both groups had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. The carnal Christian is the one who does not allow the Holy Spirit to guide him, that is, he is not filled with the Holy Spirit.

- (5) What shows that a believer is full of the Spirit is not the fact that he has a gift, since all believers have received at least one gift from the Holy Spirit. Evidence of a Spirit filled life is a transformed character, a Godly behaviour, it is Christ manifested in his daily life.

Appendix 4

Some verses related to baptism that may cause confusion

Mark 16:15, 16

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.’”

For an explanation of this passage, see the third part of lesson 4.

John 3:5

“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

The word “water” in the expression “born of water and the Spirit” cannot refer to baptism. This is clear when the cited expression you compare this verse with the rest of chapter 3. The Lord Jesus affirms that salvation is received only through faith: “... whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” This is repeated four times (verses 15, 16, 18, 36). The expression “born of water and the Spirit” does not refer to baptism but to being born of the Word and the Spirit. The word “water,” here as in some other passages, represents the Word of God. Later, in John 15:3, Jesus Christ tells His disciples: “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.” Also in Ephesians 5:26, we read, “that He might sanctify and cleanse her [the Church] with the washing of water by the word.” The close relationship between the new birth and the Word is also found in James 1:18, “He brought us forth by the word of truth,” and in 1 Peter 1:23, “having been born again... through the word of God which lives and abides forever.” The apostle Paul explains the relationship between saving faith and the Word like this: “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Acts 2:38

“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.’”

Since this is not the only verse in the Bible that deals with baptism, forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit, to understand it properly we should compare it with the other teachings of the apostle Peter and with other Scriptures.

The second chapter of Acts starts with the birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost. On this day, the Holy Spirit descended and baptized all the believers into one Body. Miraculously, the believers received the ability to speak in different languages or tongues as a sign that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on them, as predicted by the prophet Joel (Acts 2:16). At this moment the apostle Peter rose up and addressed the Jewish people who were present, those guilty of rejecting and crucifying Christ, the promised Messiah (verses 14, 22,

36). With clear and direct words, he tells his fellow countrymen that they have committed a big mistake in crucifying Christ (verses 23, 36). He exhorts them to recognize their wicked sin, to repent, and to identify publicly with Jesus Christ through BAPTISM (verses 37, 38). The Jews who responded to Peter's call were FORGIVEN from the wicked sin of having crucified Christ, and received the gift of the HOLY SPIRIT as had the others before them. This special message from Peter to the Jews who called for Christ to be crucified is not general enough to use it to affirm that Christian baptism is necessary for forgiveness of sins.

To dispel any doubt about this matter, the same apostle Peter later on states very clearly and several times that forgiveness is received by faith (and not through baptism), saying, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). This is forgiveness of sins is without baptism. Peter also points out that the prophets taught this truth: "To Him [Jesus] all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

What then does this verse mean?

As mentioned previously, in the times covered by the book of Acts, new believers were immediately baptized. In this verse, Peter is urging his listeners to take two steps at the same time: (1) repent sincerely – notice that this is the first and indispensable condition, and (2) be baptized. This way they would publically identify themselves with Jesus as their Saviour. This would then lead to two simultaneous results: (1) their sins would be forgiven, and (2) they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 22:16

Ananias told Saul, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

Thankfully the conversion of Saul (later referred to as Paul) is told three times in the book of Acts, in chapters 9, 22, and 26. As we compare them, we shall better understand these words of Ananias.

The conversion, or Saul's inner change, occurred on the way to Damascus moments after he fell to the ground, when he had a personal encounter with Christ (Acts 9:4-6). Therefore, when Ananias later visits him, he greets him saying, "Brother Saul" (Acts 9:17). Notice that Saul received from the Lord his call to the ministry before he was baptized (Acts 22:14-16) and God never calls non-believers to the ministry. It is evident that Saul had already believed and had therefore already received God's forgiveness before being baptized. When Ananias visited him, Saul is encouraged be baptized straight away, demonstrating his repentance, forgiveness, salvation, and to identify himself publicly with Jesus Christ. Years later, the apostle Paul (Saul) is very clear in his teaching: It is Christ's blood, and not baptism, which cleanses us from sin: "[W]e have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:7). The call for us today is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). In addition, Paul explains, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

Christ Himself teaches this truth. When He appeared to the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus, He entrusts to him the task of being "a minister and a witness" both to the Jews and to the gentiles, "that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those

who are sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26:15-18). Jesus Christ Himself confirms that forgiveness and salvation are received through FAITH in Christ and not through baptism.

Notice that the instructions of Ananias to Saul had two parts: (1) “Arise and be baptized” and (2) “wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Paul was already a believer but during those three days alone he surely had time to reflect on his own sinful behaviour, his pride, his stubbornness, and his aggression against the Lord’s people. As a believer, he was encouraged to confess these things, to clear his conscience, calling on the name of the Lord. Therefore, the connection is not between “be baptized” and “wash away your sins,” but between “wash away your sins” and “calling on the name of the Lord.” We too should regularly invoke the name of Christ and confess our sins so that we may be clean (1 John 1:8-10).

1 Peter 3:20-21

“[Noah and his family, eight people in all] were saved through water. There is also an anti-type which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Some think that this verse supports the idea that baptism saves us. But let us notice that Peter presents here a double analogy: Both in the flood and in baptism “water” talks of judgment; the death of the ungodly contemporaries of Noah and the death of Christ (and the believer that “dies in Him” as he takes refuge in Christ’s work in his favour). But here too, it is the “water” that saves, for the water kept the ark afloat and Christ’s death is what brought us salvation. That means that what God used for judgment He also used for salvation. In the case of the flood, the means of judgment and of salvation was the water. In our case, God’s means was Christ’s death, symbolized in the “water” of baptism.

It is worth noting that the symbol of baptism and what it represents (the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and our identification with Him in these experiences) are so intimately connected that sometimes the symbol is used to refer to the reality that it represents.

On the other hand, this verse does clarify for us the fact that baptism does not remove the filth of the “flesh” (because baptism does not have that power). But it does demonstrate a response of obedience to God, a desire to walk in new life.

We can look at this passage from another angle. Let’s compare it with Romans 10:10: “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

Notice that believing with all one’s heart (internal change) is followed necessarily by a confession with the mouth (external, public manifestation). This verse is not condemning mute people that cannot speak and therefore cannot audibly confess their salvation to others. It is simply teaching that saving faith is made evident by the works it produces. Similarly, in our passage in 1 Peter, the apostle mentions baptism as a normal way in which a believer confesses publicly the internal attitude that has saved him: faith in the effectiveness of Christ’s death and resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:29

“Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?”

Some think that this verse shows that believers were being baptized on behalf of dead relatives, people who did not manage to be baptized while they were alive. This interpretation is very unlikely. In the first place, in no other part of the Bible do we read of such a custom. There are no biblical instructions about this. On the contrary, both believing and being baptized are personal decisions to be taken by the individual concerned. What, then, does this verse mean? Here are two possibilities:

(1) The Greek expression translated “are baptized for the dead” also allows the translation “are baptized because of the dead.” In this case, the verse could be referring to those new believers that wanted to be baptized motivated by the recent testimony of believers who died as martyrs. These were baptized in the hope of being reunited with them at the resurrection. If death is the end of everything, if there is no resurrection, all of this would be pointless.

(2) Another possible explanation is that Paul was referring to the new believers who, upon being baptized, were filling the empty spaces in the church and in the Lord’s work left by those who had died. In this way, they were baptized “for” (or “in place of”) the brothers and sisters who had already died. This taking the place of the dead believers, be it in the local church or in the work, would make no sense, says Paul, if the resurrection were not a reality.

Appendix 5

The nature of the only true God

A careful study of the nature of God is both fascinating and humbling. It opens our minds to consider realities in the spiritual world and moves us to worship our great God. The study of God’s revelation of Himself humbles the brightest minds, as we respond to the invitation to explore horizons that go beyond our best efforts to comprehend.

Two warnings:

(1) Human language has developed to describe earthly realities and experiences. It should not surprise us, then, that when God seeks to reveal His nature to us using our human language the precise and correct words do not exist. (2) The Bible warns that to understand spiritual things it is necessary to be spiritual. “The natural man” (the one who has not been born again) does not understand the things of God. For him, they are “foolishness” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

What is the Holy Trinity?

The truth about God that we find in the Bible is this “God is one, and that there are three that are God - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” This incomprehensible revelation about the nature of God has been given the name Trinity (TRI-UNITY). The word Trinity is not found in the Bible, neither are the words omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient, but the realities they describe are clearly revealed in the Bible. Christians throughout the ages have accepted the doctrine of the Trinity as they observed the following four truths:

Truth number 1: “There is only one true God”

Both the Old and the New Testament are emphatic in stating that there is only one God. “The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; 6:4). “I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God” (Isaiah 44:6). “God is one” (Galatians 3:20; James 2:19). The Bible does NOT allow us to think of the existence of three gods.

Truth number 2: “The FATHER is God”

Jesus Christ refers to the Father as God. In many of His teachings, He uses the words “Father” and “God,” referring to the same person. See, for example, Matthew 6:26, 30. The apostle Paul affirms, “There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things” (1 Corinthians 8:6). The Bible describes the Father as God.

Truth number 3: “The SON is God and is different from the Father”

This truth consists of two parts. Let us explore them:

First: The Bible teaches that the Son is God.

(1) The words of Jesus: It is worth noting that Christ never said “I am God,” but He did say things like “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30) and “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:7, 9). He applied to Himself one of God’s titles: “I AM” (John 8:58; Exodus 3:14, 15). Perhaps for us today some of these expressions are inconclusive, but for His critics in those days, there was no doubt: Christ was claiming to be God, and that is why they wanted to stone Him (John 8:59; Leviticus 24:16). Before Pilate, they accused Him saying “He made Himself the Son of God” (John 19:7). Christ accepted the accusation. He did not try to correct them. The high priest said to Him, “I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!” He could have easily avoided crucifixion by responding negatively. But Christ agrees with the statement by answering, “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power...” (Matthew 26:63, 64). Everyone understood this as a clear affirmation that He claimed to be God, and they proceeded to crucify Him.

(2) The deeds of Jesus: We read that the Lord Jesus did things that only God can do: He controlled nature, He had authority over death, but even more significant, the Lord Jesus takes upon Himself the right to forgive sins - even though it was widely known that only God can forgive sins (Mark 2:5, 7). In addition, He accepts the worship of Thomas, and only God is worthy of worship. Thomas said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” Christ does not tell him, “I am not God.” Instead, He reproves him for being slow to believe (John 20:28, 29).

(3) The teaching of the apostles: There is no doubt that the apostles taught that Jesus was God. For example, “Christ..., the eternally blessed God” (Romans 9:5); “For in Him [the Son] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9); “...our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

Second: The Bible describes the Father and the Son as distinct persons.

In the gospels we read that the Lord Jesus prayed. To whom was He praying? The fact is that He was not talking to Himself (Luke 6:12). On the cross, He cried, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” When He carried our sins, the Lord Jesus felt a distancing between Him and the Father. Moments before giving Himself over to be crucified, He prayed, “... nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Notice that there are two wills: “Mine” and “Yours.” This implies two persons. Consider the argument of the Lord Jesus in

John 8:17-19: The law said that the testimony of TWO persons was valid. The Lord Jesus said that there are TWO who give testimony of Him. Who are these two? Himself and the Father. He shows Himself as distinct from the Father. As a last example, notice the use of “we” when He prayed for us in John 17:11, 12: “... that they may be one as We are.”

Truth number 4: “The HOLY SPIRIT is a person, He is God, and is distinguishable from the Father and the Son”

The Holy Spirit is the person in the Trinity that makes the Godhead real to us. God works in the believer and in the Church through the Holy Spirit. That is why we notice that the Holy Spirit is associated with power and with action. We should notice that the Spirit enables and empowers, but that does not make Him a force or an impersonal power or energy. The truth we are now considering consists of three parts:

First: The Bible describes the Holy Spirit as a person.

When referring to the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures always use the pronoun for a “person” and not for a “thing.” Why? Because He is a person. In John 14:16, Jesus Christ says, “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper.” The word translated “another” means “of the same kind.” It implies both personality and divinity. We notice also that the Holy Spirit demonstrates characteristics of a “person” like having intelligence (John 14:26), a will (1 Corinthians 12:11), and emotions (Ephesians 4:30). In Acts 15:28, the apostles and elders wrote, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us...” The Holy Spirit has an opinion. These are not characteristics of energy or a force but of a being, a person.

Second: The Bible describes the Holy Spirit as God.

We notice how the Bible ascribes to the Holy Spirit divine attributes, such as knowing all things (1 Corinthians 2:10, 11) and being eternal (Hebrews 9:14). It is interesting to notice that when Ananias and Sapphira sinned, Peter asked “why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...?” Then he adds, “You have not lied to men but to God.” (Acts 5:3, 4). Why this clarification? Because the Holy Spirit is God. In 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17, we are told that we are “the temple of God.” Later on we are told that we are “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). If someone were to think that the Holy Spirit is inferior in some way to the Father or the Son, he would benefit from reflecting on the words of the Lord Jesus over blasphemies in Matthew 12:31, 32. Every blasphemy will be forgiven, even blasphemies against the Son, but not those against the person of the Holy Spirit.

Third: The Holy Spirit is a person distinct from the Father and the Son.

Let’s look carefully at some of the activities of the Holy Spirit: (1) When the Lord Jesus was baptized, the Father declared from Heaven, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.” Then the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove (Luke 3:21, 22). Here the three persons of the Godhead are distinguished, each one doing a different activity. (2) We notice something similar in the work of redemption: It is the Father who loved us and gave His Son (John 3:16). It is the Son who was crucified for our sins (1 Peter 2:24). It is the Holy Spirit who works in our hearts so that we become conscious of sin, seek Christ, and receive forgiveness of sin (John 16:7-10). (3) Notice the activity associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit: The Son asks the Father to send the Holy Spirit. Then the Father and the Son, together, send the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-26; 15:26).

Conclusion:

Putting these four truths together, we conclude that the Bible teaches that there is only one true God, that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are God, and that, without ceasing to be one God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are persons and are distinct. This is the doctrine of the Trinity. Although it remains a mystery to us, may the Lord keep us from changing or simplifying this revelation in order to understand or explain it. Rather, let us “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

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