

Christian Baptism

Its Real Meaning

by Roderick C. Meredith

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Do you really stand in need of a Savior?**

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baptized as a child, or maybe as an infant.
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Christian Baptism

Its Real Meaning

The shoulders of the big man sitting across the table began to shake and heave. “I’ve broken every single one of God’s commandments,” he cried. “I *need* to be baptized!” This man, a World War II veteran and former Marine, was very deeply conscious that he was a sinner in need of salvation. As a young twenty-two year old college student conducting a baptizing tour, I was deeply struck by this man’s sincerely repentant attitude. He was coming to see himself, and he genuinely *hated* what he saw! He recognized his desperate need for a Savior.

What about you? What do you see when you look at yourself? How badly do *you personally* need God’s forgiveness? Are you one who has led a “pretty good” life? If so, is baptism even really necessary for you? Do you, personally, really stand in need of a Savior?

Perhaps you have already been baptized. Maybe it occurred when you were a child, and you do not even remember the event, or perhaps you were baptized as an adolescent or adult, when you “made a decision for Christ.” Is your baptism really valid and acceptable in God’s sight? This is a truly vital question because your very salvation depends upon the answer.

Millions Have Been DECEIVED

It is important to realize that the vast majority of human beings on this earth—even religious people—have been *deceived*. The Apostle John was inspired to describe Satan as “that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). It is hard for most people to fully grasp the fact that they, personally, may have been *deceived* into following wrong religious doctrines and practices.

But we all need to carefully and open-mindedly compare the clear examples and teachings of Jesus Christ with what today is purported to be “Christianity.” You will quickly see a *vast* difference, as Dr. Rufus Jones candidly explained: “If by any chance Christ Himself had been taken by His later followers as the model and pattern of the new way, and a serious attempt had been made to set up His life and teaching as the standard and norm for the Church, Christianity would have been something *vastly different* from what it became. The heresy would have been as it is not now, a deviation from His way, His teaching, His spirit, His kingdom” (*The Church’s Debt to Heretics*, p. 15).

If Jesus and the early Apostles do not represent the “standard” for true Christianity, then *what is that standard?* Is it the confused and often contradictory ramblings of the so-called “church fathers” of the Roman Catholic Church during the Dark Ages? Remember that Jesus Himself warned specifically about false religious leaders. He said: “Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch” (Matthew 15:14).

Frankly, I grew up absolutely *blind* to most of the basic truths of the Bible. I belonged to a mainstream Protestant church. I was president of my Sunday school class at one point. Both my parents graduated from a college sponsored by that church which our family attended regularly. Yet I had *no idea* of the ultimate purpose of human existence, was *totally ignorant* of the great end-time prophecies of the Bible and was never taught about the *power* of the Holy Spirit to *change my life* and enable the living Jesus Christ to *live His life* within me (see Galatians 2:20)! Incredibly, however, I was regarded by dozens of my friends as more “knowledgeable” than they were about the Bible and things of religion. These other church-going youth often asked me questions and were wondering about, and in confusion about, the very purpose of human existence.

I was baptized as a helpless little infant—unable even to discern my left hand from my right hand, let alone able to grasp the enormity of sin and deeply *repent* of my sins and accept Jesus Christ as my Savior. Was I, then, a true Christian?

Of course not!

My Personal Quest for Truth

In that well-known Protestant church I was just like the *millions* of other deceived people who just grow up in the “church of *their*

choice”—*never* even considering whether it is truly *God’s* Church and whether it is fully teaching His Truth instead of the ideas and the imaginations of deceived men. Finally, in my late teens, God began to open my mind to what true religion was all about. Rather than just reading the Gospels or Psalms for “inspiration,” I actually began to *study* the Bible just as one would study a history book or a book about physics or chemistry. I asked God for *understanding*, and I continued for months to read and mark, reread and meditate on the entire New Testament—then the Old Testament—and try to understand *what Jesus Christ actually taught!*

In my personal study, I began to realize that true Christianity is not just believing in the *person* of Jesus Christ, but believing and acting on His *Message*. I found that a true Christian must *totally surrender* and let Christ live within him through the Holy Spirit. As the Apostle Paul wrote: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:14). Also, Paul stated: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, *KJV*).

I began to understand Jesus’ repeated warnings about accepting Him and using His name in vain: “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). And again: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

But where do *you* stand?

Has God opened your mind to the fact that He *really* is the Governor of the universe; that He is a *real* God who created and now rules over all things? Do you realize that His Son Jesus Christ not only came into this world to die for our sins, but is now *alive* at the right hand of the Father in heaven, and that Christ is now our living High Priest? Do you understand that He will *live His life* in us through the promised Holy Spirit *if* we truly repent and are baptized, and that Christ will live within us the *same* obedient life He lived while in the human flesh? For your Bible says: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

All of us need help—a *lot* of help. We simply cannot overcome our own human vanities and passions, overcome the world and also overcome Satan the Devil through our own strength. The God who

made us has promised that He will give us the spiritual help and the spiritual strength that we need. Jesus said: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). And again: “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come” (John 16:13).

BELIEVE What Jesus Actually Taught

Jesus Christ came preaching a *message* about the coming Kingdom of God. The Gospel of Mark records: “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel’” (Mark 1:14–15).

To be a true disciple of Jesus Christ and receive His Spirit, you must *repent* of your sins and *believe* in Jesus Christ’s Gospel. The true Gospel message about God’s Kingdom involves one’s willingness to obey the *laws* of that Kingdom—the Ten Commandments. When a young man asked Jesus how to gain eternal life, Jesus replied: “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, *keep the commandments*. He said to Him, ‘Which ones?’ Jesus said, ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 19:17–19). Here Jesus is clearly naming the Ten Commandments as the *Way* of life for those who desire to be in His Kingdom.

Later, as our High Priest and living Head of the Church, Jesus inspired the Apostle James to explain that true Christians must keep *all* of the “points” of God’s law. Indeed, we must live as those who will be “judged” by the Ten Commandments, for they truly *are the standard* of true Christian conduct!

The beloved Apostle John warned those who would try to “water down” the clear biblical teaching of obedience to the Ten Commandments, “He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4). Many professing Christians and even many famous preachers may know *about* God, but they do not actually “know” God—are not truly

acquainted with Him—unless and until they fully **surrender** to let the true Jesus Christ **live His obedient life** within them through the Holy Spirit! *Then* they will have *experienced* what it is like to express the very character of God. *Then* they will truly “know” God.

Does that mean that true Christians keep the Ten Commandments perfectly at all times? *Of course not!* For the Apostle John also stated—clearly writing about Christians: “If **we** say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8–9).

This “cleansing” from sin is a *continuous* action, for the genuine Christian is to “**grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

The newly converted “babe in Christ” will constantly make mistakes. *All* of us who are Christians will make mistakes. Yet we will get up and try again. We will occasionally “slip off the path.” But we will **repent** each time with the help of the Holy Spirit and get back on the path of obedience to the Ten Commandments. For the great spiritual law of God—the Ten Commandments—is truly the **Way** of life. The man “after God’s own heart,” King David of Israel, stated: “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me” (Psalm 119:97–98).

What Should You Do?

If you have been drawn to God by His Spirit and want to become a true Christian, *what should you do?* The inspired answer was given by the Apostle Peter on the first New Testament day of Pentecost. After coming to realize the enormity of their sins, the repentant Jews asked Peter and the rest of the Apostles: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:37–39).

Think carefully about this fundamental instruction from God’s word. We are to be baptized “for the *remission* of **sins**.” Obviously, then, we are to **repent** of sin.

But what is sin?

The clearest definition of sin given in the Bible is found in 1 John 3:4: “Sin is the transgression of the law” (KJV). So we are to *repent* of breaking God’s spiritual law, the Ten Commandments! And we need to realize that Jesus Christ came to “magnify” the law and make it honorable (Isaiah 42:21). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained that we are not only not to kill, we are not even to harbor bitterness and hatred in our hearts—for that is the “spirit” or *attitude* of **murder** (Matthew 5:21–22). Christians are not only *never* to commit adultery, they are not even to “lust” after another person (vv. 27–28).

Far from “watering down” God’s law, Jesus’ teaching made the Ten Commandments *even more binding!*

It is **only** through Jesus Christ living His life within us that we can increasingly reflect the spirit of the Ten Commandments in our daily lives. As stated earlier, we must indeed **grow** in grace and knowledge continually.

Through the Holy Spirit, the spiritual **love** of God is given to us to enable us to keep God’s law. “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5). And what *is* the “love of God” which is given to the true Christian? How does it function? The Apostle John explains: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

So the true love of God flows down the channel or riverbed of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments tell us *how* to love God and *how* to love our fellow man. And, contrary to the clever arguments of many religious leaders, they are **not** “burdensome.” Rather, if obeyed, they become the “law of liberty” as we saw above in James’ epistle. They would **free** mankind from war, crime, adultery, broken homes, rebellious children and a host of other problems *if* they were practiced by all mankind!

In the soon-coming Kingdom of God, mankind **will** obey the Ten Commandments as a way of life. That is precisely **why** there will be **peace**, **prosperity** and **joy** in the coming millennial reign of Jesus Christ on this earth! “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the

mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us *His ways*, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the *law* shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Micah 4:1–3).

Be Sure You “Count the Cost”

Getting back to Peter’s sermon on the first New Testament Pentecost, remember that he exhorted these men to *repent*. To repent of sin means more than being “sorry.” The Bible makes it clear that genuine repentance involves being fully convicted of the fact that you are truly a *sinner* and that you have broken and *smashed* God’s law over and over—in the spirit if not in the letter. It means being convicted not only that you have *done* wrong, but that you *are* wrong! As the Apostle Paul explains: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find” (Romans 7:18). And he stated again later: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (vv. 24–25).

When you have been brought to *this kind* of real repentance, *it is time to be baptized!* You will need to honestly “count the cost” as Jesus instructed: “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it” (Luke 14:26–28).

Ask yourself: With the help of God, will you *really* put God ahead of family, friends, job, money and social position, or will you be like the Pharisees of Jesus’ day who “loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43)?

Has God become *real* to you? Will you truly put Him ahead of *everything* else? Or do you have some secret “idol”—something that, in fact, you put *ahead* of God and of your relationship with Jesus Christ?

Remember that repentance means *change*. Are you, personally, ready to accept *in faith* the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for your sins and

then *fully surrender* to let Him come in and “take charge” and *change* your entire life?

Have you come to a heartfelt appreciation for the fact that Jesus Christ—the Son of God—emptied Himself of His glory and power and came in human flesh to *die* for your sins (see Philippians 2:5–8) and that He who had been with the Father from eternity was willing to divest Himself of all that magnificence to *serve* you and me—to make it possible for us to share eternity with Him and with the Father in the Kingdom as *full sons of God* (see John 1:1–12)?

As you proceed toward baptism, will you—with God’s help—dedicate yourself to express total *love* and *loyalty* to Jesus Christ as your Savior, your Lord and Master, your High Priest and your coming King? *Will you?*

These are *vital* questions that need to be asked—and need to be sincerely answered in the affirmative. For when you are baptized, you are making a sacred *covenant* with your Creator to *love*, to *obey* and to *serve* Him and His Son Jesus Christ now and forever!

God does not owe you anything. But, on the contrary, you and I owe Him and His glorified Son *everything*. For God “created all things through Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:9; John 1:1–3). He created you and me. He created and sustains the earth we live in, the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat. God the Father, through Jesus Christ, created our *minds*—the very instrument we humans sometimes use to reason around the fact that something *greater* had to be there to create our minds! Then we “reason” ourselves into excusing ourselves from stealing, lying, committing adultery and all manner of things we should know are *wrong*. As the Apostle Paul explained in Romans 8:7–8: “The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

So we *need forgiveness*. We desperately *need* a Savior. And we *need* the constant help of our Savior and High Priest who will not save us *in* our sins but *from* our sins—and give us the spiritual strength to *overcome* and grow in the very character of God. And all of this can be accomplished *only* through our coming to a place where we are willing to completely *repent* of our natural hostility toward God and to heartfully accept the shed blood of Jesus Christ—the very *life* of the Son of God—as payment for our sins.

Have you come to such a time and place in *your life*?

The Keys to Changing Your Life

The Bible records stories of dramatic change in the lives of many individuals. How were they able to make such total “about faces” in their lives? Is it possible for you to make changes of equal magnitude in your own life? There are two vital keys. Most people overlook them entirely. Even those who acknowledge them generally misunderstand what they *really* involve.

In Acts 2 we read of the events surrounding the beginnings of the New Testament Church. Simon Peter preached a powerful sermon to multiple thousands assembled to observe the Feast of Pentecost. A number of those who heard him that day had stood in the mob assembled outside Pilate’s Judgment Hall a mere seven-and-a-half weeks earlier. At that earlier time, they had been shouting “Crucify Him!” when Pilate was offering to free Jesus of Nazareth. Now, *believing* the truth of Peter’s message, they were *convicted* of the magnitude of what they had done. It was with a deep sense of shame and personal guilt, that they now humbly asked him: “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:36–39) He responded by telling them to *repent*. **Faith and repentance** are the vital keys without which real change is impossible.

Faith sets the stage for repentance. The kind of faith we are talking about is living and real. It produces a state of mind that **wants** to make an about face and turn to God. This faith is confidence in a *real* God and in the promises He makes. It results in **action!** “Faith without works is dead,” the Apostle James wrote in James 2:17. To really believe and trust, God makes it possible for us to absolutely, unconditionally surrender to Him.

Hebrews 11 is often called the “faith chapter” of the Bible. In Hebrews 11:13 we learn that the men and women of faith *did* certain things. Understanding what they did helps us to understand life-changing faith. We are told that they “saw the promises afar off, were persuaded of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

First, we must see and understand the promises that God makes, be convinced of both their value and their reality, and then we must embrace them. To embrace is to hold dear and precious. If we do not value and cherish what God offers, we simply will not hold on and endure through the ups and downs of life. Because the men and women of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 held dear what God promised, they demonstrated by word and action that they were not *part* of this world.

We *cannot* fit in with this world and fit in with God at the same time (James 4:4). In order to fit in with and cultivate the acceptance and approval of this world, a person must be in harmony with the values of this age. John summed up the values of this world as appealing to “the lust of flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). This age and its corrupt, decadent value system is going to pass away, but there is a new world coming based upon eternal values. That new world, *tomorrow’s world*, will be permanent.

If we really believe that, then we will **want** to turn to God with all of our hearts and learn how to dwell in harmony with Him forever. Living faith produces action, and genuine repentance is one of the first actions it produces. That is what Peter’s audience displayed when they asked him: “What shall we do?” They offered no excuses. They did not attempt to minimize their actions. They did not begin blaming others. Rather, they were humble, teachable, and surrendered in their heart and mind. Peter had preached the Gospel and they *believed* his message. They evidenced faith by their heartfelt desire to act upon that faith. So they asked the question that day that all who desire genuine change in their lives must ask, “What shall we do?”

Does Obedience Earn Salvation?

God’s law tells us how to be like God (1 Peter 1:15–16). However, all of us have fallen far short of being like God. What can we do? No amount of future good deeds can ever make up for what we have done in the past. This ought to be obvious even from looking at man’s laws. If you were arrested for murder, would the promise to refrain from ever doing it again *earn* your acquittal? Of course not! If we keep the law in the future, we are merely doing what is expected. No amount of future law keeping can ever atone for past law breaking.

All of us have sinned (Romans 3:23) and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). God made possible our release from the death penalty, the curse of the law, by giving Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, to die in our stead. He took our place. We are, therefore, *reconciled* to God by the death of His Son (Romans 5:10).

God took the initiative to bring us into harmony with Himself, which is what reconcile means. He has demonstrated His love by giving the ultimate sacrifice, the life of His Son, to pay the penalty that you and I have incurred by our thoughts, attitudes, and actions (John 3:16).

However, **we must respond** to God’s grace through faith and repentance. God’s intent is to save us *from* our sins, *not in* our sins. “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?”, Paul asks. “Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Romans 6:1–2). If we are to accept God’s freely offered gift of eternal life, which we could never earn or deserve in a thousand lifetimes, then we must respond to Him by turning from our ways to His ways (Acts 2:38).

What Is Repentance?

An attitude of **unconditional surrender** of our life and of our will is the attitude of repentance. If we come to really see the reality of the glorious future that God offers and to *genuinely* believe His word, then we will **want** to seek God and His ways with all of our heart. That is what led to changes in the lives of the men and women of faith of whom we read in Hebrews 11. Living faith *always* results in action! Repentance is a response to living faith. While it starts on the inside, it will also be reflected in outward changes. If we really have come to hate the old ways, we will want to turn from them.

Have you been led by God to see that your very nature is wrong? Have you come to sincerely want to get rid of your own rotten, selfish, carnal human nature? Again, are you ready to repent of not only what you have done—but of *what you are*?

King David knew that this was what God required. He said: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart; these O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). Before anyone—and this does mean *anyone*—is really and truly converted, he has to be humbled, beaten down and made to realize his own nothingness by God. He has to go through a period of time when he is abhorring himself, acknowledging his sins to God and repenting of them—turning around in his heart, mind and will and determining to go the other way.

When that time comes, a person will quit arguing and reasoning with God or with His ministers doing His Work. He will not grudgingly hang on to false concepts of God. He will quit trying to reason around obedience to God’s commandments and literally living by every word of the Bible. He will not get his “feelings” hurt at the correction and exhortation of God’s chosen servants. Rather, he will **give** his life to God as the Apostle Paul instructs us all to do: “I beseech you therefore,

brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a *living sacrifice*, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1–2). As Paul instructed, even our *thoughts* must be **changed** by the “renewing” of our minds!

You have probably heard certain mainstream evangelists use the word “repent” from time to time—though not nearly as often as they should. However, in nearly every instance, they utterly fail to give a true biblical explanation of what repentance is all about. True repentance involves a **total surrender** of one’s mind, heart and will to the Creator God, and requires the acceptance of the death of His Son in payment for sin. For sin demands death. That is why Christ had to “pay” the death penalty on our behalf. As the Apostle Paul wrote: “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Jesus said: “If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17). Do you keep the Ten Commandments? Or do you make excuses? The Apostle John was inspired to write: “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:22). This New Testament scripture clearly shows us that we receive **answers** to our prayers when we **keep God’s commandments!**

If you would like more information about how to obey God, please write for our vital and informative booklet titled *Restoring Original Christianity*. It will be sent absolutely free upon request.

Please be *honest* with yourself. It is easy to rationalize or to “reason around” this very clear scriptural teaching about obeying God’s law. But if you want *real* answers to your prayers, you need to **repent** of breaking the Ten Commandments—which is defined as **sin** (1 John 3:4, *KJV*). And you need to accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior (Acts 2:38). Then—through the help of the promised Holy Spirit—you will need to **surrender** more and more each day to let Jesus Christ **live** His obedient life in you. Keep in mind what the Apostle Paul declared: ‘I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, *KJV*). This is the attitude of mind and heart that you must have, that your “old

self”—your former anti-God thoughts and ways—will yield completely to Christ living His own righteous life within you!

The Symbolism of Baptism

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body,” Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:13. John the Baptist said that the Messiah would offer two baptisms—Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11–12). Those who will not be “plunged into” the Family of God through the Spirit of God, will ultimately be immersed in a lake of fire that will leave them “neither root nor branch” (Malachi 4:1). Jesus Christ compared the Holy Spirit to “rivers of living water” (John 4:14; 7:38–39).

Paul explains in Colossians 2:12 that baptism symbolizes a burial. The “old man” is symbolically put to death. We emerge a new creature. Arising from the watery grave of baptism pictures our faith in the resurrection, which is our ultimate hope to become a new creature.

In Romans 6:4–5 we read: “Therefore we were *buried* with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.” Baptism is not an empty ritual or a magical rite. It is, however, a very important symbol and is not something into which we should enter lightly.

Predicated upon faith and repentance, baptism is an outward sign of our commitment. It represents a new beginning. The old person with all of his sinful past is symbolically buried and a new creature comes forth. The waters of baptism symbolize the fact that we are washed clean inwardly through the Holy Spirit. Christ’s sacrifice has paid for our sins and we come forth from baptism clean in God’s sight. This represents not the end, however, but the beginning of the real conversion process!

The Role of God’s Holy Spirit

Following baptism, we find that it was the practice of Christ’s first century ministry to practice the laying on of hands (Acts 8:18; Hebrews 6:2). This laying on of hands symbolized a special *setting apart* by God. In the aftermath of baptism, it set apart the newly baptized person to receive God’s Holy Spirit. In Acts 19:1–6 we read that Paul encountered in Ephesus some people who believed his preaching, and previously had

been baptized. However, they had not fully understood the Gospel when they were baptized and had never received the Holy Spirit, nor indeed even knew of it. After counseling with them, Paul re-baptized them in Jesus' name and laid hands on them for the receiving of God's Holy Spirit. God showed through an unusual miracle, such as had occurred on the first Pentecost of the New Testament era, that they did indeed receive the Spirit this time. Why was all of this necessary?

Peter told his listeners on the day of Pentecost that following repentance and baptism they would "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). *What* is receiving the Holy Spirit intended to accomplish in our lives?

Peter explains that it is through the Holy Spirit, God's divine power, that we become "**partakers of the divine nature**" (2 Peter 1:4). It is through the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ dwells in us and empowers us to live the same kind of life that He lived when He walked the earth as a human being (Galatians 2:20; Philippians 2:5).

Since Christ dwells in us through the Holy Spirit, our bodies are accounted as the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16) and we are told to glorify God in all aspects of life (1 Corinthians 6:20). Having God's Spirit in us is what makes us a holy people, or what the Bible terms "saints." We cannot make ourselves (or anything else for that matter!) holy. God is holy and only He can impart holiness. If we truly repent and turn to God in faith, He promises not only to forgive us our past, but also to impart His Holy Spirit to us. God's Spirit, given us as a gift, is intended to transform our lives by renewing our minds (Titus 3:5; Romans 12:2). We become a new creation because God is changing us by writing His laws in our hearts and minds (Hebrews 8:10).

Though it is the power of God that makes this transformation possible, nevertheless we have our part to play. We have to **exercise God's Spirit**, we have to follow the lead of God's Spirit—in short, we must **walk with God**. God's Spirit will lead and empower, but it will not possess or control us. We must seek and desire to follow God's lead in our lives. Our efforts apart from God's empowering Spirit are futile, yet God's power without our efforts simply represents potential energy. It is like a light switch in the off position; the potential to light up the room is present, but the circuit is open and nothing is flowing through. It is the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God that will ultimately make possible the completion of our salvation.

Upon faith and repentance, we are justified, made innocent and brought into right standing before God, through the shed blood of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:9). Next, since we have now turned to God, He sanctifies us—makes us holy—by placing His Holy Spirit within us. The Spirit is there to give us deeper understanding of spiritual things and to empower us to live Godly lives. As Christians, we must continue to grow in grace and in knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). If we follow the urging of God’s Spirit, then the righteousness of God as defined in His law will be fulfilled in our lives (Romans 8:4).

While we are *justified* by Christ’s death, we are finally *saved through His life* (Romans 5:9–10). Christ is *alive* right now at the right hand of the Father on high! He *actively intercedes* for us as our living High Priest when we slip up and sin (Hebrews 4:14–16) *and* He lives His life of overcoming sin in the flesh in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 2:20). The very fact of His triumph over death through the resurrection is the *proof* that we will ultimately be given immortal life at His return (1 Corinthians 15:20–23).

God “Inducts” You into His Church

Through baptism and the receipt of God’s Holy Spirit, you are *automatically* baptized into the true Church of God. “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” (1 Corinthians 12:13), for God’s Church is composed of those people who are filled with and *led by* the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14).

You *cannot* just “join” the true Church of God! God must “draw” you or “call” you and then place you in His Church by giving you His Holy Spirit. Remember how Jesus said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44).

Yet God *does* have an organized Church—and *always has!* Jesus Christ stated: “I will build My *church*, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). That “Hades” or the grave, would not prevail over God’s true Church may be taken in two ways: First, God will *never* permit His Church to be completely destroyed or cease to exist. Second, the basic hope of *all* true Christians is the *resurrection* from the dead. So although individual Christians may die, they *will* live again at the seventh trumpet when Christ returns to this earth as

King of kings! “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51–52).

Paul instructs us that those in the Church are the spiritual “body” of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). As the hands and feet and eyes and ears and minds of our *physical* bodies must work *together* for the body to function properly, so the *spiritual* body—the Church of God—must be organized and its members cooperating to carry on the assigned functions of the Church. Jesus Christ is the living, active **Head** of the true Church (Ephesians 1:22–23). *He* sets the goals and missions for His Church. After His resurrection and just before His ascension to heaven, Jesus commanded: “**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).

So the primary function of the true Church is to **go** to all nations and preach the same powerful message Jesus preached about the coming Kingdom of God! Then the Church is to “teach” the people **all things** that Christ taught His disciples—the entire **Way** of God based upon heartfelt *obedience* to God’s great spiritual law—and upon total **surrender**, to let Jesus Christ *live His life* within each of the people of God.

We all need to be instructed, taught, encouraged and guided toward the Kingdom of God. Therefore we are commanded: “Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24–25). Notice that we are **not** to forsake the assembling of ourselves together! Rather, we are to meet regularly on God’s Sabbaths and on His Holy Days just like Jesus and the early Apostles did (Luke 4:16; Acts 17:2).

Though some people pride themselves upon being “independent Christians,” that has **never** been God’s way. The entire story of the book of Acts describes a unified Church meeting together and *all* working together whenever possible! All of us need the fellowship, the love, the examples and the encouragement of fellow Christians who are

committed to “live by *every* word of God.” The true Church—called *twelve times* the “Church of God” in the New Testament—provides this opportunity for proper spiritual fellowship, growth and service.

Refusing to meet with those who are growing and those who are *doing* the Work of God is the complete antithesis of what Christ and the Apostles taught and practiced. For *all* of us must learn to *love* one another, to *forgive* one another and—through God’s Holy Spirit within us—to *grow* in that love. For God’s word tells us: “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also” (1 John 4:20–21).

A Covenant with Your Creator

God’s word makes it very clear that genuine Christian baptism is an adult decision to be made after deep reflection and heartfelt repentance. For, again, it truly pictures the death and *burial* of our old selfish selves. And in this decision and in this action we are making a *covenant* with our *Creator* to accept Jesus Christ’s shed blood as payment for our sins and to truly acknowledge Him as our *Lord*, or Master, and our coming *King* whom we will henceforth *obey!*

On God’s part, we are promised the precious “gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Receiving God’s Holy Spirit involves being impregnated with His very nature and character. As the Apostle Paul explains: “The *love* of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5). And, as we read in Galatians 5:22–23, the “fruit” or result of the Holy Spirit in our lives is “*love*, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

God’s Holy Spirit gives us the spiritual love and spiritual strength to obey God, to control our lusts, and to walk in His commandments as a way of life. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). So it is not us—in our human strength—keeping God’s commandments; it is *Christ* living within us His life through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ said in Matthew 24:13: “But he who endures to the end shall be saved.” If we wish to inherit the Kingdom that God has prepared

for those that love Him, we must remain faithful till the end. We do this by continuing to *abide in Christ* (John 15:3–4). How do you abide in Christ? Notice what John explained in 1 John 2:3–6: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. **He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.**”

To abide or endure means to remain faithfully anchored and established in the Truth of God. Remember, the Bible shows that the Truth is not merely a list of doctrines to be argued about, but rather, *a way of life* that must be obeyed and lived (Galatians 3:1; 2 Peter 2:2, 21).

Most professing Christians think that salvation is merely a one time affair. Many who claim to be God’s representatives have trivialized God’s promises and His purpose. They have offered a cheap grace that costs the believer nothing. They have promised “liberty” by teaching that God’s law is a yoke of bondage and that real obedience to it is unnecessary. In reality their “easy grace” doctrine that Christ somehow did it all for us only leaves their adherents ensnared in the corruption of sin (2 Peter 2:19).

In contrast, Jesus said that those who would come after Him must stand ready to give up everything, even their very lives (Matthew 16:24–25). Christ requires nothing less than total, unconditional commitment and devotion from those who would accept Him as their Lord and Savior. “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction”, Christ said. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does the will of My Father** in heaven” (Matthew 7:13, 21). This is the *covenant* that we are making with our Creator at baptism.

The Bible shows a great and awesome destiny for those who inherit God’s salvation. It also reveals the process by which God is reproducing Himself in us. Conversion is the key to that process. True conversion involves the total surrender of our life and of our will to Almighty God.

For those who turn to Him in this way, God makes possible our forgiveness, our transformation from the inside out, and our ultimate entry into His glorious Kingdom as one of His very sons. Will we encounter difficulties and even suffer persecution sometimes because we are trying to live by God’s instructions rather than by the traditions and customs of the world around us? You bet we will! But we must never forget the Apostle

Paul's admonition that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

Our personal covenant with our Creator at baptism involves a *commitment to a lifetime of change*. There will be changes in how we feel, in what we do, and, most of all, in what we **are** on the inside. True conversion leads to our being "conformed to the image of His Son, that He [Christ] might be the firstborn of many brethren" (Romans 8:29).

ACT on the Truth

God tells us that we are not merely to be "interested" in His Truth, but we must **act** upon it! "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be **doers** of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror" (James 1:22-23). No doubt thousands of you who read this are beginning to realize that somehow God has brought you into contact with *His Church* on this earth today. You have been learning, through the Work of the Living Church of God, through the *Tomorrow's World* television program and the *Tomorrow's World* magazine, the very **purpose** of human existence and the **Way** of life God commands. Now it may be time to **act** on this precious Truth. *Do not treat it cheaply!* Do not delay and procrastinate once you understand what God's purpose is in your life. Do not wait until you think you have *already* overcome or until you have "perfect" understanding or "perfect" repentance, for you *cannot even start* toward perfection until **after** you have been baptized and received God's promised Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen you!

So once you are sincerely repentant and have "counted the cost" and realize your need to be baptized, *let us hear from you*. The Living Church of God has ministers or trained representatives in most parts of the world. If you request this, they will call and set up an appointment with you for baptismal counseling. They will **not** show up unexpectedly. They will contact you ahead of time and get together at a time and place of your convenience.

You will **not** be pressured to "join" anything! In fact, our ministers may simply talk with you, answer your questions and give you some material to read and study *before* you are actually baptized. We want to be **sure**—*as much as you do*—that you are truly ready to be baptized.

But this initial visit will give you the opportunity—probably for the first time in your life—to counsel with a true minister of God who genuinely understands and teaches the full *Truth* of God.

So call or write to us *today*.

Our addresses and phone numbers throughout the world are listed in the back of this booklet. Again, we look forward to hearing from you and serving you, for you are now in contact with the *Living Church* of God. May God grant you the understanding, the love and the courage to *act* upon the precious Truth you have been given.

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