

# ***One Baptism***

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*... by One Spirit*

*we were all baptized...*

*(1 Corinthians 12:13; LEB)*

*There is... one baptism...*

*(Ephesians 4:4-5)*

## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to all who,  
resisting lies, persevere in the love of the Truth.

... they did not receive the love of the Truth,  
that they might be saved.

(2 Thessalonians 2:10; NKJV)

## Introduction

Each book of this series showcases one fundamental Truth at a time. This book continues the tradition. It is about the *one baptism* Paul mentions in Ephesians 4:5. Strikingly, his *one baptism* corresponds to a foundation which the author of Hebrews simply calls *baptisms*.

... let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of... instruction about baptisms... (Hebrews 6:2; NASB)

We will expound upon *baptisms* here: baptism in water and baptism in the Spirit. As we do, it should become apparent which of the two is the *one baptism* Paul exalted so highly by stating:

There is... one baptism... (Ephesians 4:4-5; NASB)

With so much to say and so many souls to save, let's jump right in. If we're going to cover the Biblical teaching on baptisms thoroughly, the best approach is to take each NT passage on baptism, and examine these one-by-one, commenting on the meaning.

### Believe and Be Baptized for Salvation

Go into all the World and preach the Gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned (Mark 16:15-16; NASB).

Amazingly, these words of Jesus are unwelcome in Evangelical churches today. They are prohibited. You are simply not allowed to say what Jesus said: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (NKJV). If you do, you will be ostracized and rejected as a heretic. Instead of pastors reading this verse aloud and giving people time to meditate on its simple meaning, often they'll rush into long explanations of how to interpret it, and will conclude with how unnecessary baptism is for salvation.

They tell us that we only need faith to be saved—but their message strangely doesn't sound like Jesus'. Our Lord didn't talk the way they do. Rather, he added something to faith in his formula for salvation—baptism. Does Jesus not use the conjunction *and* in his statement above? According to Jesus, in order to be saved, one must have believed *and* have been baptized. His

formula is simple:

disbelief = condemnation belief + baptism = salvation
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Nothing complicated about it. It takes one bad move to be condemned, and two good moves to be saved. This book is not about what it takes to be condemned. It's about what it takes to be saved. Jesus requires faith and baptism for salvation. He couldn't have said it more clearly.

### **Make Disciples by Baptizing Them**

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you... (Matthew 28:19-20; NASB)

Baptism is the initiatory rite in the disciple-making process. The process continues as we teach disciples to observe everything Jesus commanded, but baptism is the first step. You get baptized with a view towards the training that will shape the rest of your life. It's like the entrance exam for college. If you pass it, your studies may commence. If you pass it, you are on the road to a prosperous career.

Jesus commands those he sends to preach the Gospel to baptize converts. It's not optional. He requires it as the fundamental method of evangelization. The Church must fulfill the mission of Christ by making disciples. It does so by baptizing them and teaching them. No other method will do. We must initiate the discipleship process with baptism because it's the only way for a new disciple to start a new life in Christ.

Each of the four Gospels contains a Great Commission (GC) passage. We just surveyed the Mark and the Matthew GC passages, noting the importance they place on baptism. Now, as we observe the John and the Luke GC passages, it's patently clear that they focus on the forgiveness of sins.

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you... If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not (John 20:22-23).

[Jesus] told them, 'This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the Dead

on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem' (Luke 24:46-47).

What should we conclude if we compare the four Great Commissions? Setting them side-by-side allows us to rightly interpret what Jesus meant when he issued the GC. That is, he intended his command to baptize new believers (found in Matthew and Mark) to be understood as the *forgiveness of sins* aspect of the GCs of Luke and John. That is, the four GCs together present one message: that baptism is for the forgiveness of sins. Indeed, when Peter started fulfilling the GC at Pentecost, we see Jesus' message being clearly preached:

... be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38).

In addition, another verse demonstrates that the original ministry of Jesus and the Twelve Apostles was baptism for the forgiveness of sins. John 4:1 says that Jesus had been "making and baptizing disciples." Since our Lord *made and baptized* disciples from very early on, when he started his ministry with the apostles, it would have been easy for the apostles to continue the tradition. The CG was Jesus' final command to the apostles, but it was also the guiding principle for the apostolic team all along. *Making and baptizing disciples* had already become the custom of the apostles by the time Jesus issued the GC.

John the Baptist even had a conversation with his disciples in which he indicated that Jesus' "making and baptizing disciples" (John 4:1) was the mark of Jesus' success as a preacher. That is, the sign of God's blessing on Jesus' ministry were the many baptisms Jesus performed. God crowned the ministry of Christ with baptisms.

Some of John the Baptist's disciples came to him with concerns about Jesus' growing popularity, saying:

'Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have borne witness [Jesus], behold, he is baptizing, and all are coming to him.'

John answered and said, 'A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from Heaven' (John 3:26-27).

The fact that someone's ministry is being blessed by God with many baptisms should be a reason for us to rejoice! Can you rejoice in soul-saving baptisms? Is it something that brings profound joy to your heart? It did to John the Baptist.

Baptism also brought rejoicing to the Philippian jailer.

... he himself was baptized at once, and all those of his household. And he brought them [Paul and Silas] up into his house and set a meal before them, and rejoiced greatly that he had believed in God with his whole household (Acts 16:33-34; LEB).

Joy is the end result of baptism in the Bible accounts, not theological debate. Truly, there is no debate: Baptism saves, and salvation is always a matter of rejoicing! When John the Baptist heard that Jesus was baptizing more people than him, his reaction was to rejoice.

'... this one is baptizing, and all are coming to him!' John answered and said... 'The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete' (John 3: 27, 29; LEB).

Jesus mentions *rejoicing* in the story of the prodigal son, the story of the lost sheep, and the story of the lost coin. Then, he concludes the story of the lost coin with these words:

... in the same way there will be more rejoicing in Heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent... there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7, 10).

Did you notice that Jesus mentioned *rejoicing* twice? What are the angels happy about? Repentance. And where do we see repentance most clearly demonstrated? In the waters of baptism.

According to the passage that says: "Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John" (John 4:1), we can see that the Lord and the Twelve Apostles had more success than even John in drawing people to the waters of baptism. But what was Jesus' purpose? Why were he and his apostles baptizing people? Their purpose was to provide *purification* of sins.

So a dispute occurred on the part of John's disciples with a Jew concerning purification.

And they came to John and said to him, ‘Rabbi, he who was with you on the other side of the Jordan, about whom you testified—look, this one is baptizing, and all are coming to him!’ (John 3:25-26; LEB)

Now, it should be obvious that baptism is for the purification of sins, but we have to state the obvious since so many false teachers in the Church today vigorously oppose this truth. Sound doctrine is that baptism is for the purification of sins. This truth was revealed by the disciples of John as they spoke of purification and baptism in the same breath in the passage above.

As we compare Jesus to John the Baptist, we do well to recognize that although Jesus was greater than John, John was greater than everyone else before him. Yes, every patriarch [including Abraham], every king [including David], every priest [including Aaron], and every prophet [including Elijah] prior to John, was less than John. John was greater than Moses too. Jesus asked:

... what did you go out [in the desert] to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet... I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John (Luke 7:26-28).

Jesus said “among those born of women there is no one greater,” so let’s think this through: John’s greatness exceeds that of Melchizedek? Yes. We know that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham (Hebrews 7:4, 7), and we know that Abraham was greater than Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph—the men who followed his example to inherit his blessing.

Who could top the greatness of God’s righteous servants Noah, Daniel, and Job? No one, until John the Baptist came on the scene. God esteemed those three very highly, but he does not esteem them higher than John the Baptizer.

‘... if even the three of these men were in the midst of it [a country]—Noah, Daniel, and Job—they, through their righteousness, would save only themselves!’ declares the Lord Yahweh (Ezekiel 14:14; LEB)

So, what are we getting at? Here’s the big question: What does John’s greatness tell us about baptizing? John did, after all, dedicate his life to baptizing people. Baptizing was John’s primary



activity, and he was so well known for it that he was called *the Baptist*. At least five times in the Bible, that's the name he is given, *the Baptist* (Luke 7:33; Mark 1:4; Matthew 3:1; 11:12; 16:13).

Undoubtably, John's divinely-inspired title speaks of the greatness of the ministry of baptism. But today, such a ministry is not held in high repute, not even in Christian churches! You never hear people saying "Wow, that pastor has baptized hundreds of people!"

On the other hand, the Twelve Apostles dedicated their lives to baptizing people. Most of them had switched over from the ministry of John the Baptist to the ministry of Christ, so baptism for the remission of sins was a well-established custom they had even before they knew Jesus.<sup>1</sup> How much firmer had that tradition become through Jesus?

The GC passages we have cited prove that baptism is an essential aspect of "the faith once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Indeed, baptism was handed down to us by the apostles as one of their best practices. It is *the* fundamental Christian tradition—but who explains it, promotes it, and practices it?

I praise you that... just as I handed over to you the traditions, you hold fast to them (1 Corinthians 11:2; LEB).

... brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions which you were taught (2 Thessalonians 2:15; LEB).

### **Born of Water and the Spirit**

Nicodemus said to him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?' Jesus answered: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again' (John 3:4-7; NASB).

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<sup>1</sup> Since the first century BC, for more than 2000 years, Jewish men and women have performed ritual cleansing in baths called *mikveh*. Archeologists have discovered hundreds of these every place where Jews have lived, such as in Israel, the West Bank, and Europe. To a religious Jew, a *mikveh* is even more important than a synagogue! For example, Jewish law states that a *mikveh* must be constructed first, and then a synagogue can be built around it.

We cannot enter the Kingdom of God without a water and Spirit birth. The birth Jesus spoke of while dialoguing with Nicodemus was not a bodily birth. It was not a birth which comes from a human decision. It's not about passing on a blood type to your kids. It is spiritual. It is a birth *of the Spirit*—something which the Scriptures also call *being born of God*.

... as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God (John 1:12-13; NASB).

So, John the apostle wrote that we have to be born of God. He also recorded the words of our Lord Jesus who defined what it means to be *born again*: He called it being *born of water and the Spirit*, saying that we have to be *born of the Spirit* (John 3:5-7).

You may have heard the term *baptismal regeneration* used in theological debates. The different denominations are split on whether it's necessary or not, but Jesus isn't split. He wasn't wishy-washy about baptism. Jesus taught baptismal generation by commanding Nicodemus to be *born of water*.

Nicodemus, a teacher in Israel, did not understand baptism. He would be in good company today because the vast majority of churches don't understand baptism now. Nicodemus didn't understand the requirements for entering the Kingdom of God, and neither do the great majority of Christian pastors.

So let's go to Jesus in secret the way Nicodemus did. Jesus knows exactly what he's talking about. He said we can only enter the Kingdom through a water-spirit birth. Do you tell people the same thing? Or, following the example of some popular pastor, do you lower Jesus' requirements?

Many teachers today want to make access to the Kingdom easy. The current Evangelical tradition, established during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century through evangelistic *crusades* (which were a spinoff of the *camp meetings* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), do not promote baptism. They promote the so-called "prayer of faith."

## A Brief History of NT Church Restoration

The camp meetings, inspired by the Second Great Awakening [1790–1840] developed into an admirable church trend towards NT Christianity: the Stone–Campbell Restoration Movement. Today, continuing through denominations related to the Church of Christ, this is an attempt to bring the Church back to the New Testament model. That’s why it’s called *Restoration*.

The Restoration Movement brought back early church practices to the American churches. Adult water baptism and the Lord’s Supper became important again. A far cry from the current Evangelical tradition of leading people in a *prayer of faith* for salvation, the churches of the Restoration Movement were very Bible-centric.

They inherited the principle of *sola scriptura* from the Reformers, a love of primitive church practices from the English Puritans, and a longing for religious freedom from the Separatist Baptists of the First Great Awakening. Strengthened by these trends, the Restorationists followed a few principles:

- Creeds divide, so Christians should seek agreement through the Bible.
- Ecclesiastical traditions divide, so common ground is NT church practices.
- Christians should use biblical names for the church, not human names.

The Restoration Movement often used the following expressions:

- Where the Scriptures speak, we speak. Where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.
- We are Christians only, but not the only Christians.
- In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things love.
- No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no law but love.
- Do Bible things in Bible ways and call Bible things by Bible names.<sup>2</sup>

The offshoot of the Restoration movement is today’s Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ. These are the only two church groups that in the United States today baptize people for salvation. But there are many other groups around the world, and individuals everywhere who

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<sup>2</sup> The principles and sayings of the Restoration Movement listed above were paraphrased from a very interesting Wikipedia article found at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restoration\\_Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restoration_Movement), retrieved on March 5, 2022.

believe that the salvation experience is through water and the Spirit.

### **Our Restoring Task**

Now, back to you and me. If we don't teach unbelievers to seek the water-Spirit rebirth, they won't seek it! If we don't find a way to clean up the current doctrinal mess, confusion will increase. We have to decide what to do with the millions of people who were initiated into church life without baptism. We also have to decide about what to do with those who were baptized as infants in the Anglican, Wesleyan, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Catholic, and Orthodox traditions.

The straightforward solution to these cases is that each person must seek baptism in water and in the Spirit until they get it. Now, it will be impossible for someone to feel motivated to seek baptisms until they acknowledge that they haven't yet started a new life. After many years as members of a church community, pride stops millions of professing Christians from being baptized in water with the result that they never receive the baptism of the Spirit.

Our Lord repeatedly used the expression *truly truly* in his encounter with Nicodemus (John 3:3, 5; NASB) signifying that he was sharing an absolute truth—and what was that truth? That you must be born of the Spirit if you will ever enter the Kingdom.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God

Jesus put great emphasis on water baptism, in word and actions. Immediately after his conversation with Nicodemus, in the same chapter, we get a picture of Jesus' baptizing ministry. Why is it there? Because it's the context.

... Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were coming and being baptized (John 3:22-23).

Since the ministry of baptism is the context of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, we have strong evidence that water baptism is the *being born of water* Jesus referred to in their dialogue.

Jesus' words corresponded to his actions.

### **Spirit-Water-Blood Agreement**

For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and the three are in agreement (1 John 5:8; NASB).

Now, to *bear witness* means to testify that something is true—in this case, the testimony is that we have eternal life. The context of the verse shows that this is the topic: our sense of confidence that we have eternal life. That is, the context (see vv. 11 and 13, below) is our assurance that we'll be resurrected and will enter the Eternal Kingdom someday.

...the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life... These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:11, 13; NASB).

Do you know for certain that you have eternal life? You can feel confident that you have eternal life if you have the triple testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood.

- The Spirit testifies by giving you at least one spiritual gift.
- The water testifies through baptism by immersion.
- The blood testifies as you drink from *the Lord's Cup* (1 Corinthians 10:21).

Assurance of salvation cannot be based on feelings or on "faith alone." Rather, it must be based on the three testimonies in unison. That is, not only having a gift, not only having been baptized, and not only participating in the Lord's Supper is enough. The three of these together confirm that we're truly in Christ. Would you sit on a chair with just one or two legs? Of course not. Stability only exists on a three-legged stool.

We should not trust our feelings on something of this magnitude. The eternal security of the believer cannot be his belief. That is, simply believing you're saved will not save you. Such a faith could very well be delusional—whereas demonstrating the *genuineness* of your faith is no delusion. It's solid evidence. We affirm that faith saves, but only the evidence of faith warrants *assurance*. The testimony of water is a critical part of that evidence.

## Instruction about Baptisms

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of instruction about baptisms, and laying on of hands, and the Resurrection of the Dead, and eternal judgment... (Hebrews 6:1-2; NASB)

This passage demonstrates exactly what the apostles' most basic doctrine was. Instruction about baptism is one of the seven *foundations* which we derive from the *elementary teaching* involving Jesus as the Messiah. The context of the passage reinforces this idea. Just a few verses earlier, the apostle exhorts the Hebrews not to content themselves with spiritual *milk*, that is, the *elementary principles* they were taught when they were new in the faith.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food (Hebrews 5:12; NASB).

What the apostle calls *instruction about baptisms* figures after repentance and faith on this very important list. That's because the only people who should be baptized in water must first repent of their sins and profess their faith in God. Those who demonstrate the fruit of repentance have hearts free to exercise saving faith in God through baptism. There's a definite chronological order among the foundations.

To note: A handful of English Bible versions translate the Greek word for *baptisms* [*baptismos*] as *washings* here in Hebrews 6:2. Since the essence of baptism is a cleansing of the soul, *washings* works. The author of Hebrews uses the same Greek word [*baptismos*] with the meaning of *washings* one other time in the letter, and Jesus used it with the meaning of washing while he rebuked the Pharisees:

... the present time, in which both the gifts and sacrifices which were offered were not able to perfect the worshiper with respect to the conscience, concerning instead only food and drink and different washings, regulations of outward things imposed until the time of setting things right (Hebrews 9:10; LEB).

‘... laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.’ He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition’ (Mark 7:8-9; NKJV).

Back to Hebrews 6:2. Since the original Greek for *teachings on baptisms* is *baptismon didachys* [sounds similar to our English *baptism didactics*], there’s no reason not to use the word *baptisms*. The noun *baptism* is used five times in the NT, and the verb *to baptize* is used more than 70 times. In almost every case, the preferred translation of the verb is *baptizing* and not *washing*. Out of the 5 cases of the noun *baptism*, at least two should be translated as *baptism*: Hebrews 6:2 and the following:

... having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him (Colossians 2:12).

## **Moving On**

Let’s not linger too long on the subject of baptism as the apostle wanted his hearers to leave the subject behind them—not because baptisms weren’t important, but because they are so elementary that Christians wouldn’t mature without moving on. Today, it is still necessary to leave teachings on baptisms behind us so that we might press on to more challenging topics. We’d like to do that now, but we haven’t met a Christian who has any real Biblical foundation in baptisms. How can we stop teaching a topic which is unknown? Most Evangelicals haven’t even begun to study it. Indeed, they’ve been brainwashed into believing that baptism *doesn’t save*.

Understanding how, when, who, and why to baptize is absolutely foundational. It’s not “majoring in the minors” to talk about it, nor is it “making a big deal out of nothing.” How can a true gospel ministry be run properly without having baptism defined and practiced correctly? It is impossible to have a legitimate evangelistic ministry without giving baptism its rightful place.

## **Baptism Saves You**

And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21; NASB).

What is Peter saying here? Peter, the *Rock* upon which the Church has been built, is saying that Noah's Ark passing through the waters of the Great Flood was a symbol of baptism. Noah's adventure was a salvation experience for him and his family, and so is baptism for us. Just as the Ark saved a family through water, baptism now saves us.

*Now baptism saves* (Greek *nun sotzo baptisma*) is exactly what the Bible says here, but no one dares to say this in an Evangelical church. Indeed, this expression is denied and flat out contradicted in Evangelical churches. I quoted this verse one day in 2018 in Kentucky as I conversed with the man who built the Ark Encounter Museum, Ken Hamm. Upon hearing it, he was deeply disturbed and cut off our conversation.

Mr. Hamm became upset because I pointed out that this, the only verse in the NT that explains the meaning of the Ark, was nowhere to be found in his museum—a museum filled with thousands of Bible verses. The man responsible for investing more than \$100 million dollars in a museum about the Ark could not bear to be hear the one and only NT verse that explains the meaning of the Ark. This is serious, but the reason is clear: Mr. Hamm needs to please Evangelicals who are trained to say “baptism doesn't save.”

Mr. Hamm dismissed me, but he can't dismiss 1 Peter 3:20-21. It will remain in the Bible forever. We love Mr. Hamm's work promoting the science behind Noah's Ark, but hate his anti-biblical stance. He accepts the science, but rejects the meaning behind the Ark: Baptism saves. In a museum with Bible passages around every corner, this one is nowhere to be found:

... God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the Ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of [*an appeal to God for* -- NASB and LEB)] a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ... (1 Peter 3:20-21)

The passage says *baptism now saves you*. There should be no shame stating openly that baptism saves because it's what the Bible says. So why do the majority of Evangelical pastors say just the opposite? How many times have we heard pastors preach “baptism doesn't save”? Contradicting the Scriptures is a dangerous thing to do, bringing judgment from God.



Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it... (Deuteronomy 4:2)

Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar (Proverbs 30:6).

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll (Revelation 22:18).

### **An Appeal for a Good Conscience**

Baptism is filing a petition with God. It's submitting an official *appeal to God for a good conscience* (1 Peter 3:21; NRSV). That is, when you get baptized you are officially asking God to give you a clean and new conscience. That's the Biblical definition of *baptism*: A formal request we submit to God for a new sensitivity to sin. In baptism, we ask God to give us spiritual sensitivity.

Prior to our baptism, we called evil *good* and we called good *evil*. Without the ability to call good *good* and evil *evil*—that is, without a good conscience—we will go on sinning unknowingly until the day we die. By continuing in sin, we have no salvation from sin, and therefore we are not saved from the condemnation sin incurs! Therefore, *baptism saves us* from sin because someone who has been baptized is not confused about sin anymore. They have obtained that which they need for victory against temptation: a good conscience!

... baptism now saves you, not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience... (1 Peter 3:21; NASB and LEB)

### **A Spiritual Activity in Water**

Speaking of the Lord's Supper, Jesus said "...the words I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:51-63), affirming that Lord's Supper is essentially spiritual. You don't literally eat Jesus' flesh in the Eucharist. There's no fork or knife, and no meat. Likewise, baptism is not a literal bath. There's no soap and there's no shampoo involved.

When we call these activities *spiritual* we do not merely mean *symbolic*. Rather, we mean that they contain the essence of what they represent. "What does baptism represent?" you ask. The

death and resurrection of Christ. The opposite of something *spiritual* is something superficial. Baptism is not superficial. It is profound.

If your main concern on the day of your baptism is bringing your favorite towel or whether someone will be there to take pictures, you have missed the point. Better for no one to take pictures, but for all to be praying fervently. If you're worried about whether you'll be in the Jordan River or in another favorite brook or stream, then you'll get distracted from the goal of baptism: to be born of the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, when you take the Lord's Supper, if you're worried about the kind of wine you're drinking (be it grape juice, cabernet sauvignon, or Concorde grape) and you fight with someone over whether you should eat a cracker or a matzoh—then you're missing the point. It is not about the kind of bread or wine you consume, it's about the body and blood of Jesus. Are they your spiritual food and drink?

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16)

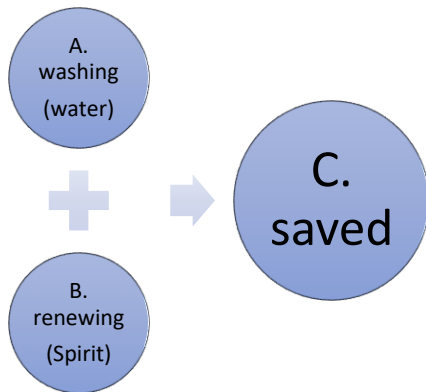
You most definitely need bread and the fruit of the vine for the Lord's Table, and you most definitely need water for baptism. You can't do the Lord's Supper with beer and an apple and you can't do baptism in mud. Your faith in the Word of God makes both effective for feeding and cleansing, and the Word speaks of bread, wine, and water. We tell baptismal candidates that they will be washed in the waters of baptism, for God's Word says that *baptism now saves us*.

### **The Washing of Regeneration**

He saved us not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to his mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; NASB).

Here we have a verse that describes how God saves us. Can you see the structure of its logic? It says that "God saved us by A and B." That's the grammatical structure of the verse, the syntax. Have you ever heard of sentence diagramming? People who like grammar sometimes put their

sentences into diagrams like the one below. This sentence can be broken down into part A and part B.



Part A is that God saved us by *the washing of regeneration* (called baptismal regeneration by some), and part B is the *renewing by the Holy Spirit*. These must occur for us to get part C and be saved according to the mercy of *God our Savior* (v. 4). Now you can see why the foundation *instruction about baptisms* uses the plural form *baptisms*. God saves us with two kinds of baptism: water and Spirit baptism!

Notice that Paul places this A-B dual baptism in contradistinction to *deeds which we have done in righteousness*. That is, we're not saved by doing good. Our good works do not pay for our bad actions. That's not the way God's spiritual economy works. We are not saved from judgment by our own righteousness.

Rather, we recognize our guilt, and wash ourselves from it in baptism. In baptism, we are buried with Christ and die to our sins. We start a new life dedicated to the One who saved us, Jesus.

You'll hear it said by followers of Martin Luther that because we are saved by "faith alone," and anyone who adds baptism to faith is preaching *another gospel* (Galatians 1:6-9) different from Paul's. However, that's simply not true. In Titus 3:5 (the verse we are focusing on), Paul says something much different from Martin Luther. Paul states that salvation is *not on the basis of* good deeds but that salvation is by *the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit*—stating very clearly that we are saved in baptism!

In contrast to my own righteous deeds stands baptism. Getting baptized is salvation in Christ. Baptism is the initiatory rite of New Covenant. We enter into a covenant which works when we are baptized into Christ.

There is no salvation in Moses. The Law is the way of the Old Covenant and the Law is good, but it doesn't save. Those who preached *another gospel* were preaching that people needed to be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses—something which history has proven does not save.

They did not teach baptism.

### **The Washing of Water**

Very similar to the expression *washing of regeneration* is the Biblical expression *washing of water*. Paul declares that Christ *cleansed* the Church *by the washing of water*. Could this mean anything other than baptism? If it's not baptism, then what is this *water* in which the Church is washed?

Christ also loved the Church and gave himself up for her, so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that he might present to himself the Church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25-27; NASB).

An argument could be made that since this *washing of water* is *with the Word* [other translations say *through* or *by* the Word] that the water symbolizes Scripture reading. But that would be redundant, like saying “Scripture reading with the Word.” You can't take out the preposition *with*. It's there to separate the *water* and the *Word*, and to make a distinction between the two: The Word is instrumental in making the water a washing. That's the idea. Paul is saying that the water is only effective through the living Word.

This brings us to the question of what is the most suitable translation of the word *rhema* (used here). *Rhema*, different from *logos*, is not the Scripture reading kind of *word*. It's the active word which brings things to life.

The best translation of Ephesians 5:26 is to understand the preposition to mean *by* (instrumentality). Paul is saying that baptism (the *washing of water*) has the effect of cleansing someone's soul when accompanied *by* a life-giving hearing of God's Word. The word *rhema* implies that there is a reviving revelation in the baptismal event. Baptism is inspirational. The revelation you get from Scriptural baptism makes it a true spiritual cleansing.

Christ died for his Bride on the Cross and *cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word*. He died with this objective: to *sanctify* the Church. He wanted to set her apart from other entities—that is, from synagogues, other religious organizations, armies, sports clubs, schools,

colleges, institutions, political bodies, businesses, and even families.

This is true love. Jesus reserves his Bride for himself, *setting her apart* as he washes in water.

This is love because the Bride is not a naive child. It's not that heinous practice of child marriage. The bride has a mature understanding of what she is doing—she has comprehended the Word!

In addition, this passage proves that baptism is only for those who have reached adolescence, the age of reason. Baptism is a *washing of water through the Word* because anyone who enters the New Covenant does so willingly. There is full consent and full understanding of the terms of the covenant.

Learning God's Word is necessary for a proper baptism. There has to be mental assent if a person will submit to the demands of the New Covenant, and the New Covenant begins at baptism. Let's take the Philippian jailer's family as an example. Each member of the family was baptized, but first each one *believed in God* (Acts 16:34). That belief was born of comprehension, for Paul and Silas first "spoke the Word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house" (v. 32).

There was no baby among the members of the Philippian jailer's family. Their faith was based upon an understanding of the message Paul preached to them. In fact, never in the entire NT ministry of the apostles is there the slightest indication that an infant was baptized. On the contrary, baptism is always the choice of a mature person freely entering into a lifetime covenant with God.

Children are in the age of innocence. That is, they do not incur guilt for any bad things they do. Their bad actions do not count as sin in the legal code of God. Because they have no guilt, God would never condemn them. He would never send them to Hell or to what the Catholic priests call *Limbo*. I've never met a Catholic parent who willing to believe that babies go to this *Limbo* because they know by common sense that God could not be so cruel or unfair.

Very few Catholics baptize their children fearing that God will condemn a child for "original sin." Indeed, few people in their heart believe that babies are born with Adam's guilt. Most people baptize children to consecrate them to a Christian life. They say they are "christening"

them, that is, they are making them Christians. However, the problem with such thinking is that we can't make anyone a Christian. We cannot save anyone, only God can. Jesus spoke about this in a conversation with the apostles:

‘... it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God.’ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, ‘Who then can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible’ (Matthew 19:24-26).

I'd rather take the long road of disciplining my child to help them form a good conscience and a free will which opts for Christ than to take the shortcut of baptizing them as a baby. I'd rather wait until my child demonstrates conversion to Christ. If my child has the freedom to choose baptism on his own, I have not robbed him of the opportunity to demonstrate love to God. But if I baptize him as a baby, I have set him on a path of confusion. A good parent will allow their child to *believe with all their heart* (Acts 8:37) and so be baptized.

The only baptism that counts in God's sight is when a person, hearing and understanding the Gospel, is *cleansed... by the washing of water with the Word*. For the same reason we oppose child marriage or child labor, we oppose child baptism. You can't force an immature minor to enter into a contract they do not understand. Love dictates that you must allow time for them to develop their own free will rather than impose a lifetime commitment on them—and baptism is an eternal commitment!

## **One Baptism**

Being diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one Body, and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one Hope of your calling; one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all... (Ephesians 4:4-5; NASB)

Would the great apostle Paul include baptism on such an important list if it were not a key element of essential Christianity? Of course he wouldn't. Paul put One Baptism on this, his list of the seven essential truths, the seven indispensable realities all Christians share. But we have to ask: What kind of baptism is Paul singling out? It's certainly not baptism by fire (Matthew 3:11), the baptism of martyrdom (Mark 10:38-39), or baptism for the Dead (1 Corinthians 15:29)! It

must be either water baptism or Spirit baptism. No beating around the bush, it's Spirit baptism.

Ephesians 4:4-5 is a perennial passage of Scripture, defining for us the *unity of the spirit*—that is, the grounds of genuine Christian brotherhood. *Unity* refers to what binds believers together, and *of the spirit* refers to the dimension in which we share such unity. It's not the material or physical, but the spiritual dimension that makes Christians truly one with one another.

In other words, Christians are not bound together by the way we dress or because we live in the same neighborhood. Our unity is not wearing the same hat. It's not simply sharing a culture, some holidays, a language, or singing the same songs. Now, these things are nice to share, and they make us feel comfortable with one another, binding our *souls* together—but cannot unite us in spirit.

The seven realities of Ephesians 4 are truths that all Christians share with one another universally. Yes, every child of God in the World is bound together with every other child of God by these truths in their spirit. That's why there is only one of each truth: one faith, one baptism, and one God, for example.

Only essential Truths figure on this list. One of those Truths is that there is one baptism—that is, there is only one baptism which, proceeding from One Spirit, can make someone a member of the one Church. There is only one baptism which binds people from different ethnic, cultural, linguistic, economic, and social backgrounds together in into one Body.

For we were all baptized by One Spirit so as to form one Body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free (1 Corinthians 12:13).

If you have experienced the baptism of the Spirit, you will recall how it transformed your life. Indeed, it was the beginning of your life—your new birth. The only true Christians are the born-again Christians. Furthermore, the baptism of the Spirit is one of seven essential realities which every true believer on the planet cherishes.

Supporting the truth of One Baptism is 1 Corinthians 12:13 which says that we've *all* been *baptized into one Body*. The one Body is the Body of Christ, the Church Universal. The Church is Jesus' Bride.

What does God give to every person to make them a member of the Church? It's not a certificate and not an ID. It's not a t-shirt and not a mark on our right hand or on our forehead. It's not a number. Rather, God gives us at least one spiritual gift—a supernatural power! Note this: That gift comes through the Holy Spirit. Only he distributes the gifts. That's why only people baptized by the Spirit are able to experience genuine Christian unity.

Only our gifts empower us to be functioning members of the Church. Being a talented musician cannot make you a worship leader and being an eloquent speaker cannot make you a preacher. Only a spiritual gift can give you a function in the Body of Christ. No college degree, training program, mechanical skill, or artistic talent will do!

The gifts are first given by the Holy Spirit at the instant we are baptized in the Spirit. He can give subsequent gifts through the laying on of hands, but the initial reception of gifts is during your experience of the One Baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

### **Baptized Into Christ**

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Galatians 3:27; NASB).

We can see here that to be covered in Christ's righteousness is only for an exclusive group of people: those who were *baptized into Christ*. That's how you have to interpret the *all of you who...* in the passage. Only and exclusively those who were baptized have been *clothed* with Christ—that is, have been fully identified with him. That's a bold statement.

Beyond that, we have to understand that when God looks at someone who has been baptized, he doesn't see their sin, he sees Jesus' righteousness. He sees someone *clothed with Christ*. When you are baptized, you have the robe of Christ's righteousness on you. You are wearing Christ, and your sins are covered the way Adam and Eve were clothed with the hide of the animal sacrifice God made for them.

Nowhere does the Bible say that there is another way to be *clothed with Christ*. It's not up to us to invent new ways to be covered by Jesus' righteousness. Baptism is the only way. The Scriptures never say, for example, that we must "receive Jesus in our hearts" in order to be



covered with Christ’s righteousness—but that’s exactly what so many pastors make people think.

To be clothed in Christ in theological terms, is to have his righteousness *imputed* to us. Most Evangelical pastors fervently deny that this happens in baptism, and insist (along with Martin Luther) that you obtain Jesus’ righteousness by faith alone. We disagree and declare with the Bible that *a person is justified by works and not by faith alone* (James 2:24; LEB). Although *Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness* (Romans 4:3; Genesis 15:6), his faith was manifested in works. Likewise, the faith of someone who believes in Jesus works through baptism!

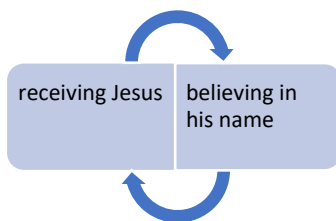
Faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself... faith apart from works is useless... Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was working together with his works... was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works (James 2:17, 20-22, 25; LEB)?

## Receiving Jesus

Most modern pastors teach that saving faith does not work through any means, but that it is mysteriously harnessed through what they call “the prayer of faith,” a prayer to receive Jesus in your heart. They base this modern practice on just one Bible verse:

... as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in his name (John 1:12; NASB).

Let’s examine this verse closely because the eternity of a majority of Evangelicals since the 1950s depends on it. *Receiving Jesus* is defined for us in John 1 as *believing in his name*. Can you see the parallelism? The two ideas are presented side-by-side, and underlined for you above.



Observe that to interpret *receiving Jesus* as a prayer is to take the verse completely out of context because Jesus explains in the same gospel what *receiving him* means—and it’s not saying a prayer. It’s opening your house to him or his disciples. It’s the act of hospitality towards someone sent by Jesus.

Be clear on this point: Jesus defines *receiving him* as offering water or food to those he has sent. When we open your homes, we open our hearts. When we care for a messenger, we accept his message.

Truly, truly I say to you, the one who receives anyone I send, receives me... (John 13:20; NASB)

Our Lord goes on to call the people he sends *prophets, righteous people, and disciples* in Matthew 10. In that chapter, Jesus uses the word *receive* eight times. There also, Christ's main theme is *the one who receives you receives me*. As you read Matthew 10 below, notice how the Lord calls the people he sends his *little ones*, highlighting the fact that they are very dear to him. In contrast, the World has great contempt for them.

You will be hated by everyone because of me... even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid...

The one who receives you receives me, and the one who receives me receives the One who sent me. The one who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward.

And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, truly I say to you, he will never lose his reward (Matthew 10:22; 30-31; 40-42; LEB).

Imagine an inner-city mother sending her four-year-old son to a store to buy a loaf of bread. She watches from the 5<sup>th</sup>-floor apartment window to see how the store owner will treat her *little one*. What would she do if they hit him? What will she do if they throw him out of the store? At the very least they would lose a client, and at most they would have a lawsuit on their hands.

Likewise, any town or home that rejects one of Jesus' *little ones* has a big problem with Jesus.

## **Return to Baptism**

If the prayer to receive Jesus into our hearts is based on a misinterpretation of one Bible verse (John 1:12, which we studied above), then those who use the popular "prayer of faith" method of

evangelism ought to reexamine it. What are we to do with the +30 Bible verses that clearly present baptism in water as God's method of evangelism? Are we to ignore them?

If a preacher dares to disregard the method of evangelism which Christ established, they will be disregarded by Christ. Only since about 1950 (less than 4% [or 1/20<sup>th</sup>] of the Church's 2000-year history) has it employed the method known as the *prayer of faith*.

Prior to the revival meetings of the past century there was a long history of preachers who insisted that baptism saves. Examine the methods of Peter, Paul, Clement, the Apostolic Fathers, Patrick, and Columba and you'll note the prominence of baptism. Other great preachers of the past include Francis of Assisi and Girolamo Savonarola in Italy with George Whitefield, John Wesley, and Charles Grandison Finney in the UK and America. Although these men didn't emphasize baptism, it was because they lived in societies where infant baptism was prevalent.

The prevalence of infant baptism is why we have the Anabaptists, the Baptists, and the Pentecostals—groups which upheld the truth that adults should be re-baptized. If you study preachers in history up to the time of large-scale evangelistic crusades of American preachers such as Billy Graham, there was no one who questioned the need for baptism, not even Martin Luther or the famous Charles Spurgeon. Among all preachers with the exception of the modern ones, the theology of salvation included baptism. Since those who oppose baptism's role in salvation normally consider themselves to be following Luther's doctrine of sola fide very strictly, let's hear a few words from Martin Luther on baptism. The following is from his *Greater Catechism*:

'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.' That is, faith alone makes the person worthy to receive profitably the saving, divine water. For, since these blessings are here presented and promised in the words in and with the water, they cannot be received in any other way than by believing them with the heart. Without faith it profits nothing, notwithstanding it is in itself [baptism] a divine superabundant treasure.

As he expounded upon Mark 16:16, Luther also wrote the following:

We must also learn why and for what purpose it [baptism] is instituted; that is, what it profits, gives and works. And this also we cannot discern better than from the words of Christ above

quoted: ‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.’ Therefore state it most simply thus, that the power, work, profit, fruit, and end of baptism is this, namely, to save. For no one is baptized in order that he may become a prince, but, as the words declare, that he be saved. But to be saved we know is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the Devil, and to enter into the Kingdom of Christ, and to live with him forever.

In his *Greater Catechism* in the section entitled *On Baptism*, Luther declared:

Baptism is no human trifle, but instituted by God Himself, moreover, that it is most solemnly and strictly commanded that we must be baptized or we cannot be saved, lest anyone regard it as a trifling matter... For it is of the greatest importance that we esteem baptism excellent, glorious, and exalted, for which we contend and fight chiefly, because the World is now so full of sects clamoring that baptism is an external thing, and that external things are of no benefit.

Someone may think that Martin Luther was never confronted by the fact that baptism must be a “work.” Well, he was. Luther confronted that possibility in his *Greater Catechism*, stating the following:

But if they say, as they are accustomed: Still Baptism is itself a work, and you say works are of no avail for salvation; what then, becomes of faith? Answer: Yes, our works, indeed, avail nothing for salvation; baptism, however, is not our work, but God's (for, as was stated, you must put Christ-baptism far away from a bath-keeper's baptism). God's works, however, are saving and necessary for salvation, and do not exclude, but demand, faith; for without faith they could not be apprehended.

### **The Purification of Our Former Sins**

For he who lacks these qualities [faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love] is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins (2 Peter 1:9; NASB).

“Why am I not growing?” a believer might ask himself. “Why am I spiritually unproductive?” Peter reminds us that there is a simple reason why Christians don’t grow in faith, goodness,

knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. It's because they have forgotten their beginnings. When believers become unproductive, it's because they have stopped appreciating what God did for them at the start, in their "purification from their former sins," that is—in baptism.

If someone forgets their final days as a single which ended at their wedding, their marriage may very well fall apart. If they forget their period of unemployment which led to them signing a contract at a new job, and they become lazy at work, they may very well get fired. Likewise, if we forget our conversion from a life of sin to new life in Christ, we become useless for ministry. A Christian becomes useless when he loses sight of God's great mercy in baptism.

We once were lost in sin and on the road to Hell, but then he saved us. We were once contaminated and dirty, but he washed us!

The key idea here is that at conversion, God purified us from our *former sins*. That is, all of our previous sins, up to the moment of our baptism, were washed away. After baptism, we need to deal with new sins in a new way—but not through baptism. We deal with sins committed after baptism through confession. Specifically, we must confess our sins prior to taking the Lord's Supper.

After baptism, a true Christian is not going to rush headlong into his previous sins. The Scriptures compare such behavior to a dog returning to its vomit; or a pig who when washed, immediately rolls over in the mud (Proverbs 26:11; 2 Peter 2:22). A true Christian, because he has been born again and has God's Spirit in him, does not return to a life of sin. He's no dog. He's no pig. He's a child of God. He has seen Christ and knows Christ.

No one who lives [*abides*] in him [Christ] keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him... No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's Seed [i.e., the *Spirit*] remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God (1 John 3:6, 9).

In the passage we are investigating (2 Peter 1:9) Peter chose to use the Greek term *katharismos* translated as *purification* (from which we get the English word *catharsis*). He writes about someone forgetting *his purification from his former sins*. Significantly, *purification* is the same

term the Bible uses for the baptisms Jesus and John the Baptist administered:

... there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification (John 3:25; NKJV).

So, we see the word *purification* in these passages, but it's not a term used much in Evangelical churches today. It's not fashionable, which is unfortunate because purification is a key biblical concept. For example, dozens of OT rites focused on purification. Chapters 12-15 of Leviticus explain many of them.

A NT believer may safely set aside all the OT rites, but he cannot set aside the principle of purity. We cannot set it aside because the New Covenant in Christ has an even more powerful means of purification, baptism. Temple sacrifices are not required of us now, but baptism is. This, the Christian rite of purification, washes away all our previous sins—something no OT Temple rite ever did.

### **Baptized into His Death**

Of all Bible passages, the next one most clearly describes the meaning of baptism. It is monumental in the debate in favor of salvation by faith and baptism.

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the Dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin (Romans 6:3-6; NASB).

Paul asks the Roman Christians whether they knew that baptism is full identification with Jesus. He was astounded that they might not. Through baptism we are crucified with Christ and set free from the power of sin. For Paul to say *Do you not know?* implies that these facts should be obvious. That is, it should be a given that only baptized believers participate in the death of Christ. It's not people who go to church, and it's not people who say the "prayer of faith" who

own the Cross—it's only baptized believers.

And there's more to dig out of this passage. For example, our baptism was *in order that* we might walk in *newness of life*—that is, the goal of baptism is to start a resurrection lifestyle. Baptism is the door to a new life of love, freedom from sin, and fellowship. You get baptized to get a new life now—you don't get baptized to only start waiting for the new body you'll be getting at the Resurrection. You'll get that too, but your new life starts the moment you're baptized.

Furthermore, Paul points out that *we have been buried with him [Jesus] through baptism*, declaring baptism the means by which we die to the old self. The leaving behind of a former life of sin officially takes effect in the act of baptism. Only someone who has been baptized can say with Paul:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:20).

Note that our new resurrection lifestyle is conditional upon whether we have become united with Jesus through baptism or not. Paul expresses this conditionality with his grammatical structure *if... certainly also*. We will not begin our new life, the one that ushers us into Eternity, if we aren't first baptized in water. Baptism is the condition that must be met for our new life to initiate.

### **Baptism for the Dead**

... if there is no Resurrection of the Dead... what will those do who are baptized for the Dead? If the Dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them? (1 Corinthians 15:13, 29; NASB)

We just learned from the previous passage that our resurrection is conditional upon our baptism. That is, we won't be resurrected if we haven't been baptized, period. The Early Church was completely convinced of this. Alarmingly, you'll be hard pressed to meet someone who is convinced of it today.

Around 200 AD the Church Father Tertullian, known as the father of Latin Christianity and the

founder of Western theology testified to the belief of the Early Church. He wrote: “The prescript is laid down that without baptism, salvation is attainable by none.”<sup>3</sup>

Now, let’s go further back than Tertullian, to the author of First Corinthians, Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul’s clear-cut theme and context is the Resurrection. He affirms with many proofs that the Resurrection is certain. One proof he offers is the common Church practice of baptism for the Dead. Paul’s argument was: If there is no Resurrection, then those in the Church who were being baptized for the Dead [a considerable number] were wasting their time.

But what is this baptism for the Dead? What exactly was going on? Quite simply, a proxy members got baptized for a deceased believer. Those who otherwise would have been baptized but who were not able to do so due to sudden death or martyrdom, were treated with special concern in the Early Church. Through proxy baptism, concerned church members made sure that it was on record that the deceased had believed in Christ! They established the testimony of salvation on Earth, believing that it would be affirmed in Heaven.

Today there is still a small percentage of aspiring converts who die before baptism. In countries where persecution is highest, like in China, North Korea, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and India—newly professing believers in Christ are still being martyred. In the West, many bedridden sick and elderly people cannot get up to be baptized. Should we do with them what the Church did in the past? The Church gave testimony to God that someone who passed away had truly attained to saving faith by baptizing someone in their place.

## **Binding and Loosening**

As the Bride of Christ, we have the authority to *bind* and *loosen* things on Earth. Does your congregation use that authority or not? Proxy baptism is an act of love. Whether we bind or loosen, God will affirm our decisions in Heaven, and that’s the goal—we want God’s affirmation. Speaking on the authority of the Church, Jesus said:

Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven; and

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<sup>3</sup>Retrieved from Bible Hub on September 8, 2021 at [https://biblehub.com/library/tertullian/on\\_baptism/chapter\\_xii\\_of\\_the\\_necessity\\_of.htm](https://biblehub.com/library/tertullian/on_baptism/chapter_xii_of_the_necessity_of.htm).



whatever you loose on Earth shall be loosed in Heaven (Matthew 18:18; NASB).

If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained (John 20:23; NASB).

Deciding who should be baptized remains one of the Church's greatest tasks to this day. Jesus charged the Church with the responsibility of deciding who receives remission of sins, so the Church must administer baptism judiciously. Baptism is, after all, for the remission of sins!

Along these same lines, the Church arbitrates on the appropriate time for youth to be baptized. It is responsible for deciding on whether a young person is acting under the influence of their parents, or whether they are under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The Church decides what the age of accountability must be!

For gross sinners, the Church examines the fruit of repentance. Did this person who was once an adulterer truly turn to purity and faithfulness? Did this thief return what was stolen and start to work to provide for the needs of others? But the fruit of repentance will be different in youth raised in a Christian home. It will be more subtle to discern such fruit, but the Church must discern this with the help of the parents.

Many people hear about the Church's involvement in a person's salvation and ask "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" (Luke 5:21b) But this is not a Christian question. It's a question of the Pharisees. The Pharisees considered it to be *blasphemy* (v. 21a) to say that men can forgive sins. Do we dare follow the thoughts, words, and ways of the Pharisees?

Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’?” But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on Earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God (Luke 5:18-25).

Jesus destroyed the argument of the Pharisees by not only doing the invisible wonder of healing a spiritual illness, but by doing the visible wonder of healing a physical illness. He proved that he has authority to forgive sins. He shares that authority with his Bride, the Church.

When Jesus healed a paralytic in front of many watching eyes, he did it “... in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on Earth to forgive sins” (v. 24). The argument against human beings being able to forgive sins is destroyed upon Jesus’ use of the term *Son of Man* because *the Son of Man* is not only Jesus as the Messiah, but Jesus as a man. If a man can forgive sins, then authority to forgive is a privilege of the sons of man!

The issue raised by the Pharisees is whether God alone can forgive sins or whether man can also forgive sins. Jesus’ response is that he has authority *on Earth* to forgive. He uses the expression on Earth to place not only his ministry, but the ministry of all Christians in comparison to the authority God wields *in Heaven*. That is, he was not just calling himself the Messiah, he was comparing the authority God to the authority of men.

In this life, we as Christians can ask God to forgive people of their sins and God will hear in Heaven. He will *give them life*, as John put it.

... if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of him.

If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and he will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death.

There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that (1 John 5:15-16; NKJV).

Our authority to forgive is so powerful that John advises against praying for certain sins, lest they be forgiven when they shouldn't be. Certain sins should be bound, not loosened. Some sins the Church should be busy *loosening* are those which through proxy baptism would have stayed with believers who would otherwise have been baptized. People who demonstrated repentance from sin, but who either died or were killed before they could be baptized, need our support. Baptism was their intention, and we intend for them to get the benefits of baptism.

As a wife makes household decisions in the absence of her husband, so the Church decides who receives forgiveness while Jesus is in Heaven. The wife punishes children while the husband is gone, and so does the Church. It decides which church members should be disciplined.

Most Bible translations do not do what the NIV does in v. 29, but there the NIV conveniently puts Paul's question in context by repeating the topic established in v. 13. The topic is whether there will be a Resurrection or not.

Now if there is no Resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the Dead? If the Dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? (1 Corinthians 15:29)

The answer to Paul's rhetorical question "What will those do who are baptized for the Dead if there is no Resurrection?" is supposed to be: "They will despair." If baptism for the Dead is ineffective, then there is no consolation for those who get baptized for them, seeking the salvation of someone who didn't have the opportunity to be baptized.

People who are baptized for the Dead invest time and effort in something God thinks is very important: the Church's witness to someone's faith. God doesn't accept someone's profession of faith at face value. Rather, he leaves it up to the Church to judge the sincerity of the profession of faith.

The Church is responsible for discerning repentance. Pastors and church leaders need to stop thinking that we're doing people a favor not demanding the fruit of repentance. A good doctor will check the position of a baby in the womb and will coax it to set it aright if it's not head-down for birth. He does that out of a love for the baby and the mother. Only a negligent doctor would not monitor the position of a child in the womb. Pastors likewise must check to see whether those who would be born again have or have not positioned themselves for repentance

prior to baptism.

Multitudes came to John the Baptist for baptism. In spite of the great numbers, John did not perform baptisms on demand. Rather, he insisted that each penitent demonstrate *fruit in keeping with repentance* (Matthew 3:7). The response was remarkable. Not only did people come confessing their sins and requesting to be baptized, but John rejected those who were not willing to demonstrate fruit of repentance.

Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance’ (Matthew 3:6-8).

So that people wouldn’t be deceived into thinking that they could be purified of their sins without a change of behavior, John the Baptist described the indicators of repentance in detail. For example, he demanded that people share clothes and food with the needy. Directing his words to tax collectors, John specifically insisted that they not collect more than necessary. From soldiers, John demanded three things: that they not extort, not falsely accuse anyone, and that they be satisfied with their salary.

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers... The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.’

‘What should we do then?’ the crowd asked. John answered, ‘Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.’

Even tax collectors came to be baptized. ‘Teacher,’ they asked, ‘what should we do?’ ‘Don’t collect any more than you are required to,’ he told them.

Then some soldiers asked him, ‘And what should we do?’ He replied, ‘Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay’ (Luke 3:7-14).

That was the Baptist’s approach as he answered the great question of what we must do to demonstrate repentance. What was Paul’s? Paul commanded believers to repent and to help

others come to repentance. For example, he ordered the Corinthians to judge each other, insisting that they call out anyone in the congregation who was not living in holiness. For Paul, this was an indisputable function of believers in a church. Is it still a function of believers in church communities you know? Likely not. Indeed, most Christians can't even understand the passage where Paul gave the instructions:

For what do I have to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the Church? ... or do you not know that the saints will judge the World? ... Do you not know that we shall judge angels? (1 Corinthians 5:12; 6:2a, 3a; NASB)

People won't understand the principle of church discipline mainly because they don't even know that we will rule the World—but that's another matter altogether. In conclusion, the Early Church had the custom of proxy baptism for their believing friends who had passed away prior to water baptism. They did not believe in Purgatory, a place where sins are *purged*, but they did believe in Hades [Hebrew *Sheol*] to be the waiting room for the Resurrection. They believed that people's eternal status can still be modified while people are in Hades—but only those who had the intention of being baptized before they died.

... the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his [Jesus'] voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the Resurrection of Life, and those who have done evil, to the Resurrection of Condemnation (John 5:28-29; NKJV).

There is a triple-witness to the salvation of a human being: Spirit, water, and blood.

... there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and the three are in agreement (1 John 5:7-8).

Baptism is the testimony of water. We know that the Spirit testifies, like he did about the family of Cornelius, giving them Spirit baptism and gifts before they were baptized in water. But does blood also testify? Yes, the blood of Christ speaks.

... you have come... to Jesus, the mediator of a New Covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel (Hebrews 12:22-24; NASB)

Those who would have been baptized if it were possible, who died and are in Hades right now, do not have the three testimonies. Even if someone is baptized for them, they are still missing the testimony of the blood, never having drunk of the Cup of the New Covenant. However, with the bare minimum of the witness of the water, the Spirit will agree. Consider how this works legally: A double witness is the legal Biblical minimum.

Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses (2 Corinthians 13:1).

The testimony of water in proxy baptism will get a dead man's sins forgiven. Because it is the decision of the Church, it elicits the testimony of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit agrees with the Church, and testifies to God that that dead believer is forgiven in Christ and worthy of the Resurrection. This is possible because the Spirit says the same thing the Church says.

The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!' (Revelation 22:17)

Paul supported this practice in the churches he founded. Would you support in your congregation today? There doesn't seem to be much motivation to do so. There's little conviction among believers that people are waiting for a Resurrection from Hades. Even so, we must offer believers baptism for the Dead, if for no other reason than mercy—mercy for those who are mourning the death of a loved one and for the souls of those loved ones.

Think compassionately. What of the souls of those who could not be baptized? Are they not in agony in Hades right now, awaiting an eternal judgment? Baptism for the dead is based on compassion. It's an act of Christian love.

### **Buried and Raised With Jesus**

... having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the Dead (Colossians 2:12; NASB).

Baptism is the only activity available to the human race in which we can become united with the Lord Jesus in his burial. Baptism is where the old self, the "old me" is done away with—that is, I am buried. My faith works specifically as I come out of the water. It's at that moment when I am

*raised up with him*—that is, resurrected. Only in baptism can a person experience this: Genuine union with Christ in his resurrection. As we rise from the waters of baptism, we officially become partakers of Christ's Death and Resurrection.

Let's be aware of the fact that when Paul writes that burial and resurrection in baptism is *through faith* that faith does not abrogate baptism's place in salvation. It's completely illogical to conclude that because we are raised up *through faith*, baptism doesn't save us. The logical interpretation is that faith works through baptism. Indeed, the entire testimony of Scripture affirms that faith works—but when we affirm faith, we do not deny baptism. Faith and baptism are complementary.

*Faith works* does not mean baptism does not work. In fact, faith affirms baptism's role in salvation! The Church's affirmation of faith cannot become the Church's denial of baptism. The two are completely compatible. Notice how Paul uses the expression *faith working* below:

... in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love (Galatians 5:6; NASB).

So, faith works through baptism unto salvation. The Scriptures demonstrate that baptism is the saving complement to faith, and that faith is the saving precursor to baptism. Both have a saving quality, which is why if the old you has been crucified with Christ *and* was buried with Christ in baptism—you are saved from the power of sin!

Earlier in the same epistle, Galatians, Paul made a famous statement about the faith we need to be justified. It's not faith in the works of the Law, but faith in Christ. It's not believing in the Old Covenant, but in the New.

... a person is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus... I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:16, 20; NASB).

Let's finish up our analysis of Colossians 2:12. It's crucial to understand that saving faith focuses on God's action of raising Jesus from the Dead. The passage specifically says that baptism is *faith in the working of God*. This means we trust in something God did, an action. God's action

upon which baptismal faith is laser-focused is that particular *work* of raising Jesus from the Dead.

The NT states 30 times that God resurrected Jesus. We must believe this truth to be saved! If you believe that Jesus self-resurrected, you have not yet put your faith in God. Jesus did put his faith in God, and so was saved from sin and death. Follow him on the basis of the 30 passages below. They reinforce the fundamental doctrine of *faith in God* (Hebrews 6:1)!

1. ... having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the Dead (Colossians 2:12; NASB).
2. ... the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the Dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:8-9).
3. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it (Acts 2:32).
4. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus... You killed the Author of Life, but God raised him from the Dead (Acts 3:13-15).
5. It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the Dead, that this man stands before you healed (Acts 4:10).
6. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the Dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross (Acts 5:30).
7. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the Dead on the third day and caused him to be seen (Acts 10:39-40).
8. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the Dead... (Acts 13:29-30).
9. What God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: "You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'



God raised him from the Dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said, “I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.” So it is also stated elsewhere: “You will not let your Holy One see decay.” “Now when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. But the One whom God raised from the Dead did not see decay (Acts 13:32-37).

10. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the Dead (Acts 17:30-31).
11. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the Dead? “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth... that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the Dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles (Acts 26:8-9,23).
12. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the Dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:4).
13. Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the Dead (Galatians 1:1).
14. ... we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the Dead (1 Corinthians 15:15).
15. For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God’s power (2 Corinthians 13:4).
16. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know... his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the Dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 1:17-20).

17. ... your faith in God has become known everywhere... you turned to God from idols to serve the Living and True God, and to wait for his Son from Heaven, whom he raised from the Dead—Jesus... (1 Thessalonians 1:8-10)
18. During the days of Jesus' life on Earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the One who could save him from Death... (Hebrews 5:7)
19. Now may the God of Peace who brought again from the Dead our Lord Jesus... equip you with everything good... (Hebrews 13:20-21, ESV)
20. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead (1 Peter 1:3).
21. The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the Dead (Romans 4:23-24).
22. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the Dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the Dead [God] will also give life to your mortal bodies... (Romans 8:11)
23. By his power God raised the Lord from the Dead, and he will raise us also (1 Corinthians 6:14).
24. ... we know that the One who raised the Lord Jesus from the Dead [that's God] will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself (2 Corinthians 4:14).
25. But God raised him from the Dead, freeing him from the agony of Death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. David said about him [Jesus]: 'I saw the Lord [God] always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the Dead, you will not let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence' (Acts 2:24-28).

26. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him (1 Thessalonians 4:14).
27. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us (Romans 8:34).
28. Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the Dead, descended from David. This is my Gospel... (2 Timothy 2:8-9)
29. ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again...’ He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the Dead on the third day (Luke 24:7,46—to be compared with all the other passages which address what *rising from the Dead* means, none of which ever use the reflexive *raise himself* (Mark 9:9-10; 10:34; Luke 18:33; John 20:9; Acts 17:3).
30. After he was raised [passive tense] from the Dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken (This passage is the primary one enemies of the truth twist to deceive people into thinking that Jesus resurrected himself—read the context, please; John 2:18-22).

### **You Were Washed**

And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:11; NASB).

Paul presents the order of the salvation experience here. Pay close attention to how salvation has a washing effect before it results in justification. That is, Paul does not explain salvation by putting our being *justified* before our being *washed*. Contrary to popular opinion, the Bible teaches that nobody is justified until they are washed.

The terms Paul employs here lay out a chronology we can’t afford to miss. Observe first that washing brings about sanctification. That is, baptism sets you apart. We must take the *washing* here to mean the same thing Paul called the *washing of regeneration* in Titus 3:5—it is the same man speaking, after all. Paul had his own set of terms just like anyone else, and with *washing*

Paul means the cleansing of sins in baptism. Paul may have learned this from Ananias, the man who evangelized him and who commanded Paul:

Get up, be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name (Acts 22:16; LEB).

So, after a person has been forgiven of their sins in the washing of baptism, they are set apart/sanctified as a child of God. Jesus won a championship on the Cross and we're his trophies! He places us on a special shelf, and he is committed to keeping us free from clutter and dust. We occupy a special place in his house. We are *sanctified*.

Being sanctified then opens the way for being *justified*. We are not only set apart, we are set apart to be made like Christ. Think of dishwashing. When you put plates in a sink, first you scrub them with soap in water (they are washed). Then you set them on the rack to dry and place them in the cupboard (they are sanctified). After that, you take them out to use them for dinner—the plates are justified at dinnertime.

Plates eventually are used for their intended purpose. They are *justified* because they fulfill their purpose. So it is with us when we are born again, we are declared *just* when we are made useful for God's service and we finally do what we're supposed to do.

Only at the moment of *justification* does God finally consider us to be righteous. But what happens if we sin afterwards? There's little doubt we will stumble into sin again. When it happens, we maintain our righteous status before God through confession.

Let's return to the illustration of the plate. A polite person at the dinner table will keep their plate clean while they are sitting at the table. Nobody uses water to clean their plate in the middle of a meal. It would be absurd for someone to run their plate under the faucet before they have finished eating. Rather, we keep our plate neat by either pushing our food with a fork or wiping it with bread. The one thing we don't do is clean it with water during the meal. Likewise, nobody should be baptized in water a second time.

## **Our Fathers Were Baptized**

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the Cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the Cloud and in the sea (1 Corinthians 10:1-2; NASB).

This is a curious passage, especially the phrase *baptized into Moses*. What does that mean exactly? The explanation is in the theme Paul repeats being *in the Cloud and in the sea* or *under the Cloud and... through the sea*. The dual experience of the Israelites as they walked under the shadow of the Column of Smoke and through the Red Sea was the equivalent of our current dual experience as we walk through this life. Those who walked with Moses had one experience, and those of us who walk with Jesus have another.

The pair of supernatural wonders of the Exodus parallel NT baptisms. *The Cloud*—that is, the column of smoke by day and fire by night—was equal to our Holy Spirit baptism. The crossing of the sea equals our water baptism. Paul says we should *not be unaware* of these parallels. However, most churchgoers today are completely oblivious to them. By becoming aware of the OT/NT parallels, you will understand that two-fold baptism is not new.

Paul's interpretation of the Red Sea crossing matches well with Peter's interpretation of another ancient event, the Flood. Peter tells us that God used the Flood as a baptism for Noah and his family. As they passed through the waters in a wooden vessel (1 Peter 3:21), they prefigured baptism in water and faith in the Cross. With Paul and Peter freely interpreting baptism as an ancient phenomenon, we should be open to seeing it in other stories of the Old Testament. Let's do that with three OT stories.

## **NT Baptism in Three OT Stories**

Consider the story of Naaman, who was cleansed of leprosy. The prophet Elisha refused to perform a headline-making healing in front of Naaman's entourage. Instead, he directed Naaman to the unimpressive waters of the Jordan. For someone from a country such as Aram,<sup>4</sup> which

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<sup>4</sup> Naaman was from Aram, and Abraham's city of birth, *Ur of the Chaldeans* (Genesis 11:28, 31; 15:7; Nehemiah 9:7) was most certainly located in that region. This Ur is likely the modern Turkish city of Urfa (the Greeks called it

encompassed the northwest slopes of Mount Hermon to the northern regions of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, plunging in the tiny Jordan would be humiliating. However, the Jordan's current would heal Naaman forever once his faith was activated.

Naaman was the commander of the army of the King of Aram... He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy... he went down and plunged into the Jordan seven times, according to the word of the man of God [Elisha], and his flesh returned as the flesh of a small boy, and he was clean (2 Kings 5:1, 14).

This story of Naaman shows us how significant the Promised Land by highlighting the importance of Israel's only river. The crowning glory of the Jordan would be when the Messiah was baptized there, but Naaman's experience opened the eyes of many Gentiles as to the importance of the Jordan. Indeed, the fact that God had already split open the Jordan to allow the Israelites passage into the Promised Land was a sign that "that all the peoples of the Earth might know that the hand of Yahweh is powerful" (Joshua 4:24). So God has made his power visible to the Gentiles through a weak river!

Joshua told the people that God did the same thing to the Jordan River that he had done to the Red Sea. That is, drying it up so that the people could cross over. Notice in the passage below how he says "Yahweh your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over." What does this mean but that we must interpret the crossing of the Jordan the same way we interpret the crossing of the Red Sea? And, how do we interpret the crossing of the Red Sea? It's baptism. So the crossing of the Jordan also

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*Edessa*), and not the Sumerian city of Ur located south of Baghdad close to the Persian Gulf in modern Iraq (a theory which only became popular in 1927).

Abraham had a brother named *Haran* who may be associated with the ancient city of Haran (currently located just north of the Syrian border in Turkey). The cities of Haran and Ur of the Chaldeans were located within Aram. From the Arameans we get the Aramaic language (spoken by Christ and by many Syrians and Israelis today). Notably, Laban, the brother of Rebecca, was called an *Aramean* (Genesis 28:5).

Abraham's chief steward Eliezer went to Aram to find a bride for Isaac. At the time, Isaac lived far away, south of Beersheva in the Negev. Eliezer found Rebecca, the daughter of Bethuel and brought her to the Negev. But just one generation later, Rebecca would advise Jacob her son to flee from his brother Esau, and to go to Aram to find a wife (Genesis 28:2-5; 29:1, 4). Jacob arrived to the city of Paddam-Aram (Genesis 28:5, 7; 46:15).

Aram is roughly the equivalent of modern day Syria and parts of southern Turkey. Its ancient borders spanned from Mount Hermon north-westward to the fertile region of northern Mesopotamia, between the great Euphrates and Tigris Rivers.

represents baptism. Specifically, it demonstrates that if there is a covenant and priesthood involved in your baptism, then those waters will usher you into the Kingdom of God.

Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of Yahweh stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

... Yahweh your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. Yahweh your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of Yahweh is powerful and so that you might always fear Yahweh your God (Joshua 3:15-17; 4:23-24).

Now, let's consider Elisha's floating axe-head miracle. Our souls are the axe head, separated from the handle, our body. Once we die, our souls sink down to Hades, but wood in contact with water (faith in the Cross of Christ combined with water baptism) can rescue our souls from Hades. This rescue consists of reuniting our souls with our bodies, putting us in the hands of God, our owner.

As one of them [the prophets] was cutting down a tree, the iron axe head fell into the water. "Oh no, my lord!" he cried out. "It was borrowed!" The man of God asked, "Where did it fall?" When he showed him the place, Elisha cut a stick and threw it there, and made the iron float. "Lift it out," he said. Then the man reached out his hand and took it (2 Kings 6:5-7).

Paul tells us that the Exodus was a double baptism. Peter tells us that Noah and his family were baptized. Can anyone deny that Naaman, Elisha, and Joshua also demonstrated the importance of baptism? Will we close our eyes to baptism in the OT? No. Rather, we must interpret the

Scriptures according to the axiom: The OT in the NT revealed, the New in the Old concealed.

### **Bodies Washed with Pure Water**

Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:22; NASB).

With no effort, we stumble upon yet another passage about baptism—this one describes how God transforms our conscience through it. We already examined the impact baptism has on the conscience with Peter’s Noah’s Ark comment (1 Peter 3:21). Peter noted that baptism is a request from us to God for a good conscience. Now we find another passage in which baptism is associated with the cleansing of *an evil conscience*.

In baptism, our hearts are *sprinkled clean*—but not by water. The author of Hebrews makes it clear that water is for the body and blood is for the spirit. Our bodies are immersed in water but our hearts are sprinkled with the blood of Christ! The term *heart* here is synonymous for the human spirit, the deepest part of our being. Jesus has sprinkled our spirits with his blood. Let’s compare this NT phenomenon to one from the OT: Moses sprinkling the people with blood.

... [Moses] sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to Yahweh. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the Altar.

Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, ‘We will do everything Yahweh has said; we will obey.’ Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, ‘This is the blood of the Covenant that Yahweh has made with you in accordance with all these words’ (Exodus 24:5-8).

Now, Jesus’ *sprinkling* his blood on our hearts works the same way Moses sprinkled the blood of the Old Covenant on the people—it sets us apart. The blood sets us apart as a people in covenant with God. It sanctifies us. But why is blood the seal of the Covenant and not some other substance like oil or water?

Like the OT Jews, we have heard God’s Word and agree to keep it. The terms of the New



Covenant are: 1) We acknowledge our sin. 2) We acknowledge that we deserve the death penalty. 3) We believe that Jesus sacrificed his life for our life. 4) We trust that God accepted Christ's life because God resurrected him. 5) We prize Christ's blood as the sign of his life and the grounds for our forgiveness.

The interpretation of Exodus 24 is not left to guesswork. The correct interpretation is given to us in the New Testament which tells us that immediately after Moses explained the terms of the Old Covenant, God put the it into effect—activating it through blood!

... a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. This is why even the First Covenant was not put into effect without blood.

When Moses had proclaimed every command of the Law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool, and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. He said, 'This is the blood of the Covenant, which God has commanded you to keep' (Hebrews 9:17-20).

Our covenant with God works the same way. It is put into effect the instant Christ's blood is applied to our life. Ask any theologian, pastor, or Bible teacher this question: "At what instant is Christ's blood applied to me?" and you'll likely hear a broad gamut of answers. You may even here a lot of uncertainty, but the Bible is clear that the application of Jesus' blood happens by faith—a faith which we exercise in baptism. The author of Hebrews sums it up nicely:

... our hearts sprinkled clean [with Christ's blood] from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:22).

Nobody will obtain forgiveness of sins, nor will they enter the Kingdom of God without a covenant—and our covenant, the New Covenant, is established in baptism!

When Moses sprinkled the blood on the scroll and the people, he was establishing the Old Covenant. The people and God (the scroll contained God's Word, so it represented him) were parties to the agreement, so Moses sprinkled the scroll and the people with blood.

The Old Covenant was good, but it was incomplete. It's hard to notice in Exodus 24, but the author of Hebrews points out for us that something was missing from the Old Covenant

established in Exodus 24. Reflect upon contrast of *the copies* of the Heavenly Temple apparatus with the Heavenly Temple apparatus *themselves*. Can you tell the difference between the two?

In the same way, he [Moses] sprinkled with the blood both the Tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. In fact, the Law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

It was necessary, then, for the copies of the Heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the Heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered Heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's Presence (Hebrews 9:21-24).

Do you follow the interpretation? The author of Hebrews signals that purification with blood was required for the Earthly Tabernacle. If you believe that, then you are supposed to conclude that the True Tabernacle in Heaven had to be purified too. This logic is what brings us to the main point of Hebrews 9, that the Heavenly Tabernacle had to be cleansed with a greater sacrifice—the blood of Jesus!

Moses sprinkled the blood on the worship space and all of its accessories, establishing the Old Covenant, but that Tabernacle was only temporary. That is, the utensils Aaron was using were *copies* of the true utensils which our High Priest Jesus uses in God's Presence in Heaven—yes, he literally uses utensils to minister in a real space in a real body! Therefore, the Tabernacle and its utensils, being made with human hands, constituted a temporary covenant which would only be in effect until the Eternal High Priest Jesus entered the True Temple. Since Christ's Ascension to Heaven, the Temple in Heaven has become operational. The New Covenant has been enacted and the Old Covenant, which represented it in a temporary way in times past, is now *obsolete*—God making sure that this is clear by allowing the destruction of the Temple (which Jesus prophesied).

### **Does Blood Really Cleanse Things?**

The sprinkling of blood is a *cleansing* in God's eyes, but it's not so in the eyes of modern man. We think: How can sprinkling objects with blood cleanse them? We limit our thoughts to science, which has proven that blood has germs and will transmit infections. As far as we know,

there are few bodily secretions more dangerous than blood, but the benefit of blood far outweighs its dangers.

The benefit of blood is life! Only blood generates life. Just ask someone who has received a transfusion. And that's why while putting a covenant into effect, blood is all-important. Blood declares "a life was given" and establishes the legal basis for God's forgiveness.

... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22).

Blood is life, so when it is sprinkled, it says "God has had mercy by substituting a life for our life." The blood of Jesus *speaks*, as we are told in the next passage. And what does his blood say? It says "This is one to whom the atonement applies."

But you have come to... Jesus the Mediator of a New Covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Hebrews 12:22-24).

... God's elect... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father... to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood (1 Peter 1:2).

The sprinkling of blood has long been an action believers perform by faith. Moses, for example, kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood *by faith*.

By faith he [Moses] kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, in order that the one who destroyed the firstborn [the *Destroyer* as per Exodus 12:23] would not touch them [the firstborn boys] (Hebrews 11:28; LEB).

God established that he wouldn't take the lives of the firstborn sons of the Jews from any home in which a lamb had been slaughtered and its blood spread on the doorpost. The sprinkling of blood was the sign that God had redeemed firstborn sons from a Jewish home. Blood signaled the life-for-life contract the Jews had with Elohim.

Now, we have to rewind here. Nobody will understand how important *life for life* is without being grounded in this principle: If you have sinned, God has decreed your death. That is, God will give you capital punishment if you sin. Only those who are convinced that God's payment for sin is death will value his gift of life!

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

So, we receive the grace of God through the blood of Jesus. The blood he spilled on the Cross was his life, and it appeases God's righteous wrath against us. When it's sprinkled on our hearts (that's our focus passage—Hebrews 10:22), it replaces the death we deserve with the death of a righteous man. This is called *substitutionary atonement*, when someone dies in the place of another.

But here's the main point: The atonement doesn't cover everybody. Only those who have been *baptized into Christ* partake in Christ's death. Only people who are baptized have their sins forgiven.

... don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death (Romans 6:3)?

God's sentence of death against you is cancelled when you die with Christ. This should make sense to you. If it does, then add to it that you are *baptized into his death*. That is, the instant you are baptized is the instant you die with Christ. That means that Jesus' death counts for you the moment you are baptized. There is no other moment when this legal transaction takes place, only in baptism.

Paul presumed that the Romans knew that *all of us who are baptized* participate in the death of Christ. Times have changed, so we cannot presume what Paul did any more. On the contrary, if you defend baptism's importance in a Christian church, presume that you'll be rejected, scorned, and even deemed a heretic.

Slander us as they will, we do not deny the role of faith in a person's salvation. They accuse us of denying that salvation is by faith, but we affirm faith. It is by faith that we receive redemption. Anyone who steps into the waters of baptism does so by faith! We deny dead faith. We affirm a faith that works, a faith that works through baptism.

... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith (Romans 3:23-25).

This passage brings us back to the matter of how we are cleansed by Jesus' blood. If we simplify it to its skeletal basics, it essentially says:

... all are justified freely by God's grace through Christ Jesus who God presented as a sacrifice through the shedding of his blood, received by faith

We're trying here to understand what it means to be justified by grace through Jesus' blood. We want the bare bones truth about redemption—that is, what we need to be bought back. To understand redemption, we must return to the OT principle of blood sacrifice. The next passage lays this out for us. Particularly, how important it is that Jesus shed his blood for us.

... only the High Priest entered the Inner Room [Holy of Holies], and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place [the one in Heaven] had not yet been disclosed as long as the First Tabernacle was still functioning.

This is an illustration for the present time [speaking of the time prior to 70AD, when the priests still ministered in the Temple], indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered (not being able<sup>5</sup> to clear the conscience of the worshiper) are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the Time of the New Order.

But when Christ came as High Priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect Tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this Creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining

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<sup>5</sup> The words *were not able* in the NIV here make it sound like the author is writing about the past, but he was talking about the sacrifices that were still happening in the Temple. Therefore, we have replaced the NIV's translation with the original Greek's *not being able*—the present participle passive voice *mē dynamenai*.

eternal redemption.

The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the Living God! For this reason, Christ is the Mediator of a New Covenant (Hebrews 9:7-15).

You'll notice that the topic the passage drives at is the New Covenant. We can summarize and paraphrase the passage above like this:

Jesus entered the Most Holy Place in Heaven once for all by his own blood obtaining eternal redemption. How much more than the Earthly Temple's OT sacrificial system will the blood of Christ, who offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences?

Do you see that the passage concludes with a statement to the effect that our sins are *cleansed from our consciences* through Jesus' blood? Those sins are the ones God washes away when we plead God for a new conscience in baptism, for in baptism we *wash away our sins* (Acts 22:16). Indeed, if we circle back one more time to Hebrews 10:22, our focal passage, we'll see that the author of Hebrews is indeed talking about baptism. What does it say in Hebrews 10:22? That *our bodies [are] washed with pure water* when our hearts are sprinkled with Christ's blood. These things happen simultaneously.

### **Blessed Assurance**

Let's now turn our eyes to how our focal passage (Hebrews 10:22) addresses the critical issue of assurance. Assurance is being confident that we are right with God.

Let us draw near [to God] with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:22; NASB).

How can we get assurance? How can we have confidence in approaching God in prayer? How do we get confidence that we'll pass the Day of Judgment unscathed? The wording of the passage describes baptism as an action which cleanses us of an evil conscience and washes the body from

spiritual impurities—but it does not describe baptism as an end in itself. Baptism is not the goal. We get baptized so that we might confidently *draw near* to God and get the things we want.

If you want confidence in prayer and you want to feel assured of a good standing with God, you have to be baptized. The reason is because through baptism we are *in Christ*. Our confidence becomes Jesus' life, not our life, once we are baptized. We have trusted in the blood of Jesus and have renounced self-confidence. Someone who has been baptized puts their faith in Jesus' righteousness, not in their own righteousness.

When the author of Hebrews writes of having *our bodies washed with pure water*, he's not using a figure of speech. The expression *our bodies* is too concrete to be a metaphor. The author is clearly talking about being physically dipped in water, and he directly states two things:

- a) sin contaminates the body
- b) baptism washes the body

These are two undeniable truths. The first one can be supported by two other verses:

... on some [whom you are evangelizing] have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh (Jude 23; NASB).

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? ...Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body (1 Corinthians 6:15, 18).

Does sin really contaminate our bodies? Yes. In particular, sexual sin pollutes the body. And since the body, soul, and spirit are inextricably intertwined (1 Thessalonians 5:23), and because our bodies must be resurrected, they must also be cleansed. That's why having *our bodies washed with pure water* is so important!

Our need for cleansing is also why baptism must be complete immersion in water. Immersion speaks of complete consecration. God designed our bodies for service to him so it's only right that they should be dedicated to him.

Each of us is bound to our own body forever. Jesus was resurrected scars and all, proving that we keep our bodies forever. In addition, he who never sinned in his body cleansed his—so why shouldn't we who have sinned in our bodies cleanse ours? The nature of mankind is that we have bodies and we must prepare them for eternity. Jesus came to help us with that by showing us what to do before he resurrects us.

## **Not Sent to Baptize**

For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ.' Has Christ been divided?

Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, that no man should say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel... (1 Corinthians 1:11-17; NASB)

The typical interpretation of this passage goes something like this: "Paul's mission was not to baptize people, but to preach the Gospel to them, proving that baptism does not save." However, such an exegesis is far from the truth. On the contrary, Paul equates baptism with Christ's death in the text. We'll explain that shortly, but first consider how it was Paul's custom to equate baptism with Christ's death:

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism (Romans 6:3-4; NASB).

... all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Galatians 3:27; NASB).

Notice the correlation of these two verses to 1 Corinthians 1, the passage at hand. Paul is demonstrating that Jesus' crucifixion counts for someone when they're baptized in the name of Jesus when he says "Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name



of Paul?” The corollary is that if we’re baptized in the name of Jesus, Jesus was crucified for us!

What is Paul’s objective with the Corinthians in this first epistle? In chapter 1 Paul is trying to stop their quarrels by turning their focus on Jesus as Savior. He is trying to turn their eyes away from the apostles and towards Jesus. His focus is not the doctrine of baptism. Paul presumes that the Corinthians already understand baptism. He only speaks on baptism in order to cure the Corinthians of their division.

But why would Paul condemn those who say *I of Christ* right along with those who say they are of Paul, Peter, or Apollos? Aren’t all Christians supposed to belong to Jesus? Isn’t saying *I am Christ’s* the right attitude? Paul’s answer is *no, it’s not*. Let’s see why.

There were at least 82 men sent by Jesus to preach: 70 or 72 disciples plus the Twelve Apostles. Did any of these become proud of having belonged to Jesus’ earthly ministry? Undoubtedly so. Indeed, in Corinth Paul was running into such people. He also met with people who served in Peter and Apollo’s ministry. The folks from Peter’s ministry who said *I of Cephas* were wrong just as the men from Jesus’ earthly ministry who were saying *I of Christ* were wrong because of the way they said it. They said it in the sense that their affiliation with Jesus was knowing him in the flesh—that’s not the way to know Jesus!

Our Lord, understanding that there is a strong temptation for people to affiliate themselves with anointed teachers, did not baptize anyone during his earthly ministry.

Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John, although Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were (John 4:1-2; NASB).

By not baptizing people in water, Jesus demonstrated two things:

1. That he did not want people to trust in him, but in God.

A certain ruler asked him, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ ‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good—except God alone’ (Luke 18:18-19).

Jesus cried out and said, “The one who believes in me does not believe in me, but in the One who sent me, and the one who sees me sees the One who sent me... For I have not spoken

from myself, but the Father Himself who sent me has commanded me what I should say and what I should speak (John 12:44-45, 49; LEB).

2. That he was patiently waiting for a bigger ministry to begin—his ministry of baptizing people with the Holy Spirit.

This great ministry, the only one of its kind in history, would begin after Christ's ascension to Heaven. Notice in the following passages how both John the Baptist and Jesus prepped their followers for the ministry of the Holy Spirit:

I [John the Baptist] baptized you with water, but he [the One to come after John, who is more powerful than John, the straps of whose sandals John was not worthy to untie] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8; LEB).

... wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me [Jesus] speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5).

Few Christians today are aware that Jesus' earthly ministry registered more water baptisms than the ministry of John the Baptist. But yes, the Twelve Apostles baptized more people than John the Baptist, ministering during the same time period as John. Now, John had become famous for baptizing people, but Jesus became more famous and successful baptizing people than John. If we disregard the fact that Jesus was the most successful baptizer of his day, we diminish the importance of baptism itself.

Back to the point of why Paul was glad that he didn't baptize many people in Corinth. Paul felt this way for the same reason that Jesus felt happy not baptizing people. Why didn't Jesus stand in the waters of the Jordan and dip people? Jesus' decision to not involve himself in water baptism was a decision made in love. He refrained from baptizing to prevent people from falling into temptation. This NT principle of brotherly love very important and summed up in the expression *do not cause your brother to stumble* (Romans 14:13-23; 1 Corinthians 8:9; 10:32).

If Jesus had baptized people, wouldn't they be tempted to brag? They would say "I was baptized by Jesus." They would think they were better than other believers. Jesus didn't want to tempt

people and he didn't want to confuse them. Anyone baptized by him may have imagined that they had reached some sort of goal, but the goal is to be baptized by the Holy Spirit! That's the goal Jesus sets for every human being—now and during the time of his earthly ministry.

Jesus did not want to open a door to future quarrelling and neither did Paul. Paul's crisis in Corinth proves that Christians were prone to quarreling over who baptized them. Even some people were saying *I am of Christ*, meaning that they were from Jesus' ministry. Like we said, it's not that Jesus actually dipped people, but just as Solomon got the credit for building the Temple without lifting a stone, Jesus got credit for baptizing without dipping a soul. He led the apostles' ministry of baptism, so people who were involved in that ministry could rightly say *I am of Christ*.

However, at all costs we must avoid any baptism experience which makes the "star player" the person doing the baptizing—even if that person is Jesus! The people in Corinth who said *I of Christ* were people who knew Jesus in the flesh just like those who said *I of Peter* or *I of Apollos* knew Peter and Apollos in the flesh.

It's likely that many of those who said *I of Christ* were baptized under his watch, or were among those who saw him after the Resurrection and prior to his Ascension to Heaven. At least 515 people fit into that latter category, and Paul tells us in the same letter (1 Corinthians) that they were still alive!

...he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and... he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:4-6).

But what did being baptized under Jesus' earthly ministry ever do for anybody? It didn't bring about a new birth. That only came later.

The important thing is knowing Jesus through the Spirit. To have known him in the flesh is a small thing compared to knowing him by means of the Holy Spirit. The apostles, who knew him face-to-face, renounced all pride in having known him that way, exchanging those experiences for the much greater privilege of knowing Christ through the Spirit.

... from now on we recognize no one by the flesh; even though we have known Christ by the flesh, yet now we know him in this way no longer (2 Corinthians 5:16; NASB).

Water baptism is important, but people who make water baptism their boast easily fall into the sin of sectarianism.<sup>6</sup> Jesus didn't want people to say that he had baptized them, and neither did Paul. Their reason was simple: They knew that only the baptism of the Holy Spirit saves a soul, and they wanted souls to be saved!

Think about it: Paul's words *Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel* cannot mean that Jesus didn't want Paul to baptize people. If that's the interpretation, then the passage at hand should be read as a confession of disobedience since Paul names a family and two other people he baptized in Corinth: the household of Stephanas, Crispus, and Gaius.

In Acts, Luke records Paul baptizing Lydia and her companions; the family of the Philippian jailer; and twelve disciples of John the Baptist. Are we to interpret these as demonstrations of Paul's disobedience to Christ? Of course not.

The Lord opened her [Lydia's] heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home (Acts 16:14-15; NASB).

And they [Paul and Silas] spoke the Word of God to him [the Philippian jailer] together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household (Acts 16:32-33; NASB).

Paul... came to Ephesus, and found some disciples... they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying (Acts 19:1, 5-6; NASB).

Paul was glad that he hadn't baptized any of the church members of Corinth *that...* (a word which introduces his reason) ...no man should say you were baptized in my name. In other words, Paul didn't want anyone to put their confidence in him, proclaim themselves to be Paul's

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<sup>6</sup> Galatians 5:20 puts on the list of the *deeds of the flesh* dissensions and factions—which is sectarianism.

followers, and so cause division in God's church. Christians are united by the one baptism in the One Spirit, making them part of one body, the Church.

... by One Spirit we were all baptized into One Body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free persons, and all were made to drink One Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13; LEB).

Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body, and One Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism... (Ephesians 4:3-5)

In 1 Corinthians, Paul was not attacking the place of baptism in salvation. Paul consistently demonstrated that he believed baptism in water must proceed baptism in the Spirit. Not once did Paul show any lack of appreciation for the place of water baptism in God's plan of salvation. He simply wanted everyone to get the supreme baptism. He didn't want anyone to become so satisfied with baptism in water that they might miss baptism in the Spirit, the one baptism.

God designed baptism in water as a stepping stone, but it was becoming a stumbling block in Corinth, just like it has been for the millions of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, and Presbyterians who have been baptized as infants. To them, we should say along with Paul: "I thank God that I baptized none of you except X and Y, that no man should say you were baptized in my name." And if they say anything like "My child was baptized by Father X, or by Bishop Y," we should be ready to gently correct them, and guide them towards the baptism of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit must always be the star player in baptism. The Spirit sprinkles our conscience with the blood of Jesus, establishes us in the New Covenant, and empowers us for new life! No human could ever do that—not even Jesus (during his earthly ministry) pretended to do such a thing! The Lord Jesus prepped his disciples for the baptism of the Spirit by repeating the words: *When the Spirit comes...* (John 16:8, 13), building up their expectations. On one occasion he said:

Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the Gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).

With these and many other words, Jesus was building a sense of expectancy in the hearts of the apostles. Their expectations were met on the day of Pentecost. From Pentecost, we can trace the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the Book of Acts with relative ease. The Spirit baptized people who had repented, believed, and were baptized in water, giving them power, life, and love.

So, when Paul declares that Jesus did not send him to baptize, is he raising the question of who Jesus *did* send to baptize? Yes, and the answer is: the Holy Spirit. Paul was not making the point that it was wrong for him to baptize. If he was saying that it was wrong for him to baptize, then he was incriminating himself many times over [having admitted to baptizing many people].

Paul baptized people, but this passage is not about how wrong he was in doing so. This passage is about preventing division. Corinthian church members were proud that they had followed Paul, Peter, and even Jesus—but they should have made following the Holy Spirit their pride.

... all those who are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God (Romans 8:14; LEB).

Baptism in water is not enough to get you into the Kingdom of God. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is the all-important *One Baptism* mentioned in Ephesians 4:4 and 1 Corinthians 12:13. Baptism in the Spirit is the objective of anyone who has repented and believed in Jesus. Repentance, faith in God, water baptism, and baptism in the Spirit are the steps towards Eternal Life.

[Jesus said] Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5).

Until we get *regenerated* (born again) in the Holy Spirit, we can't be content with just repentance, faith, and water baptism. We're only saved when we get both the *washing of regeneration* (baptism in water) and the accompanying *renewing of the Holy Spirit*, that is—we must be born again of water and the Spirit if we will be saved!

He saved us... by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; NASB).

## Exemplary Salvation Experiences

Some dare teach that the patterns established in the Book of Acts are not examples for us to follow, and that they do not apply to us today. For those who think that way, our question is: “What example should we follow, then?” The virtual online model? The Purpose-Driven Model? The megachurch model? I know Conservative Baptists who say we should go back to a 17<sup>th</sup> Century Puritan Model.

Is it really feasible to believe that the times we now live in are so advanced spiritually that the example of Christ, the apostles, and the primitive church has become outdated? The opposite is true. The modern church has become blinded by the idea that our digital technology makes us more advanced than all other societies in history. We cannot see our weakness and poverty. Pride has blinded us to think that we’re on the verge of a worldwide revival, but the opposite is true. We are like the church in Laodicea:

You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see (Revelation 3:17-19).

The *refined gold* Jesus offers the Church today is the doctrine passed down to us by the apostles—the One Faith. The *white clothes* are the purity we obtain through baptism and confession. The *salve* opens our eyes to see the example of the Early Church. What the first believers did as demonstrated in the Book of Acts and the epistles allows us to see how the Church should really operate. Let’s get some of that salve right now as we study baptism experiences led by Philip, Peter, Paul, and Jesus. Their examples definitively demonstrate how baptism should be handled.

## Experiences led by Philip

### A Method to Evangelism

And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them... for he [the Spirit] had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they [Peter and John] began laying their hands on them and they were receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:5, 16-17; NASB).

Evangelism in the Early Church was carried out in three steps: a) preaching Christ, b) water baptism, and c) the laying on of hands. The combination of these three actions resulted in Holy Spirit baptism. This was the method and there was no other.

Is there any church or modern-day evangelist who uses this method today? Is there an evangelist who, in the very least, baptizes people in water? Wherever these evangelists are, they're not among history's famous. But that's okay. None of the Twelve Apostles became famous either.

The phrase *they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus* does not indicate that water baptism is empty. It means that baptism in the name of Jesus is incomplete. Baptism in water in Christ's name cannot save unless accompanied by the baptism of the Spirit. Unless the person baptized receives the Holy Spirit, then they have not experienced the new birth necessary for entry into the Kingdom.

### The Conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch

And Philip opened his mouth and beginning from this Scripture, he preached Jesus to him. And as they went along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look, water! What prevents me from being baptized?' And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him (Acts 8:35-38; NASB).

The eunuch understood baptism to be a necessary component of salvation. His response to the Gospel (it says that Philip *preached Jesus to him*) demonstrates the substance of what Philip preached. Without question, baptism was part of Philip's presentation of Christ! When the



eunuch responded to the Gospel by volunteering for baptism, Philip didn't correct him saying, "You didn't get it, salvation is by faith alone, not by baptism."

It's important to note that the Philip is the only person in the Bible specifically called an *evangelist* (Acts 21:8). If the only person God calls an *evangelist* in the Scriptures used baptism as his method, then any true evangelist should also use baptism to evangelize. That's not happening in popular Christianity today—worse off, Christians do not use the term *evangelist* the way God does.

None of the people famous for being "evangelists" today dare call sinners to baptism for salvation. Many call people to repentance. Many preach salvation. Some baptize, but I know none that call sinners to repent and to wash away their sins in baptism for salvation.

The man God calls an *evangelist* preached a message which included baptism. That's precisely why the eunuch said that he wanted to be baptized after having traveled alongside Philip for a time. *They came to some water* and the eunuch was very excited to see it. He had just heard from Philip what it means to die with Christ, so the Ethiopian exclaimed *Look, water! What prevents me from being baptized?*

Philip's wise answer was that the eunuch needed wholehearted faith to be baptized. Today, our message must be the same for anyone seeking the forgiveness of sins: *If you believe with all your heart, you may be baptized!* That is, if you have a genuine and wholehearted faith, express it through baptism, and you'll be forgiven of your sins. If you do that, you'll be saved from the power of sin!

## **Experiences led by Peter**

### **What Shall We Do?**

Now when they heard this [that God had made Jesus Lord and Christ], they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For the Promise [the Holy Spirit] is for you and your children, and for all who are far off,

as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.’ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying: ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls (Acts 2:37-41; NASB).

What we have here is the pure uncorrupted Gospel, the message which was issued to humanity on the very birthday of the Church. This is the exhortation with which the man handpicked by Christ to lead the Church, Peter, guided the Church at its inception. These are the instructions for salvation given on the day of Pentecost.

After having been asked the question *What shall we do?* Peter didn’t answer: “Do? No, no That would be a works-based religion. You don’t have to *do* anything. Just believe!” It would have been the perfect opportunity for God to establish the doctrine of *sola fide* in the Church, but he did not. And he did not because it’s a false doctrine.

Rather, a man anointed and inspired by the Holy Spirit included baptism as one of the two fundamental requirements of those who would be saved: *Repent, and... be baptized*. Three thousand responded to Peter’s words, and only after having been baptized were they added to the Church.

Moreover these 3,000 souls were saved. Salvation was the command because Peter ordered them to *be saved from this perverse generation!* Their reaction was *those who had received his word were baptized*. The connection between salvation and baptism is undeniable.

### **God Overrides Error**

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God.

Then Peter answered, ‘Surely, no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?’ And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days (Acts 10:44-48;

NASB).

We should always aim for baptism in the Holy Spirit when someone is being baptized. That is, the result of water baptism should always be baptism in the Holy Spirit. This is the pattern of the NT and the pattern of the apostles' ministries in every case, except for once. Yes, there is a solitary case in which the baptism of the Holy Spirit came moments before New Covenant baptism in water—but not without good reason. The Church only consisted of Jews at the time. The leaders, Peter in particular, had not yet come to understand that Gentiles could join the Jews in God's Church.

In spite of the blindness of Peter and the apostles, the Time of the Gentiles had arrived! God was going to graft the Gentiles into his Church with or without the approval of the Church's Jewish leaders. God would override their discrimination against the Gentiles by granting the baptism of the Spirit to Gentiles without baptism in water. God was compelled to do so.

Gently correcting the error of the Church's Jewish leaders, God obligated them to accept the Gentiles into fellowship. Cornelius became the first Gentile allowed into the Mosaic covenant without proselytizing into Judaism. After Cornelius' conversion, a new standard was established. Gentiles didn't need to become Jews to enter God's Covenant. All this because God overrode the discrimination of Peter and the Jewish leaders of the Church. God overrode Peter by sending the Holy Spirit to Cornelius.

## Experiences led by Paul

### An Open Heart

And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshipper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay” (Acts 16:14-15; NASB).

Lydia’s heart was opened to respond to the Gospel. How did she respond? She was baptized with her household. *Respond* is the key word in this passage.

Responding to the message of Christ is synonymous with seeking baptism. The Ethiopian eunuch, Pentecost’s 3000 souls, the Samaritans who believed under Philip’s preaching, and every other repentant sinner in the Bible [for example, Paul] responded to the Gospel the same way. There’s no alternate way of responding affirmatively to the Gospel message.

The passage above shows two additional truths:

1. That after a person has been baptized, mature Christians can assess them as being someone who is *faithful to the Lord* or not Lydia knew that when had to be assessed by other. She did not ask Paul to judge her level of devotion until she had been baptized.
2. A person who has been baptized is someone who has been integrated into Christian fellowship. From the moment they are in fellowship, if they are a head of household, their home becomes a place where Christians can meet, eat, share, and maybe even spend the night.

### Believing = Being Baptized

SO So they [Paul and Silas] said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, AND you [the jailer] will be saved, you and your household.” THEN they spoke the Word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. AND he took them the same hour of the night AND washed their stripes. AND immediately he and all his family were baptized.

NOW WHEN he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; AND he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household (Acts 16:31-34; NKJV).

Look carefully at the wording in this account of a man's salvation, the Philippian jailer. Study the chronological order of the events. Believing is equated with baptism—the two constituting salvation. We know that because the passage wraps up with the declaration that the jailer and his family had *believed in God*. The entire account demonstrates what it means to obey the command to *believe*.

From the command to its fulfillment, you can follow the clearly-defined chronology of the passage. This is made easy if you focus on the connecting words “SO... AND... THEN... AND... AND... AND... NOW WHEN... AND.” We have put the passage's connecting words in capital letters to make the chronology of the passage more visible.

The portion of Scripture above begins with the jailer already repentant. He knows that he has sinned, so he asks the now-famous question: *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* (Acts 16:30) The unforgettable response is *Believe in the Lord Jesus*. But what is *believing*? The rest of the passage demonstrates what true belief looks like.

The author, Luke, is very careful to show how salvation came to the household of the Philippian jailer. Luke demonstrates how a) they heard the Word of God, b) they showed the fruit of repentance, and c) they were baptized. These three activities were the proof that the jailer had *believed in God with his whole household*. Even today, hearing the doctrine of the apostles and responding through repentance and baptism is believing!

The jailer demonstrated the fruit of repentance by washing the wounds of the apostles. He *received* those whom Jesus sent, so he received Jesus! Pastors would do well to teach this passage for what it is: a demonstration of what it means to *receive Christ*.

The one who receives you receives me... whoever gives one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, truly I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward (Matthew 10:40-42; NASB).

Only after baptism may someone desiring salvation rejoice in having obtained salvation. This

man and his household had true saving faith. Prior to baptism, he would never have eaten with the apostles. Rather, he would have beaten them and thrown them into a dungeon. Prior to baptism, he was a man who lived for the Roman Empire, but afterwards, he lived for the Church and for the Kingdom of God.

The Philippian jailer was on the brink of suicide before he discovered that he would do much better dying with Jesus in baptism than dying by his own sword. Prior to believing, the jailer would have died for Rome, but upon seeing that he had lost his Roman rewards (by failing as a Roman jailer), he died to this world. He died to his old self, including his worldly ambitions—dying with Christ in baptism.

Finally, notice how only after the jailer was baptized did he rejoice. Salvation is not complete until we are baptized. This passage concludes by stating that the jailer, his wife, and kids rejoiced *having believed in God*. But that belief was only manifested in the jailer's participation in Christian fellowship. That is, sitting at the table in his house and serving food to the men who preached the Gospel to him was the solid proof that he had become part of the fellowship known as the Way!

### **One Encounter, Three Baptisms**

Paul... found some disciples, and he said to them 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they said to him, 'no, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.' And He said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' And they said, 'Into John's baptism.'

And Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. And there were in all about twelve men (Acts 19:1-7; NASB).

Notice how Paul seamlessly transitions from believing in Jesus to the act of baptism. It says *when they heard this* (that Jesus was the Messiah John the Baptist pointed to), they were baptized in Jesus' name. That's simply what people who believe in Jesus do.

Furthermore, it's clear that Paul's goal was more than water baptism. It was for the new believers to receive the Holy Spirit. Do you aim at that for the people you evangelize? Do you let them know that they must receive spiritual gifts, or are you shy about telling them about their need for the power of the Holy Spirit?

Paul describes the baptism of John as being solely for repentance—something greatly inferior to baptism in Jesus' name. John's baptism was a washing of sins confessed, but Christ's baptism gives us complete forgiveness of all previous sins. That is, John's baptism washed away a limited number of sins, while baptism in Christ's name washes away all.

More importantly, our old self is buried with Christ when we're baptized in his name. That didn't happen with the baptism of John. There was no burial with Christ because Jesus' hadn't been buried yet. John's baptism was a wonderful washing of sins confessed, but it was not a dying to our old self.

In baptism in Jesus' name, we are also raised with him as we come up from the water. Our identification with Jesus is complete because we rise from the water just as he rose from the Dead. Our new identify is Christ—joining him in his death and resurrection. Full identification with Jesus is what opens the door for God to give us the Holy Spirit, just as God gave Jesus the Holy Spirit at his baptism. To obtain Holy Spirit baptism, an anointed believer must lay their hands on us.

John the Baptist did not transmit the Holy Spirit. Indeed, he could not baptize people into the New Covenant because it hadn't been established yet. Jesus established the New Covenant at the Last Supper with the words *This cup is the New Covenant in my blood* (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25) long after John had died. Furthermore, Jesus affirmed the New Covenant by ascending to Heaven where he currently intercedes for us as our High Priest, standing in the presence of God Almighty.

In remarkable fashion, this passage paints a picture of three baptisms: the baptism of John,

baptism in the name of Jesus, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Like Paul, a true evangelist will query people about what kind of baptisms they have attained, and will encourage them to strive for the one that seals their salvation, baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Baptism in Jesus' name will establish you in the New Covenant and will give you the full identification with Christ you need to receive the Holy Spirit. Receiving the Holy Spirit is something Jesus prepares everyone for, just as he prepared the apostles for it:

... he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (John 20:22).

### **Experiences led by Jesus**

Did you know that Jesus took the lead in hundreds, perhaps thousands of baptisms? Read about the three examples below to see why Jesus was a greater baptizer than John the Baptist.

### **Jesus the Baptist**

After these things Jesus and his disciples came into the land of Judea, and there he was spending time with them and baptizing. And John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there, and they were coming and were being baptized (John 3:22-23; NASB).

What more can be said about these verses outside of what they already say? Jesus was *spending time* with his disciples *and baptizing*. That is, he was doing the same thing as John the Baptist. Most Christians today are completely unaware that Jesus had a big reputation as a baptizer, but he did. Indeed, Jesus' baptizing ministry eclipsed that of John. Our Lord Jesus became the premier baptizer of his generation!

The reason why we no longer think of our Lord as a baptizer is because he did greater things such as miracles, exorcisms, healings, and resurrections. These far outweigh his success as a baptizer. In addition, Jesus' role as a baptizer pales in comparison to his role as the Messiah. What is baptizing compared to dying as the Lamb of God? What is baptizing compared to rising from the Dead? In fact, Jesus' death and resurrection inject meaning into baptism. We derive the meaning baptism from these two events so that without them, baptism would be devoid of its New Covenant power. It would simply be a baptism of repentance.



## The One Who Sent Ananias to Saul

... and he [Paul who was still called *Saul*] has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight... and Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him, said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’

And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight... and he arose, and was baptized (Acts 9:12, 17-18; NASB).

The resurrected Lord Jesus involved himself in Paul’s conversion by sending him Ananias. Now, Ananias was the man who evangelized Saul. You might not see evangelism in the passage above, but when Paul retold the story of his salvation experience, being questioned about it in court, he recalled that Ananias did not just heal him. Ananias also told Paul “Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his [Jesus’] name” (Acts 22:16).

Paul’s salvation experience is exemplary. He is the founder of at least a dozen of the first churches in history. His intent was for the account of his baptism to be a model salvation experience. The order of his experience, according to Paul’s own testimony is:

1. repentance (Saul was deeply humbled as he fell down blind.)
2. belief in Jesus (Ananias explained to Saul that he had encountered Jesus.)
3. baptism (Paul demonstrates three dimensions to it.)
  - a. the washing away of sins
  - b. invoking the name of the Lord (crying out for mercy)
  - c. the filling of the Spirit (Ananias told Paul about it prior to water baptism so that Paul would know what to expect.)

Paul’s baptism included all this! How can professing Christian look down on baptism as much as they do in the light of how much baptism involves. Anyone who says they believe in the writings

of Paul should also give weight to Paul's testimony of salvation.

### **Jesus' Example**

Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan, coming to John to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent him, saying, 'I have need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he permitted him.

And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Matthew 3:13-17; NASB).

The Lord Jesus lived an exemplary life. Everything he did should be imitated by us. In the case of his baptism, although he had no sins to be forgiven, he was still in the flesh, so he needed the gift of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord came to John *to fulfill all righteousness* (that is, to do everything the right way). Baptism is part of doing everything right because everyone needs to be baptized to receive the Holy Spirit. So Jesus was showing us how to go about things the right way.

John the Baptist correctly noted that Jesus was exempt from baptism, but Jesus wanted to please God. Since the Father assigned Jesus the task of showing us how to attain eternal life, Jesus got baptized. Now that Jesus did it, we are certain about what to do. Now there's not a soul who could ever make the excuse that they are exempt from baptism since the Messiah Himself was baptized.

### **Related Topics A-K**

A discussion on baptism will bring other topics to the foreground. Be prepared to formulate biblical responses to the questions that arise on the following topics:

#### **A. The Prayer of Faith**

We teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. We don't overemphasize baptism, but you're not doing a seeker a favor by leading them to recite the "prayer of faith" for salvation. Those

who do so are not only misleading people who otherwise would come to Christ, they are supplanting baptism. They are replacing baptism with a prayer. They are removing baptism from its rightful place in evangelism.

There is no need to preach against the “prayer of faith” since there is so much for us to preach *for*, but if we preach that people should repent, believe, and be baptized, the first ones to resist us are those who teach this prayer. This shortcut to proper evangelism has become so popular that we’re now at the point where baptism and the “prayer of faith” cannot coexist. What has brought us to this point? What has allowed this false practice to become so integrally woven into the fabric of Evangelical Christianity?

First of all, the term “prayer of faith” is a very inappropriate term to use for evangelism since it is already used in the Bible in *another* sense in James 5:15. It’s not helpful to use Biblical phrases outside of their intended meanings. Doing so will always blur our understanding and distort truth.

The modern-day “prayer of faith” is an oversimplification of the Gospel message. Although the Gospel is not complex, it should not be turned into just words either. In baptism, the Gospel maintains its simplicity without losing its challenging nature. Shouldn’t we value and appreciate the wisdom of God in having established baptism as his means of salvation?

Finally, the so-called “prayer of faith” comes to us from a poor interpretation of John 1:12—that is, an interpretation that understands *receiving Jesus* to mean “saying a prayer.”

... as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in his name (John 1:12; NASB).

The text speaks for itself, defining *receiving him* with the parallel concept of *believing in his name*. To believe in someone’s name is to believe in everything they stand for because one’s *name* is all they represent. Jesus stands for a lot, and only by receiving someone Christ has sent into our house for teaching and fellowship will we be able to fathom all that Christ stands for.

You have to receive someone sent by Christ to *receive Jesus*. They will teach you all about Jesus’ commands. That’s what Jesus sent them to do. Jesus said to his disciples:

And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave that city. As you enter the house, give it your greeting... And whoever does not receive you nor listen to your words, as you leave that house or city, shake the dust off your feet... The one who receives you receives me... (Matthew 10:11-14; 40; NASB).

## **B. Faith Alone**

The supposedly “orthodox” doctrine of salvation by faith alone stands against the biblical declaration that we are *not* justified by faith alone. The “faith alone” teachers will avoid at all costs a passage of Scripture which says the polar opposite of what they teach:

You see that man is justified by works, and not by faith alone (James 2:24; NASB).

Of course, people will try, but they just can’t get this verse to say something different than its plain meaning. You just cannot put another meaning to it. There’s no spin. There’s no “the context gives this verse another meaning” or “the Greek really says something else.” There’s no way of getting around this passage. We are not justified by faith alone, but by works. That’s apostolic doctrine.

What does the Bible teach us about works? The Epistles to the Romans and Galatians in particular reveal that the Old Covenant works of the Law are not able to make us right with God. In spite of this, many Christian denominations mistakenly teach that performing the Ten Commandments [they normally mix in some Jewish holidays with Sabbath-keeping and certain dietary restrictions] will make them righteous. These legalists want to be in the Old Covenant, but God gave the Old Covenant to the Jews to show them and the entire world how incapable we are of being righteous. We have come to know that no man will ever be justified by the works of the Law.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law, since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified (Galatians 2:16; NASB).

The OT commandments are good, so good that the human nature (our flesh) resists them. We are

carnal by nature. We are bad by nature, so God used something good to show us how bad we are.

So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. We know that the Law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual... (Romans 7:12-14)

Still, even if we overcome our flesh and perform the commandments, that won't take away the guilt incurred by our sin. Doing the works of the Law cannot outweigh our guilt. The Law is only capable of revealing our sinfulness. It cannot make us righteous. It can only show us how unspiritual we are.

But now God has given us a New Covenant so that faith in Jesus becomes the path to obedience. In Jesus we can obey a greater Law, the overarching Law of Love. What matters now is *faith working through love* (Galatians 5:6). If we act by faith in Christ, our works become acceptable to God. That faith we have in Christ is established in baptism, the first action we take by faith, making us participants in his death, burial, and resurrection. The faith exercised in baptism is a faith that saves us from sin and condemnation.

That being said, the *works of the Law* (practicing the OT ritual commandments God gave to Israel) cannot free us from the power of sin. Obeying the Old Covenant will not save anyone. It never saved the Jews, and it won't save Gentiles either.

[Paul] said to Cephas in the presence of all, 'If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?' "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from the Gentiles; nevertheless, knowing that a person is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the Law; since by works of the Law no flesh will be justified (Galatians 2:14-16; NASB).

Anyone who tries to get to God through Moses will fail. Anyone who tries to get to God through Jesus will succeed. Following Moses produces legalism, following Jesus produces liberty—and love!

What does baptism have to do with the Law? Absolutely nothing. It's not in the Law. Circumcision is the Law, so if we were to command circumcision, we would be legalists. But we command baptism—the basis of the New Covenant. We encourage people to die with Christ in baptism, and so receive the grace of God. Baptism is freedom from the Old Covenant, not a commitment to it. It is the opposite of trying to be justified by the Law.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free... do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery... if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all... You who are trying to be justified by the Law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace (Galatians 5:1-4).

### **C. Real Saving Faith**

Luther's *sola fide* doctrine is a lie. The Holy Spirit has said through James that we are *justified by works* (James 2:24), and James was not referring to the works of the Old Covenant because his examples of those who were justified by works were Abraham and Rahab, believers who never followed the Old Covenant, and who had never heard the Ten Commandments.

You see that man is justified by works, and not by faith alone (James 2:24; NASB).

If the Scriptures say that justification before God is *not by faith alone* then justification is by faith! If I say that digestion is not by the stomach alone, then digestion is by the stomach—but digestion includes the mouth, esophagus, intestines, and other organs. Nobody denies that justification is by faith, just *not by faith alone*, with emphasis on the word *alone*.

If the Bible reinforces that *the righteous shall live by faith* (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38), then what does *living by faith* mean? It means performing actions by faith. A biblical faith is something to live by. That's why Paul states that what really matters is *faith working* (Galatians 5:6).

You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by the Law; you have fallen from grace... For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love (Galatians 5:6; NASB).

A *working* faith saves. Specifically, faith working through baptism saves—and faith most certainly works through baptism. On the other hand, is the so-called “prayer of faith” a work? No, and that’s another reason why it cannot save. If faith does not work, it’s dead.

... faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself (James 2:17; LEB).

If you are using the “prayer of faith” method to evangelize people, you will leave them with the false confidence that they are okay with God when they are not. They have not followed any Scriptural mandate by saying a prayer. They need to step it up. They need to *invoke* the name of the Lord. They need to cry out to God in baptism!

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:13; NASB).

... be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name (Acts 22:16; LEB).

#### **D. False Security**

A true evangelist will refuse to give people false assurance of salvation. God has so ordered the salvation experience that everyone must earn their own sense of assurance. Nobody is allowed to feel secure in their salvation unless they deserve such a feeling. Spiritual strength is not based on imagination. It needs to be manifested in us. Strength has its origins in God, but since God works through us, his works are carried out by us, even his saving work.

To teach, as many do, that *only* God is responsible for salvation is very dangerous because we play a large role. We both will it and work it out through our actions.

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:12b-13).

You can see that salvation comes to those who cooperate with God. There is a balancing act between God and us. He is at work in us, working in us so that we get active! His purpose is for us to do the work he has prepared for us, good deeds which will serve to bring us a reward on the Day of Judgment.

... by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are his creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we may walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10; LEB).

Below are eleven reminders that our deeds will be weighed on God's scales of justice and tested with the fire of his judgment. The point is this: Our works determine our eternal status. All of us will be judged by our works. These will determine the degree of rewards we receive in Eternity. We will be tested by fire and will get what our deeds deserve.

1. ... we will all stand before God's Judgment Seat... So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God (Romans 14:10-12).
2. [we will] 'receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad' (2 Corinthians 5:10).
3. The one who plants and the one who waters [missionaries and pastors] have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor (1 Corinthians 3:8).
4. For we must all [speaking to Christians] appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).
5. ... no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day [of Judgment] will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).
6. God 'will repay each person according to what they have done' (Romans 2:6).
7. ... you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially... (1 Peter 1:17)



8. I saw the Dead, great and small, standing before the Throne, and books were opened... The Dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Revelation 20:12).
9. You [God] reward everyone according to what they have done (Psalm 62:12).
10. Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done? (Proverbs 24:12)
11. Run in such a way as to get the prize... I [Paul] strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

If you're not happy that we'll be judged by our actions, then you'll be even more unhappy to know that we'll also be judged by our words and thoughts! For example, even hating someone or looking lustfully at someone is counted as sin. Every careless word we utter will be noted in God's books for the Day of Reckoning.

... for every careless word that people speak, they will give an account of it on the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned (Matthew 12:36-37; NASB).

You have heard that it was said '... anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment (Matthew 5:21-22).

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:27-28).

## **E. The Covenant**

Baptism is the sign of the one and only covenant which can guarantee our salvation from sin. Yes, it guarantees salvation. God wants to inspire confidence within us, a confidence grounded in Jesus Christ, who does not break covenants. He is faithful, and he will stick with us, with one exception: if we deny him.

... if we died with him,<sup>7</sup> we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are unfaithful, he remains faithful—he cannot deny himself (2 Timothy 2:11-13; LEB).

Jesus will be faithful even if we are unfaithful. But since this is not a one-sided covenant (it's bilateral) both Jesus and we play a part in our salvation. According to the passage above, we have to: die with him (be baptized) and endure (which means persevere under trials). The passage also states that our unfaithfulness does not nullify the covenant.

The answer to the very common question “Can you lose your salvation?” is *no*—you can't lose your salvation like you would lose a wallet on a bus. However, you can renounce it like you can renounce citizenship. In other words, you are free to deny God's grace and break the covenant that he has graciously established. But know this: Before you use that freedom, God will use all means necessary to restrain your madness. He might even make a donkey speak to you!

[false teachers]... have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam... he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—an animal without speech—who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness (2 Peter 2:15-16).

If an American comes to a U.S. Embassy to renounce his citizenship, the officer who manages the case must listen closely to the citizen's reasons for doing so. If the American thinks that their tax debt or child support debt will be forgiven by renouncing citizenship, they are mistaken. Their debt will follow them wherever they go. Likewise, a person who turns away from the faith will be indebted to God no matter where they turn.

God guarantees salvation, but like a guarantee on a household appliance such as a refrigerator, if the owner carelessly disregards the instructions and breaks a part, the small print on the warrantee nullifies any obligations of the company. The owner will have to pay to have the refrigerator fixed. The company will not repair any damages as the owner is not covered by the guarantee.

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<sup>7</sup> This is a reference to baptism since *dying with Christ* occurs exclusively in baptism (see Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12; verses we've already examined).

For anyone who wants to feel it, they can have great confidence that God will make everything work out, and that they'll attain to eternal life. However, our motivation to follow God's commandments should never be diminished by such confidence. In his wisdom, God has made the Gospel both perfectly consoling for those who need consolation, and strongly motivating for those who desire holiness and glory.

Coexistent with the truth that even if we are faithless, Jesus remains faithful is the truth that Jesus does not allow for any permissiveness in the New Covenant. For example, if I forget to take the Lord's Supper, I'm being unfaithful to the New Covenant, but Jesus is not going to condemn me the day I stand before his Judgement Seat for forgetting to take the Lord's Supper.

He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him (John 6:56; NASB).

Christ's directions are to abide in him by taking the Lord's Supper with a clear conscience, but let's say I miss opportunities to take the Lord's Supper. Or, worse off, let's say I am negligent to keep a clean conscience. Neither will Jesus send me to Hell under those circumstances. Rather, I can expect to undergo the fire of judgment on the Last Day, losing any eternal rewards, but still being saved.

If what has been built [the works of ministry, love, and service to God] survives [the test of fire], the builder [the person being judged] will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames (1 Corinthians 3:14-15).

Our commitment to God in baptism is that we will follow Jesus till the end. That's what a person is saying when he enters the waters of baptism, that he is committed to following Jesus unto death. The individual being baptized has entered a covenant, and God will hold him to it. Since the New Covenant was established in the blood of Jesus, the blood becomes the continual witness to the covenant.

This cup is the New Covenant in my blood (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25).

Our confidence that we are abiding in Christ is not based on our feelings. People are not any more saved by believing that they are saved than someone is an employee of a multi-national

company by thinking that he's an employee of that company. Without a contract, he is simply not an employee.

Without an account, you can't save money in the bank. If there's no certificate of marriage from the town clerk (or from an ordained minister), you're not truly married! Likewise, without baptism, you're still not officially right with God because you haven't yet been buried with Christ. You still bear the guilt and burden of your sins. You have not delivered your sins over to Jesus yet.

We are to continue in the fear of God in which we started. Sinners should fear God, but so must Christians. Why? Because we are still in the flesh and we could potentially become sinners again. You are greatly mistaken if you think that salvation means that there's no way God could ever condemn you. If you think that God has somehow locked himself into a promise he can't get out of—you're wrong. Jesus warned his closest friends, the Twelve Apostles, to fear God. He warned them based on the fact that God could cast them into Hell.

I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into Hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him (Luke 12:4-5)!

Are you greater than the Apostles? Are you beyond warnings? Does it offend you for someone to warn you of the fires of Hell?

## **F. Exceptions to the Rule**

Immersion is a rule of faith. This rule is as applicable to us as it was to Jesus the day he was baptized. And, yes—it was applicable to Jesus. He was baptized *to fulfill all righteousness* (Matthew 3:15). In other words, Jesus was baptized to do what is right. It was right of him to affirm John the Baptist's ministry. It was right of him to set an example for all who would follow him, and keep God's command to *be baptized* (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

We know of only two exceptions to the rule of baptism. The first is the so-called “thief on the cross” (Luke 23:39-43) of whom most current translations have as an insurrectionist, militant

rebel, or revolutionary.<sup>8</sup> For accuracy's sake, we'll simply call him *the rebel*. The other exception to the rule of baptism is Cornelius, the first Gentile convert to Christianity (Acts 10:44-48).

Neither of the two exceptions express that one doesn't need to be baptized. On the contrary, both reinforce the importance of baptism. For example, the story of Cornelius proves the need to get baptized in water rather than disprove it.

Cornelius received water baptism instantly after having manifested the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Peter gave hurried orders for Cornelius to be baptized in water precisely because Cornelius had a great need for baptism. It's impossible to say that the text teaches that Cornelius didn't have to be baptized—but many supposed “evangelists” say just that, including Ray Comfort.

The background to Cornelius' exceptional case is that the Jews, unwilling to welcome Gentiles into Christian fellowship, would never have considered baptizing Cornelius' family and friends unless God intervened. So he did. God showed the all-Jewish Church that he approved of Gentile converts by overruling the Jew's 1300-year old tradition of separation.

God sent the baptism of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles against the will of Peter—putting Peter in checkmate. Peter had no choice but to baptize Cornelius' cohort, proving that Peter and the other Jewish leaders of the Church had overcome their bias. Indeed, the main point of the passage is how God helped the Jews to overcome a bias [it was not *discrimination* since it was based upon the OT kosher laws (Leviticus 11) and the prohibition of eating meat sacrificed to idols (Exodus 34:15)]. However, there's a second issue in the passage seen in Peter's reaction to God's intervention: the need to be baptized to be saved!

The other exception, the rebel on the cross, is the story the enemies of baptism most frequently use to deny baptism its rightful place in salvation. It breaks our heart to see how pastors misuse it

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<sup>8</sup> The Greek term used for the men crucified with Jesus is the exact same term used for Barabbas who was called a *rebel* (John 18:40; NASB), and of whom it was said that he 'had been imprisoned with the rebels who had committed murder in the revolt' (Mark 15:7; NASB). Rome did not crucify thieves. They crucified political criminals who opposed their authority through violence. Luke 23:18-19 sheds some light on the background of those condemned to crucifixion that fateful day, telling us that 'Barabbas... had been thrown in prison because of a certain insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.'

because the passage was never meant to be an argument against baptism. Those who use it to that end are reading into the text what they want it to say, ignoring the context, and doing the Church a great disservice.

Let's look at the facts. Firstly, the rebel was not physically capable of being washed in water, having been nailed to a piece of wood and hanging a few feet over the ground. As you would expect, God makes exceptions to the rule of baptism for cases of extreme physical limitations. God doesn't insist that a man who is physically nailed to a piece of wood and in the throes of death be dipped in water to be forgiven.

At any rate, the rebel literally *died with Christ* (Romans 6:3)! Those of us who die with Christ now do so spiritually through baptism; but the man who was crucified alongside Jesus died with him spiritually on a cross. Indeed, he was crucified in a very spiritual way, dialoguing with Jesus while he was dying and expressing hope in Christ's Kingdom. Who better to approve of his faith than the Lord Jesus Himself, who accepted the rebel into Paradise based upon his repentance and his profession of faith in Jesus as Lord.

Remember: Dying with Christ is the activity baptism represents. If you die with Christ, God forgives you—that's a spiritual principle. Therefore, it's only appropriate that one of the two people who literally died with Christ would receive pardon—to serve as an illustration of the pardon someone who dies with Christ in baptism receives.

The one man in history who was content to die alongside Christ certainly would have been just as content to die with Christ in baptism, if it were possible. He did, after all, do the more difficult thing—literally dying by being nailed to a cross alongside the Lord. Would this rebel not have done that which is easier and have entered the waters of baptism if he had the choice?

Undoubtedly so.

At any rate, Jesus declared that his death was a *baptism*—a baptism *in blood*, the hardest of all baptisms! When James and John came to Jesus to ask him if they could sit at his right and left hands in the Kingdom, Jesus responded to them that they would be martyrs like him, but that he could not guarantee their places in glory.

‘Can you... be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?’

‘We can,’ they answered.

Jesus said to them, ‘You will... be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant’ (Mark 10:38-40).

Baptism means unity with Jesus through his death, but not all who are baptized do it by faith. Those who do not die with Christ by faith are like the second rebel who was crucified alongside Jesus, but refused to die with Christ spiritually. Even the repentant rebel knew that the unrepentant one was far from Jesus. And sadly, since he didn’t trust in Jesus, the second rebel never got God’s mercy, mercy that would have been very useful to him.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: ‘Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’ But the other criminal rebuked him. ‘Don’t you fear God,’ he said, ‘since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’

Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.’

Jesus answered him, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise’ (Luke 23:39-43).

The repentant rebel received a remarkable salvation. Indeed, he got the most he could get in the pre-New Covenant times he lived in: He got mercy and a free ticket to Paradise. Baptism in the Spirit was not available to anyone at that point in history. Pentecost had not occurred and the New Covenant had not been initiated. Neither had Jesus entered Heaven to act as our High Priest.

## **G. Illustrations**

A man and a woman are not legitimately married unless a ceremony is carried out, vows are made, and rings are exchanged. Outside of that protocol, the two are just living together—they are in cohabitation. Likewise, how many people say that they love God but have never entered into a covenant relationship with him? Such people have fake fellowship with God. They may

have strong emotions expressed through worship and prayer, but their faith, being non-committal, cannot endure the trials and tribulations destined for the heirs of the Kingdom.

Can someone who has never been baptized be considered to be “in Christ”? To be *in Christ* is to be in the New Covenant, so by no means are the unbaptized “in Christ”—they are not in a covenant with God. With Evangelicals everywhere telling them that that they’re “saved,” the effect on these people’s eternity is devastating.

Even if someone comes to a church, gets baptized, and is forgiven of their sin—if they don’t have a knowledge of the terms of the New Covenant, and if they don’t comply with those terms, they will most definitely slip back into sin. They will eventually be swept away by temptations because without a covenant, there is no strength backing their commitment to God.

Child marriage is real across the world, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and India. Would you encourage a 12-year old to take wedding vows? Do they really understand what they are promising? A matrimony can be annulled if it can be proven that one spouse was underage, lacked the capacity to consent, or was under duress when the vow was made. In the same manner, God will invalidate a person’s water baptism if the baptismal candidate doesn’t understand what they are doing. That’s why reaching adolescence is necessary for baptism—you should be at least age 12 to be baptized. Baptism is entry into a covenant weightier than marriage!

When we preach the Gospel, we preach Christ. We don’t preach baptism first—that would be putting the cart before the horse. We preach Christ, and baptism follows. People who decide to believe in Jesus are the right candidates for baptism. Because they know someone who loved them unto death, they respond by dying in baptism. He went to the grave for us, so we go to the water for him. He was buried for us, so we are buried with him.

Baptism is the principal sign of the New Covenant just as a ring is the principal sign of marriage. Someone with a ring on their finger is devoted to their spouse—they belong to no other. Someone who has been baptized is devoted to Christ—they belong to no other. The sign of initiation in the Old Covenant was circumcision. The sign of initiation into the New Covenant is baptism.



## H. The Forgiveness of Sins

In baptism, the sins of our past life are washed away. That's why baptism in water should be performed only once. We deal with the sins committed after baptism through confession. The breaking of bread is the key instant for us to have those sins confessed. However, the unfounded belief that our sins past, present, and future are all forgiven through the "prayer of faith" has caused untold damage among Evangelicals, and we want to address it here.

To believe that past, present, and future sins are forgiven by a prayer is a huge obstacle to sanctification. It makes a new believer presume that the bad things they're going to do won't cause any hinderance to their eternal destiny—opening the door to permissiveness. A church that is permissive with sin cannot please God.

The apostles never taught that our future sins are forgiven when we first believe in Christ. On the contrary, they instructed believers about how to keep a clear conscience through the confession of sins.

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other... (James 5:16)

... holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith (1 Timothy 1:19).

... the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus... were all seized with fear... Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done (Acts 19:17-18).

The confession of sins was common practice in the Old Testament as well. For example, it was the task of the tribe of the Levites, a class of priests, to guide the nation of Israel towards confession.

... when anyone becomes aware that they are guilty in any of these matters, they must confess in what way they have sinned (Leviticus 5:5).

... if they will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors—their unfaithfulness and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for

their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land... for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God (Leviticus 26: 40-42, 45).

Hearing confessions was the job of the OT priests. However, we read the heartfelt cries of other men in the Bible, men who went to God for forgiveness: David, Daniel, and Nehemiah are primary examples. Their prayers have inspired repentance in Bible-readers throughout generations.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to Yahweh.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin (David in Psalm 32:5).

So I turned to Yahweh God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to Yahweh my God and confessed: 'Yahweh, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name... we have sinned against you... we have not obeyed Yahweh our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you' (Daniel 9:3-6, 8, 10-11).

Those of Israelite descent... stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors. They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of Yahweh their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping Yahweh their God (Nehemiah 9:2-3).

Even Solomon, a man who struggled with the temptation of worldly desires and human wisdom his entire life, taught the need for confession.

Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy (Proverbs 28:13).

For the Early Church, to commit a sin was terrible but treatable. To commit a sin (that is, to

perform a sin *once*) had a remedy, but to sin repeatedly (to *practice* sin) indicated that a person never really knew Jesus in the first place. The apostles taught that if you repeatedly sin, you've never had a true encounter with the Lord Jesus. That is, those who practice sin have never really met Jesus. They don't know him yet. Somebody probably taught them another Jesus (the "feel good" version of Jesus), not the one of the Bible.

No one who abides in him [Jesus] sins.<sup>9</sup> No one who sins<sup>10</sup> has seen him or knows him.  
Little children, let no one deceive you... (1 John 3:6-7a; NASB)

God established the entire Old Testament Temple system on the truth that people must continually confess their sins in order to remain in right standing with him. Although there is no Temple standing in Jerusalem today, we still need to reconcile ourselves to God through confession, a sacrifice, and a priest. So now we confess our sins, claiming the body and blood of Christ as our substitutionary sacrifice, and approach God's Throne in the name of Jesus—that is, not in our own righteousness or believing in our own goodness.

... since [due to the fact that] we have a great High Priest who has ascended into Heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

Let us then approach God's Throne of Grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

It's uncommon to find anyone who actually thinks these things through, but there is a general sense among Christians that the New Covenant means "God has become more lenient." This is a great error among believers. Many understand the New Covenant to mean that we don't have to go through a priest anymore—and that we're reconciled with God with no need to confess

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<sup>9</sup> It's important to think of the grammar of the verb *sins*. It is given to us in the present active tense, so it could be also translated *keeps on sinning*. The meaning is that sinning is something the person does consistently, continually, and repeatedly.

<sup>10</sup> John was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write this verb *sins* also in the present active. It should be understood as *continues to sin*.

further. How wrong they are. Indeed, we need to repent, confess, and seek God's mercy more now, not less!

We seek God's grace for one fundamental reason: Because we know that Jesus has been in our shoes. He knows what we're going through. He has waged our battle. He has obtained the victory we are struggling to obtain. In brief, Jesus was tempted just as we are (Hebrews 4:15) in the flesh (1 John 4:2; 2 John 1:7, 9-10)—that is, in the very same human nature we have, with every natural inclination to sin (Romans 8:3; Hebrews 2:17)!

... we have one [a High Priest] who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God (1 John 4:2).

... many deceivers have gone out into the World who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh... Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him (2 John 1:7, 9-10; NKJV).

... what the Law could not do... God did: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh [lit. *flesh of sin*] (Romans 8:3; NASB).

... he had to be made like his brothers, fully human in every way (Hebrews 2:17).

Instead of imagining a priesthood is not needed now, we should be exploiting the priesthood of Jesus for all it's worth. How active is our Lord Jesus in his High Priestly role right now? Well, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy describe dozens of sacrifices the OT priests managed including the butchering processes of many different animals and birds, different grain offerings, and different incenses to burn. If all that was a mere shadow of what Christ does for us, then what is the reality in Heaven right now?

Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us (Romans 8:34).

Many people think that the meaning of *grace* is that God lets Christians get away with more than he let the Israelites get away with. Bad definition—especially considering that the reality is just the opposite. God is more ready to discipline a Christian than he was an Israelite. Under the Old Covenant, God let many sins go unpunished. Under the New Covenant, because God has given more, he will also demand more.

... in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished (Romans 3:25; LEB).

The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:47-48).

‘... the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.’ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? (Hebrews 12:6-7)

The New Covenant demands more, not less, from a believer. God will punish us more severely than he punished OT Israel if we turn away from him.

See to it that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refuse him who warned them on Earth [the Word],<sup>11</sup> much less shall we escape who turn

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<sup>11</sup> The main idea here is that the Israelites got warnings from Jesus on Earth while we got warnings from the Father in Heaven—the direct communication from the Father making us more accountable. The One who warned the Israelites from Earth was the Pre-Incarnate Christ, who told the Israelites that they should not approach Mount Sinai or they would die. Exodus 19 relates the encounter Christ had with Moses, warning the people with words like ‘Guard yourselves against going up to the mountain and touching its edge. Anyone touching the mountain will certainly be put to death’ (v. 12).

We know that that was our Lord Jesus because he warned Moses that Yahweh God was going to come down in a cloud. In particular, he warned that ‘... they must be prepared for the third day, because on the third day, Yahweh will go down on Mount Sinai before the eyes of all the people’ (v. 11). In other words, this Messenger spoke of Yahweh as someone distinct from himself. It wasn't the One God speaking, but the Word.

away from him who warns from Heaven<sup>12</sup> [God] (Hebrews 12:25; NASB).

Confession must be more frequent for NT Christians than it was for OT Jews. A Christian, instead of going to the Temple to seek the assistance of a priest to offer sacrifices, goes to God through Jesus. We go to our High Priest Jesus to intercede for us before the Father. At a minimum, every time we confess during the Lord's Supper, Jesus reacts in Heaven by acting as Mediator between us and God.

That's the minimum, but we should confess even when we're not at the Lord's Table. Any pattern of sin should be cut off immediately from the life of a Christian—it should be amputated like a bad hand or plucked out like a bad eye.

If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into Hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into Hell (Matthew 5:29-30).

We confess our sins to God. The Bible never says that we confess to Jesus. Rather, we go to God in the name of Jesus to cleanse our conscience. If you don't read the Bible closely, you won't notice this distinction, especially due to the times we're in—times in which most Christians are completely unable to distinguish between God and Jesus.

God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he [God] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son, purifies us from all sin... If we confess our sins, he [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:5-9).

... looking intently at the Sanhedrin, Paul said, 'Men and brothers, I have lived my life in all good conscience before God to this day' (Acts 23:1; LEB).

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<sup>12</sup> The One who warned from Heaven is God who spoke in a thundering voice during the Transfiguration saying 'This is my Son whom I love, listen to him!' (Mark 9:7)

... make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him [God]<sup>13</sup> (2 Peter 3:14).

The conclusion is that NT believers must fear God. The punishment of a Christian will be much worse than the punishment God gave the Israelites if we don't repent. And what happened to them? They died in the wilderness with God swearing in his wrath that they would not enter his Rest—that means their souls will not enter Paradise, the place where people who are weary of this World go after they die.

“I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my Rest.’” See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the Living God (Hebrews 3:11-12).

I saw... the souls of those who had been killed because of the Word of God, and because of the testimony... And a white robe was given to each of them; and they were told that they were to rest for a little while longer... (Revelation 6:9-11)

A true believer cannot continue in sin because there is no additional sacrifice for sins committed in obstinate rebellion against the Lord Jesus Christ. That is, God refuses a person's claim to the blood of Jesus if they have demonstrated disdain for it. If you have *regarded* his blood as *unclean* or if you have *trampled* it *underfoot*—then he can rightfully make it ineffective for the cleansing of your sin.

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.

Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or

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<sup>13</sup> We know that Peter is referring to God the Father here because sin produces a separation between us and God. ... your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear (Isaiah 59:2).  
... while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son... (Romans 5:10)  
God... reconciled us to himself through Christ... God was reconciling the World to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them... (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)  
... since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).

three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the Covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of Grace? (Hebrews 10:26-29; NASB)

Anyone in the New Covenant must cut sin out of their lives and let Jesus deal with it! He deals with sin day and night. At this moment Jesus is working on our behalf, ministering in the Heavenly Temple. There he continues to present his blood before God as the payment for sin. Do you dare demonstrate disdain for the only remedy for sin?

Jesus the High Priest can deal with the sins of all kinds of sinners. He has “offered one sacrifice for sins for all time” (Hebrews 10:12). Because of what he did, “...we have confidence to enter the Holy Place<sup>14</sup> by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way... his flesh” (Hebrews 10:19-20; NASB). That is, we can approach God for forgiveness, prayer requests, and salvation as long as Jesus stands as High Priest! Jesus has made access to God possible. You decide whether or not you’re going to take advantage of the access Jesus provides you to God.

## **I. Your Duty After Baptism**

The apostles taught that all believers, after having been purified of our *former sins* (2 Peter 1:9), need to keep our conscience clean in the sight of God. We need to keep a clean slate. Christ intercedes for us now in Heaven before God, applying his blood to any sin we confess. The New Covenant places no demand on us to be baptized again, but it does demand consistent confession.

Indeed, forgiveness from God is still conditional upon confession, just like it was in the Old Covenant. Notice the *if* in the next verse, indicating a conditional statement: If A, then B.

If we confess our sins, he [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9; NASB).

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<sup>14</sup> This *Holy Place* is the same as the *Throne of Grace* mentioned in another passage, which is simply praying to the Father (Hebrews 4:16).



So, NT believers are cleansed through confession. In the Old Covenant it was the same. The Israelites had to continually go to God to seek forgiveness for their sins. Along with their confessions, they offered the blood of lambs. Such an offering expressed their belief in a Messiah to come, the Lamb of God. Now, in the New Covenant, we remember the already-come Messiah, drinking from what he called the “cup... the New Covenant in my blood” (1 Corinthians 11:25). So, we not only offer blood, like the OT believers, we drink it!

... whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death... (1 Corinthians 11:26)

OT believers killed a lamb to demonstrate their faith in a coming Messiah. We break bread to demonstrate our faith in the already-come Messiah! The broken bread reminds us of Christ’s broken body—the great offering to God. The Lamb of God.

And he said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer... And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me’ (Luke 22:15-19).

### **Being Completely Clean<sup>15</sup>**

Today’s baptized covenant-keeping Christians are the happy fulfillment of the illustration Christ gave when he said:

He who has bathed [has been baptized] needs only to wash his feet [that’s confession]; otherwise he is completely clean [after baptism, you are completely clean from sin] (John 13:10; NASB).

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<sup>15</sup> There have been a handful of movements in the history of Christianity detractors have deemed *perfectionism*. Nonetheless, these movements have been used by God to motivate believers to a holy life. In 1777, John Wesley published a book called *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* which inspired many Methodists to pursue perfection.

Other Christian groups in history which have emphasized perfection were the Apostolic fathers, the Church fathers, orders of priests and monks, the Anabaptists, the Quakers, and the Pentecostal Holiness Movement. Many are confused about original sin, but all agree that it is incumbent upon believers to heed the words of Christ: *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Matthew 5:48).

Read this verse again and again. Meditate on it because in it is one of the most undertaught truths of the Church: How to be *completely clean*. God designed the two rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper to sustain us in holiness—a holiness he demands! And God does not demand it unfairly. He has made holiness possible. In fact, there is a kind of holiness without which no man or woman will obtain eternal life.

You shall be holy, for I am holy (1 Peter 1:16; Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:26)

Pursue... the holiness [the original Greek has a direct article “the” here] without which no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14; NASB).

The kind of holiness of which this passage speaks is having a good conscience. You get a good conscience in baptism. You keep it clear through confession! Combine these two activities (baptism and confession), and you have the kind of holiness required for someone to see God.

## **J. The Gospel and Baptism**

Baptism is not our message. We preach the Gospel, *the Good News about Jesus* (Acts 8:35) and people should respond to it with baptism. Anyone who believes should be baptized right after hearing the message because this is the NT pattern—baptism is the second half of evangelism. After we invite people to believe in Jesus, the only acceptable, appropriate, and saving response is to request immersion.

God designed baptism to be the perfect *amen* to the Gospel. Silently it resounds with Gospel faith. It's a converted person's way of agreeing with everything that the Gospel puts forth. It's the sinner's way of making Christ his Savior. It proclaims publicly: “The old me was buried with Christ. I'm a new person according to the power of God, who resurrected Christ.” It shouts: “I'm in Christ!”

Peter preached *be baptized*, but he precluded that command with an explanation of the Good News. That's when his hearers were *pierced to the heart*. Feeling deep conviction of sin, they asked Peter what they should do to respond to the Gospel.

When the people heard this [the Gospel], they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized’ (Acts 2:37-38).

Peter’s instructions sound hasty and premature to the ear of today’s Evangelical church. Didn’t Peter’s congregation have a “new believers’ class” which people should take before baptism? Why the rush? Wasn’t there more to explain? The answer God gives is “No.” The 3,000 souls baptized on that first Christian Pentecost had only two simple things to do before being baptized: repent and believe.

Once someone becomes aware that they have offended God Almighty and demonstrate deepfelt sorrow for their sins, we share the Good News with them. Once they trust with all their heart that Jesus died for their sins and that God proved that Jesus’ sacrifice was acceptable by resurrecting him and making him Lord of All, they should seek forgiveness for their sins. Then and only then should we baptize them.

Until they have been baptized, to tell them that they are saved, that they are right with God, or that they are forgiven, is no act of kindness. In fact, it’s deception. Real evangelists do not deceive people. Real evangelists do not play with people’s emotions.

If you tell someone that they are saved before they get baptized, you impede, obstruct, and stifle the work of the Holy Spirit. In your misguided zeal to uphold the man-made doctrine of *sola fide*, you hinder the work of the Spirit. You halt a process which otherwise would have led to repentance. Prior to the Spirit’s guiding believers to a sense of assurance in Christ, he convicts them of sin, righteousness, and judgment. In other words, the Spirit makes people feel bad before he lets them feel good.

And when he [the Holy Spirit] has come, he will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16:8; NKJV).

Let’s not put the cart before the horse! Let’s not cut the work of the Spirit short. Trying to inspire assurance where it has not been duly earned will lead people’s condemnation. How many Evangelicals continue ignorantly in sin because nobody ever demanded heartfelt repentance or true faith from them? Philip told the Ethiopian eunuch that to qualify for baptism, the eunuch had

to believe with all his heart.

If you believe with all your heart, you may [be baptized] (Acts 8:37)

If you refuse to challenge a penitent sinner with baptism, you throw out the baby with the bathwater. This is more than a metaphor—by disposing of the baptismal water, you literally abort a new birth. You cut short the God-ordained process of being born of water and the Spirit. You throw away the potential for someone to be born again!

Today, instead of inviting people to die with Christ and to believe with all their heart, we have churches filled with people who are clueless about baptism. Many of them have never even repented of their sins, but there they are in church.

### **K. Authentic Baptism of the Holy Spirit**

Many sincere believers experienced anointings of the Holy Spirit long before they were baptized in water. That's because the Spirit often does things in a person's life prior to the baptism of the Spirit—healings, revelations, anointings. However, those experiences are not equivalent to salvation. For example, the convicting work of the Spirit (showing a person their guilt before a Holy God, and produces repentance from sin), does not indicate salvation from sin.

What of the miracles, healings, or other anointings that someone may experience such as visions or dreams? All these are demonstrations God has begun his gracious work in a person, but they are not the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They are temporary. The Baptism of the Spirit is permanent.

Baptism in the Spirit is one of the greatest privileges we have been granted—that is, we who live in the period of World history called *the Times of the Gentiles* (Luke 21:24). Other privileges include: having the completed Scriptures, the knowledge of Jesus as Messiah, the promise of reigning in the Kingdom, having a perfect High Priest in Heaven to intercede for us, the New Covenant, and irrevocable spiritual gifts. Among these treasures is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Note the difference in the apostles before and after the day of Pentecost. Before Pentecost, they healed people, cast out demons, and even resurrected people. However, they were not complete.

They had not been made firm in love, they often stumbled into sin, and they were not yet established in the New Covenant. Then the Holy Spirit came upon them with power. At Pentecost, the Spirit established the apostles with gifts, confirmed them in love, and sealed them for salvation.

Jesus had already prepared the apostles for the coming of the Holy Spirit by saying:

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of Truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me (John 15:26).

But when he, the Spirit of Truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth (John 16:13).

‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, Rivers of Living Water will flow from within them.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified (John 7:37-39).

Like the apostles, Old Testament saints like Abraham, Samson, David, and the prophets were notoriously unstable in their walk with Yahweh God. That’s because they were not *sealed* with the Holy Spirit. They had not been immersed in the Spirit, although he was active in many aspects of their lives. That Seal, now available to us, is what guarantees our permanence in Christ. The Seal is the Spirit Himself, who comes to permanently abide within you when he baptizes you.

Your baptism in the Spirit is when you truly become a new creature. You can develop and cultivate the fruit of the Holy Spirit (for example, love) after your baptism in the Spirit. Only then do your good works and character become consistent. We need the baptism of the Holy Spirit—but to get it, we have to first repent, be baptized in water, and receive the laying on of hands!

### **The Laying on of Hands**

If you take a look at the list Scriptures call *the foundations*, you’ll notice there’s one that doesn’t seem to fit. At first, it’s hard to understand what makes it as important as the other activities. This is, after all, a list with the Resurrection and the Final Judgment on it! It also has “biggies”

such as repentance, faith, and baptism—but then you get the rather unpopular and controversial issue of laying on of hands. Why?

... the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of Resurrection of the Dead, and of Eternal Judgment (Hebrews 6:1-2; NKJV).

Well, the main reason why the laying on of hands is on the list is because it is a very special prayer. The Lord Jesus Himself gave the prayer to receive the Holy Spirit the highest level of importance when he taught his famous *ask, seek, and knock* lesson:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give good gifts to those who ask him? (Matthew 7:7-11)

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him (Luke 11:13)!

A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, so if your “laying on of hands link” is broken in your “fundamentals chain”—the seven fundamentals representing a complete salvation experience—then your salvation is incomplete! That is, if you don’t receive the laying on of hands sometime after you repent of sins, believe God’s Word, and are baptized in Jesus’ name; then don’t count on getting the baptism of the Spirit, the Resurrection from the Dead, or a merciful Eternal Judgment. The fundamentals are in chronological order from 1-7, and if you are missing anything under #7 (the Eternal Judgment), then you won’t get God’s forgiving mercy on that day. It won’t go well for you on the Day of Judgment.

So, a prayer is on the list of *the Foundations!* Wow. That shows you how important prayer is. It shows you how important the Church is too, because since hands must be laid on a believer during this prayer, other believers are involved. But the laying on of hands also proves how important the Holy Spirit is. Receiving him in your heart is the most important experience you'll ever have in this lifetime. Indeed, the laying on of hands is the most important prayer you'll ever make.

One of the greatest travesties in the history of the Christian Church is that this prayer was displaced by the so-called “prayer of faith” in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Evangelicals allowed themselves to be persuaded that what they needed for eternal life was a prayer to receive Jesus—and not a prayer to receive the Holy Spirit. But that’s exactly what we need, and we need that prayer to work so effectively that the Spirit be actually transmitted to us. The prayer is not complete until we receive his authentic supernatural power in a tangible way.

Although most *so-called* Christians would say that the laying on of hands is unnecessary, unregenerate man’s great need to receive the Holy Spirit remains. Just because a man isn’t thirsty doesn’t mean he’s not dehydrated—likewise, the baptism of the Holy Spirit continues to be humanity’s great need, even though hardly anyone knows it.

So, God longs to give his people a blessing most so-called “Christians” never seek. In spite of this blindness and apathy, Jesus exhorts us to ask for the Holy Spirit. Good things come to those who ask, but who in your church community asks for the Holy Spirit? Do you ever hear people earnestly and fervently praying to God to give them the Spirit? If you don’t, then why not be the first person to do so?

### **Limitless Anointing**

Let’s say that you’ve become convinced that you need the Holy Spirit. So now you know what you need and you have asked God for the Holy Spirit. The next question is “For how much of the Spirit’s anointing should I ask?” Should you ask for just one spiritual gift, or can you ask for many? Does God have a limit on the amount of power we are permitted to receive? The answer is *no*. In fact, to the degree you ask, you will receive the Holy Spirit. God will even *fill* you with the Holy Spirit! But that’s only if you ask him.

... God gives the Spirit without limit (John 3:34).

Basic to a healthy Christian faith is belief in this truth: God is not stingy. Keep that in mind when you seek, and ye shall find. Keep that in mind when you ask, and ye shall receive. Believers receive the measure of anointing we request.

You might think that since the anointing is transmitted from one person to another through the laying on of hands, that requesting a great anointing would be deprive the one praying of their own power, but you're wrong. Obtaining anointing does not make the person from whom the anointing is being channeled any less anointed.

... the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah were sitting on their thrones... with all the prophets prophesying before them. Now Zedekiah son of Kenaanah had made iron horns, and he declared, "This is what the LORD says: 'With these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.'"

All the other prophets were prophesying the same thing...

But Micaiah said, "As surely as the LORD lives, I can tell him [the king] only what my God says..." Then Micaiah answered, "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the LORD said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'"

... Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah went up and slapped Micaiah in the face. "Which way did the Spirit from the LORD go when he went from me to speak to you?" he asked (2 Chronicles 18:9-11, 16, 23).

The evil-hearted prophet Zedekiah said of the Spirit "He went from me to speak to you" as if the Holy Spirit were a runaway. Was the Spirit playing hide and seek? Should we be chasing him around saying "Where did he go? Where did he go?" Obviously not.

Rather than competing with one another, we must help one other—this is done by giving and getting the laying on of hands. We should seek double or triple portions of the anointing fellow believers have. God would give it to us. He is the greatest giver and he uses people as channels of his giving.



Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?’

‘Let me inherit a double portion of your Spirit,’ Elisha replied. ‘You have asked a difficult thing,’ Elijah said, ‘yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it [the double portion] will be yours—otherwise, it will not’ (2 Kings 2:9-10).

### **The Sharing Scandal**

Take a moment to read about the scandal that ensued during the times of Moses right after 70 elders of Israel got the Holy Spirit. Notice how Moses reacted to Joshua (who still a young man at the time) as Joshua tried to impede other men from getting God’s anointing.

Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the tent. Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him [Moses] and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again.

However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the Tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. A young man ran and told Moses, ‘Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.’

Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses’ aide since youth, spoke up and said, ‘Moses, my lord, stop them!’

But Moses replied, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!’ Then Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp (Numbers 11:24-30).

Do you wish all the Lord’s people were prophets? That’s a good thing to want. Moses corrected Joshua because Joshua thought that the anointing was only for Moses. Joshua was *jealous for Moses’ sake*. Moses responded that he wished all the people were anointed with power.

Like Moses, all Christian leaders should want their anointing for everybody else. Believers should never compete with other believers. Rather, we should encourage and support each other in the great task of obtaining the anointing of the Holy Spirit. In fact, we should wish everyone would be as we are.

Agrippa replied to Paul, ‘In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.’ And Paul said, ‘I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains’ (Acts 26:28-29; NASB).

It’s this attitude of wanting everyone to have what we have which prompts pastors to pray powerfully for the people in the Church. That kind of prayer is properly called *the laying on of hands*—and it is God’s means of filling us with the Holy Spirit. It is a personal pastoral prayer for power and the fifth of the seven fundamental Christian experiences (Hebrews 6:1-2). As such, every Christian must experience it to be complete! Without it, we are incomplete.

### **God’s Irrevocable Gift**

Now, although we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, that doesn’t mean that we should put the Spirit to the test. When you see a carton of milk in a grocery store refrigerator, and the expiration date has not passed, you can trust that the milk inside is sealed and safe. Is there a need to yank on the seal? If you do, you may very well break it—then what becomes of the milk? It will become unsuitable for sale and unsuitable for consumption. Likewise, if we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, we lose our salvation only if we tamper with the Seal—that is, if we put the Holy Spirit to the test.

It’s logical that since the Holy Spirit is a gift from God, God will not take the Spirit back. After you’ve been baptized in the Spirit, he is yours. Who gives a gift and then takes it back again? No one, especially not God. He will not reclaim any spiritual gifts.

... the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29; NKJV, NASB, LEB, Mounce).

However, God also warns us not to be like those who have *tasted the heavenly gift* (i.e., really experienced a spiritual gift), and who *shared in the Holy Spirit* (i.e., really were partakers of the Spirit), and felt the power of the Kingdom, but who regressed to a lifestyle of sin. That kind of spiritual backslider has no possibility of repenting. Those are the ungrateful deserters—the defectors from the faith. They are eternally lost.

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance (Hebrews 6:4-6).

This ominous passage proves that the hardest-hearted people are not those who *never* knew God. They are those who *once* knew God. Those who were partakers of the Holy Spirit but who further down the road turned from Christ cannot be restored. The Bible says that it is impossible to restore them to step one, repentance. They passed through steps #1 (repentance), #2 (faith in God), #3 (baptism in water), #4 (baptism in the Holy Spirit), and #5 (the laying on of hands) already. God won't let them do #1 over again. The Holy Spirit abandons those who abandon him.

If you are not keeping a clear conscience, you are not fulfilling your part of the New Covenant. God's part in the New Covenant is to forgive you when you confess, but your part is to confess—that is, you should be struggling to maintain the purity you obtained in baptism. Your rejection of holiness is a rejection of the *Spirit* of Holiness—and that Spirit, the Holy Spirit, will not abide in a person who does not have holiness.

The Holy Spirit did not remain all the time with OT believers like Noah, Abraham, Lot, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Saul, David, Solomon, Samson, or Jehu. The Spirit had to abandon them many times for a simple reason: They did not maintain holiness. On the other hand, the Spirit remains with New Covenant believers—and he does it for a simple reason: We keep holy. The New Covenant works, so we can keep holy. It does free us from sin. The Old Covenant—as good as it was—couldn't work. God never meant for it to save us. Rather, he meant for it to show us how sinful we are.

Jesus is able to sanctify us because the New Testament presents his example to us. In conclusion, following Moses cannot free us from sin. Following Jesus will free us from sin. Such NT freedom is possible through the Holy Spirit who guides us in a way the Law never could. He guides us in the footsteps of Christ, who sent him. In fact, he is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus!

... where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17).

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery... every man who lets himself be circumcised... is obligated to obey the whole Law. You who are trying to be justified by the Law... have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope...

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free... So I say, walk by the spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh... But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law (Galatians 5:1-5, 7, 13, 16, 18).

## **How the Prayer Works**

### **1. You Feel the Power**

Here's how the prayer we call *the laying on of hands* works. First, the person praying must have the Holy Spirit within them. Do you know what it looks like for someone to really have the Holy Spirit? It's simple: They have supernatural power and can do things that people cannot do in human power. Find that kind of person.

It was very clear that Jesus had the Holy Spirit because of his great miracles and healings. The Spirit produces power within us, and that *anointing* flows out of us. Jesus had great power within him and the anointing flowed out of him to heal and to perform miracles. He cast out demons and even laid his hands on dead people to resurrect them.

However, it became even clearer that Jesus had the Spirit when in Mark 5 the Holy Spirit did something remarkable: He overrode the will of Jesus! In Mark 5 we read of Jesus transmitting the power of the Holy Spirit and healing a woman without even knowing it. That proved that the

*One Spirit* is so independent and has so much autonomy that he can even override the will of the person he indwells.

And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years... When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak because she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.' Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?' (Mark 5:25-30)

The Spirit overrode the will of other people in whom he dwelt on other occasions, proving that the Holy Spirit truly is an autonomous being—an individual spirit with his own will.

Before Saul became king of Israel, the Spirit instantaneously transformed him into one of the prophets, making him a different person than what he had been. Later, when Saul pursued David to kill him, the Spirit came upon him and also upon his soldiers, detaining them from doing the evil they intended to do.

As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, timbrels, pipes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying. The Spirit of the LORD will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person... When he and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he joined in their prophesying. When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, 'What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?' (1 Samuel 10:5-6, 10-11).

Word came to Saul: 'David is in Naioth at Ramah;' so he sent men to capture him. But when they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came on Saul's men, and they also prophesied. Saul was told about it, and he sent more men, and they prophesied too. Saul sent men a third time, and they also prophesied. Finally, he himself left for Ramah and went to the great cistern at Seku. And he asked, 'Where are Samuel and David?'

‘Over in Naioth at Ramah,’ they said.

So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even on him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. He stripped off his garments, and he too prophesied in Samuel’s presence. He lay naked all that day and all that night. This is why people say, ‘Is Saul also among the prophets?’ (1 Samuel 19:19-24).

The conclusion is that the power we wield when we lay hands on someone is not our own. It doesn’t come from our personality, our political or physical strength. It comes from the Holy Spirit. It’s his anointing, and he does with it what he wills.

This is the word of Yahweh to Zerubbabel, saying, ‘Not by strength and not by power, but only by my Spirit,’ says Yahweh of Hosts (Zachariah 4:6; LEB).

But One and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as he wills (1 Corinthians 12:11).

## **2. You Lay Your Hands On Someone**

The person who is transmitting the Holy Spirit places their hands on the person who wants the Spirit. This is best performed with both hands leaving no doubt to observers that prayer is occurring. Laying hands on the head, shoulder, or hand work best, avoiding any appearance of impurity. In fact, there should not be the slightest hint of sexual contact (no touching the chest, neck, or thigh) as there are plenty of people who will be quick to criticize this ministry.

... they [twelve men] were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:6-7).

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the Gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands (2 Timothy 1:6).

... the apostles in Jerusalem... sent Peter and John to Samaria. When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit... Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, 'Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit' (Acts 8:14-19).

### 3. You Impart Spiritual Gifts

We transmit spiritual gifts through the laying on of hands. Anyone who performs the laying on of hands or who receives it must believe this. Our faith is that the gifts of the Holy Spirit can be shared!

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong (Romans 1:11).

Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you (1 Timothy 4:14).

God testifies when we use the gifts of the Holy Spirit. God intends for the power of the Holy Spirit to make people think: 'Who else could do such things but God?' That's because we manifest God's power by using the gifts. That's exactly what Jesus did as he ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit. Have you considered what people thought of Jesus as he used the anointing of the Holy Spirit?

1. They noted that God had given authority to men.

When the crowd saw this [Jesus' healing of a paralytic], they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man (Matthew 9:8).

2. The people Jesus healed and those who saw Jesus' healings praised God. In other words, they understood that God deserved the credit for Jesus' healings, having concluded that his power to heal came from God.

Jesus said to him, 'Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.' Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God (Luke 18:42-43).

3. Observers used common sense to draw the conclusion that the signs Jesus performed came from God. The logic of his healings is that nobody could do the things he did if it weren't for God.

[Nicodemus] came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him' (John 3:2).

The gifts are supernatural. They are not of human origin. Their origin is Divine. Since only God could be the source of such power, the gifts are God's testimony that the person who is speaking is speaking on God's behalf! That's why it says below 'God testified to this great salvation with signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit.'

... how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord [Jesus], was confirmed to us by those who heard him [the apostles]. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will (Hebrews 2:3-4).

God doesn't back up everybody with supernatural anointing. Not everybody gets it. God only gives such an anointing to those who are faithful to him. He only gives it to those who speak on his behalf. How many people can proudly proclaim what Jesus proclaimed: that he did not add or detract from what God had commanded him to say?

I have not spoken from myself, but the Father himself who sent me has commanded me what I should say and what I should speak... So the things that I say, just as the Father said to me, thus I say (John 12:49-50; LEB).

So we can trust Jesus and the apostles because of the evidence that God sent them. The signs and miracles they performed testified that what they said was true because God was clearly working through them. Anyone who listened to them, listened to God. It's as if they were God's spokesmen, to the degree that anyone who heeds their words, heeds the words of God Himself. They didn't speak on their own, and they didn't act on their own.



Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing from himself except what he sees the Father doing. For whatever that one does, these things also the Son does likewise (John 5:19; LEB).

I came forth from God and am here; for I have not even come on my own, but he sent me (John 8:42; NASB).

Remember this fundamental truth: Our faith is ultimately in God the Father. After repentance from dead works on the Hebrews 6 list comes *faith in God*. We believe in God because of what he did in Jesus.

Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the Dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God (1 Peter 1:21).

### **An Ancient Tradition**

The laying on of hands is an ancient custom. Only now in the Age of the Gentiles do we use it to transmit the baptism of the Holy Spirit; however, from the times of the patriarchs, leaders used the laying on of hands to transmit authority. It developed so that by the time of Moses, it had become a means to transmit power.

Authority and blessing came through the patriarchs' laying on of hands, but the laying on of hands was primarily and fundamentally a guarantee of personal trust. Notice in the following passage how insistent Isaac was to get physically close to his son. He insisted on getting close because he wanted to transmit the blessing of the firstborn son to the *true* firstborn son. Isaac had to know that he trusted the man standing before him. He had to be sure that he wouldn't be deceived.

... Isaac said to Jacob, 'Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not.' Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, 'The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau...' so he proceeded to bless him... Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Come here, my son, and kiss me.' So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and

said, ‘Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed. May God give you Heaven’s dew and Earth’s richness...’ (Genesis 27:21-28)

### **It's All About Trust**

Only through the laying on of hands was Isaac willing to transmit the Abrahamic blessing—the blessing of an eternal inheritance in the World to Come—to his firstborn son. Isaac’s commitment to doing things right moved him to touch Jacob, to demand a kiss from Jacob, and even to smell him. The combination of these actions proves that the laying on of hands is essentially an act of trust—a confidence-builder. It remains that even now, in the Times of the Gentiles. For example, Paul warned Timothy not to use the laying on of hands unless Timothy could completely trust the man receiving it.

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others (1 Timothy 5:22).

To interpret this verse correctly, you must understand that the laying on of hands was the standard ceremony for establishing a man in the pastoral ministry. So, the expression ‘do not share in the sins of others’ means that if, subsequent to the ordination ceremony, the newly-ordained pastor sins, those who performed the laying on of hands would be guilty of the troubles caused by his sins.

What we get out of this is that, similar to Isaac’s careful selection of the heir of the Abrahamic blessing, today in the Christian Church, ordaining a man into the pastoral ministry is a careful choice. Those who lay hands on a future pastor share responsibility for the behavior of that man after the ordination.

### **Jacob and His Two Grandchildren**

In terms of transmitting authority, the gesture of laying the right hand on someone means more than laying the left hand on someone. Notice how carefully Jacob, who valued the transmission of blessings so highly that he actually went out of his way to deceive his father to get it, used each hand very intentionally to transmit two different degrees of blessings to his grandchildren. Just as the expression ‘seated at God’s right hand’ indicates authority (Acts 2:33; Psalm 110:1;

Mark 16:19; Romans 8:34; 1 Peter 3:22; Hebrews 1:3; Luke 22:69; Hebrews 12:2; Acts 7:56; Hebrews 10:12; Colossians 3:1; Matthew 26:64; Hebrews 8:1; Acts 5:31; Revelation 3:21), so does the right hand transmit greater authority than the left.

But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn...

When Joseph saw his father [Jacob] placing his right hand on Ephraim's head he was displeased; so he took hold of his father's [Jacob's] hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. Joseph said to him, 'No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.'

But his father refused and said, 'I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations' (Genesis 48:14, 17-19).

Based on the same principle of right- and left-hand authority, the two apostles John and Jacob placed the direct request with our Lord about who would get the privilege of sitting at his right and left hand in the Kingdom.

They [James and John] replied, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory'

'...to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared' (Mark 10:37, 41).

### **Power to Lead: Joshua**

At the start of the Israelite's Conquest of Canaan, Moses laid hands on Joshua to charge him with leadership over the Israelites. With that charge came anointing. Immediately after Moses transmitted *the Spirit of Wisdom* to Joshua, something else happened: The Israelites recognized Joshua as their commander.

Now, Joshua already had the Holy Spirit (as you can see from the passage below), so we have to ask ourselves: Who or what was this *Spirit of Wisdom* he received? Was it a special anointing of the Holy Spirit? For example, was it the anointing of wisdom which the Holy Spirit produces? It had to be because God doesn't send angels to live within us. That privilege belongs exclusively to the Holy Spirit.

[Moses said] 'May Yahweh, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so Yahweh's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.'

So, Yahweh said to Moses, 'Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit,<sup>16</sup> and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him...'

Moses did as Yahweh commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him... (Numbers 27:16-23)

What pertinent information can we gather from this passage? We know that through the laying on of hands Joshua received power to lead. Through the laying on of hands and the power of the Holy Spirit, Joshua got his commission to lead. But there's more. Please pay special attention to the word *because* in the next passage.

Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the Spirit of Wisdom<sup>17</sup> because Moses had placed his hands on him, and the Israelites listened to him, and they did as Yahweh had commanded Moses (Deuteronomy 34:9; LEB).

The word *because* proves that Joshua got the anointing for a reason. He obtained the anointing to lead more than 600,000 people—all who heeded him—due to a conscientious physical action. It

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<sup>16</sup> Here we have a perfect word-for-word translation of the Hebrew. There is no reason why the NIV should have translated *the Spirit* as "spirit of leadership," but they did. Adding words to the Scriptures is a serious sin. In this case, it leaves the reader confused about whether Joshua had the Holy Spirit or not. He did.

<sup>17</sup> This is the Hebrew combination *ruach hachmah*, Spirit of Wisdom.

was *because of* Moses' laying on of hands. The point is that the anointing of the Holy Spirit doesn't come through osmosis. Furthermore, you may have the Holy Spirit, but you can always seek more of his power. Nobody is exempt from seeking more of his anointing.

### **Consecration of the Levites**

God also used the laying on of hands to separate the Levites for Tabernacle service, but he did it in a unique, democratic way. It was not just Moses or Aaron who would lay their hands on the Levites. God invited the entire Israelite community to do it, signifying that they themselves entrusted the ministry of the Tabernacle to Levites.

Bring the Levites to the front of the Tent of Meeting and assemble the whole Israelite community. You are to bring the Levites before Yahweh, and the Israelites are to lay their hands on them. Aaron is to present the Levites before Yahweh as a wave offering from the Israelites, so that they may be ready to do the work of Yahweh (Numbers 8:9-11).

The Levites were the Israelite's offering to God. Of the twelve tribes, the people of Israel devoted one completely to God's service. This dedication of human resources, the greatest resources we possess, to God, is reminiscent of the dedication of the firstborn sons. God established that practice through Isaac, and later in the Exodus, and it was affirmed in Jesus.

Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you' (Genesis 22:2).

... you are to give over to the LORD the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the LORD (Exodus 13:12).

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord'), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons (Luke 2:21-24).

So, believers offer our tithes, our time, and even certain members of our family and religious community to the Lord!

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas... and Saul.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them (Acts 13:1-2).

### **A Tradition for Ordination**

Today Christians carry on the tradition of the laying on of hands to set men apart for the ministry. That means that the laying on of hands is not only for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The leaders of the church of Damascus sent out the missionaries Barnabas and Saul by laying hands on them.

While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, when they had fasted, and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away (Acts 13:2-3; NASB).

While the church at Damascus laid hands on men to set them apart for apostolic-missionary work, the church at Jerusalem used the laying on of hands to set men apart for another ministry: the diaconate. The church community chose the men democratically and the Twelve Apostles prayed over them with the laying on of hands.

They [the members of the church] chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6:5-6).

Observe in the last passage that Steven, a man ordained to be a deacon in the Jerusalem congregation, was already filled with the Holy Spirit when he received the laying on of hands. That confirms that the laying on of hands is not always for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it is simply a sign that someone has trust invested in them—that they have been set apart for a special ministry among God’s people.

## **For the Filling of the Spirit**

The conversion of the great apostle Paul was marked by the laying on of hands. The man who preached the Gospel to him, Ananias, placed his hands on Paul (who was still called *Saul* at the time) not simply to heal Paul from blindness—it was that, but it was much more. Ananias laid his hands on Paul so that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit!

In a vision he [Saul] has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight... Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 9:12, 17).

So, a believer can get the filling of the Spirit from the very start of his or her Christian life. Now, the filling of the Spirit is for everyone and it’s supposed to occur after our baptism in the Spirit. It’s God’s purpose that everyone filled with the Spirit—but reality does not match God’s intended purpose. Only someone who has had a thorough repentance, having emptied themselves of all sin, will get the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Interestingly, it’s not necessary to get the baptism of the Spirit to be filled with the Spirit. You would think it’s a prerequisite, but John the Baptist proves that it’s not.

... he [John the Baptist] will be great in the sight of the Lord... he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born (Luke 1:15).

## **Jesus’ Style**

Jesus laid his hands on people a lot. Below are 15 different passages that highlight this as a ministry style of Jesus—there are at least 5 more which we’ll look at later (Matthew 8:2-3; Matthew 20:30, 34; Mark 1:40-42; Luke 13:11-13; Luke 22:50-51), giving us a total of 20 passages that show Jesus ministering with the laying on of hands. Let’s start with one that shows how Jesus healed many people at once:

Now while the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him; and he was laying his hands on each one of them and healing them. Demons also were coming out of many... (Luke 4:40-41)

Sometimes our Lord would touch people's eyes, ears, or even their tongues. Oddly enough, in one passage we see Jesus putting saliva on his fingers, and touching a man's tongue with those same fingers! This sounds gross to most of us, but Jesus' use of saliva combined with the laying on of hands shows how much Jesus believed in the laying on of hands.

There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears.

Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to Heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, '*Ephphatha!*' (which means 'Be opened!'). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly (Mark 7:32-35).

This passage also proves that Jesus was absolutely confident that he would transmit blessings. Are you that confident? Can you lay your hands on others at any time or are you, like most people, worried about the germs they or you might transmit? Is your main concern giving or getting a virus—or transmitting the anointing?

... some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, 'Do you see anything?' (Mark 8:22-23)

Did you notice that people *begged Jesus to touch* the deaf-mute man? Everyone who observed Christ's ministry knew that he ministered with the laying on of hands. It was the mark of his healing ministry—his ministry style. Jarius, the man in the next passage, also came to Jesus and—knowing that it was Jesus' custom—asked for Jesus to lay his hands on his dead daughter.

... a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, 'My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live...' After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up (Matthew 9:18, 25).



More and more people came to Jesus seeking the laying on of hands. These folks didn't only want healings; they sought blessings on their children too!

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them... And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them (Mark 10:13, 16).

Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them... When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there (Matthew 19:13-15).

He was no performer. Jesus touched people because he loved them with the pure love of God. He would lay his hands on people's heads and hands. His touches were fitting and polite. Nobody ever interpreted Jesus' touch wrongly because everything about him was simple and natural.

When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him (Matthew 8:14-15).

Jesus' practice of laying hands on people was fueled by the faith of those who came to him. If anyone came to him with faith, he would heal them. When multitudes came believing, he would heal all, but where there was little faith, he performed few healings. Either way, he would lay his hands on the people who had faith.

He could not do any miracles there [in Nazareth], except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them (Mark 6:5).

## **Degrees of Faith**

The Bible records for us one occasion in which a healing of Christ had a delayed response. The reason for the delay has to do with the laying on of hands because a blind man needed Jesus to lay his hands on his eyes a second time. Once was not enough to see 100% clearly.

The episode proves that degrees of anointing are transmitted through the laying on of hands. For instance, the blind man only got half of the anointing the first time Christ prayed for him. He

didn't get all of it. You can get 25% or 50% or even 75% of an anointing when someone prays for you. If that's all you get, then you'll need more prayer.

They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, 'Do you see anything?'

He looked up and said, 'I see people; they look like trees walking around.'

Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly (Mark 8:22-25).

This is not the only time Jesus—desiring to heal—did not heal people. In his hometown of Nazareth Jesus performed a handful of healings and the Bible tells us why: The Nazarenes had very little faith.

...he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith (Matthew 13:58).

We deduce that the man who was only half-healed of his blindness had a problem with belief. Similar to the man who cried out to Jesus *I believe, help me in my unbelief* (Mark 9:24), the blind man had unbelief mixed in with his belief! We know that because he received half a healing, this man had only 50% of the faith he needed for a complete healing.

Such spiritual weakness is normal among unbelievers but it's unacceptable among Christians. James rebukes Christians who are unstable in their faith, saying:

... when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do (James 1:6-8).

So, if you doubt you shouldn't expect to receive anything from God. Your problem goes beyond prayers. You are *unstable in all you do*. You are double-minded.

As we continue to examine the reasons why the blind man only got half a healing, it helps to remember the Capernaum centurion, a special man. Indeed, that man was the one of whom Jesus said *I have not found such great faith even in Israel* (Luke 7:9). According to Jesus' criterion, this centurion had more faith than anyone else he had met in Israel.

The centurion requested that Jesus *not* enter his house, and believed that Jesus could perform a long-distance healing. The centurion understood nearness to Jesus to be a great privilege, which means that he understood the power of the laying on of hands. Laying on of hands is based upon the truth that physical proximity unleashes power.

...I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed... (Luke 7:6-7).

The fact that the Centurion did not request the laying on of hands does not mean that he didn't believe in it. Rather, it proves that the greater people's faith, the less they need the laying on of hands. The centurion's faith was so great that he believed Jesus could simply pronounce a word to heal someone. He knew that Jesus' authority was so great that he did not need to touch the sick.

Correspondingly, Cornelius and his entourage got the baptism of the Holy Spirit without the apostles laying hands on them. Why? Because their faith was so great that God sent the Holy Spirit straight to them with no human mediator.

Jesus also fits into this category of people who had great faith. Although Simeon prayed over him as an infant and John the Baptist laid his hands on him at baptism, the Holy Spirit baptism Jesus received was directly from Heaven. Jesus' faith was strong enough for him to forego a human mediator.

### **Immediate Healing**

The normal pattern for healing in the ministry of Jesus was instantaneous healing. You'll notice how central the word *immediately* is in the passages which describe Jesus laying his hands on others. Here's one:

... and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, ‘Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.’ Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God (Luke 13:11-13).

Did you get the final phrase *immediately she straightened up*? The word *immediately* indicates that the power of the Holy Spirit was readily available to whoever was in contact with Jesus—and that is exactly what God expects from a Christian ministry today. We have to be ready channels of the power of God. To do so, we have to figure out how to make sure the power of the Holy Spirit is readily available through us.

Most Evangelicals will say that if anyone could get immediate healing through Jesus’ laying on of hands, it was either because “Jesus is God” or because “Jesus was much more powerful than us”—but those are erroneous interpretations. People were healed immediately because Jesus was filled with the Spirit—something we should be living too. Indeed, we are commanded to live in the fullness of the Spirit. It’s not optional.

... be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4).

... and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit... (Acts 4:31)

Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit... (Acts 6:3)

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them... (Acts 4:8)

Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas... (Acts 13:9)

... the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52).

Notice that Jesus did not drag out his prayers. If the power of God abides in the person ministering, then the healing, prophecy, or any other ministration of the gifts does not come from their words, but from within. The anointing is transmitted through an action, not an incantation.

For example, in the passage above, Jesus simply declared that the woman was healed. He made no prayer. The healing occurred the moment he touched her.

Focus again on the *immediacy* of healing in the passages that follow. Can you see how this immediacy is connected with the laying on of hands? It is.

A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, ‘Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy (Matthew 8:2-3).

Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!’ ... Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him (Matthew 20:30, 34).

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, ‘If you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed (Mark 1:40-42).

And one of them struck the servant of the High Priest [Malchus], cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, ‘No more of this!’ And he touched the man’s ear and healed him (Luke 22:50-51).

## **Our Power Too**

Paul healed every sick person on the island of Malta—no small feat. The Scriptures record that Paul initiated the Malta healing campaign by *placing his hands on* the father of Malta’s chief official, resulting in the island’s first healing and unleashing a massive healing campaign.

[the father of the chief official of the island] ... was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured (Acts 28:8-9).

It wasn't just Paul. The Twelve Apostles utilized the power of the laying on of hands. They laid their hands on thousands of people, so performing the miracles which marked the early days of the Church. These apostolic *signs and wonders* were performed *through their hands*—a biblical expression that should be taken literally!

And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people (Acts 5:12; NKJV).

The Bible clearly states the reason why the Lord Jesus gave the power of the laying on of hands to the apostles: He wanted to *testify to the message of his grace*. That is, Jesus wanted to lend greater credibility to the Gospel message. To give the message this credibility, he authorized his messengers, the apostles, to transmit power through their hands.

So they [Paul and Barnabas] stayed there [Iconium] for a considerable time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who testified to the message of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be performed through their hands (Acts 14:3).

### **Demonstrating That You Have Received the Spirit**

Can you be 100% sure that you have received the Holy Spirit? That's the main question this book addresses. It's the reason why we wrote this book. Every believer must be able to signal a conversion experience they can identify as having occurred on a certain day in their life. Before that day, as good as you were, the Holy Spirit did not abide within you. So, give your new birth in the Holy Spirit a timestamp.

Your conversion occurred at one precise moment in time. Since then, have you served believers with the supernatural power God gave you? Are you serving the Church that way right now? This sounds extremely challenging because it *is*. In fact, it's impossible for someone to minister in the Church God's way with human skills and abilities. We need a much greater power than Michelangelo, Bach, and Shakespeare. We need divine power.

Try to list the spiritual gifts you are using or have used. What things have you done in service to the Church which have no natural cause? For example, playing the guitar has the natural cause of your rehearsals and practice. Healing a sick person with the laying on of hands is not natural—

it's supernatural. Doing Christian poster art does not count as supernatural, but casting out demons does. Cooking food does not count as supernatural, but teaching the Bible with divine revelation does. Speaking a language you studied in college does not count, but spontaneously speaking in the tongues of angels does.

A gift is not a talent. Talents are developed by skill and practice. The Holy Spirit distributes God-given gifts in the form of immediate power from On High. You'll notice it when you get a gift from the Spirit because it's a new ability you never developed. You may have built up the confidence to use it. You may have overcome shyness, but the ability itself is not developed. You'll speak a foreign language without being a linguist and you'll heal without being a doctor.

## **Spiritual Gifts**

There are three NT passages that outline the spiritual gifts. From a combined list, we can categorize the gifts into two groups: speaking and serving gifts. Each of the two categories has seven gifts, giving us a total of 14 gifts.<sup>18</sup> Old Testament anointings such as Samson's strength or David's skills with the harp were not permanent irrevocable gifts, but temporary powers God granted his servants for special tasks (i.e., defeating the Philistines or delivering King Saul from a demon). They should not be included on the list.

The 1 Peter gifts passage establishes two categories of gifts: speaking and serving gifts. Peter calls speaking and serving two *forms*. Specifically, he states that they constitute the *various forms* of the grace of God. Other translations speak of the *manifold* or *diverse* grace of God.

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

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<sup>18</sup> Paul uses the term *gift* one other time in the NT, but not in the same way he enumerates the supernatural gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 (which he wrote). In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul identifies the gift of being a spouse and the gift of remaining single.

I wish that all of you were as I am [celibate]. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that (1 Corinthians 7:7).

Paul is speaking of two different lifestyles here. Every believer must opt for one or the other: marriage or celibacy. Since these are for every Christian, are not given by the Holy Spirit when we're born again, and not supernatural, we haven't included them on our master list. Still, we wanted to mention them in case someone would like to argue in favor of including them on the list.

If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God.

If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 4:10-11).

With the two categories of speaking and serving as our foundation, we may build a list of the spiritual gifts, sourcing them from two more thorough passages: 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12.

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit... But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:

for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit,  
to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit,  
to another faith by the same Spirit,  
to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit,  
to another the working of miracles,  
to another prophecy,  
to another discerning of spirits,  
to another different kinds of tongues,  
to another the interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:4, 7-10; NKJV).

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.

If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith;  
if it is serving, then serve;  
if it is teaching, then teach;  
if it is to encourage, then give encouragement;  
if it is giving, then give generously;  
if it is to lead, do it diligently;  
if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully (Romans 12:6-8).



These two lists from Paul can easily be broken down into Peter’s two categories:

Speaking Gifts	Serving Gifts
prophecy* <sup>+</sup>	faith
word of wisdom	working of miracles
word of knowledge	healings
different kinds of tongues	discerning of spirits
interpretation of tongues	giving <sup>+</sup>
teaching <sup>+</sup>	leading <sup>+</sup>
encouragement <sup>+</sup>	showing mercy <sup>+</sup>

\* = Prophecy appears on two of the three gifts passages, making it unique. Indeed, it’s a *greater* gift, making those who use it *greater* than others in the Church. *Greater* is not our word but Paul’s who said ‘I would rather have you prophecy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues’ (1 Corinthians 14:5); and ‘eagerly desire the greater gifts’ (1 Corinthians 12:31).

What Paul means by *greater* is greater *in service*. He uses the concept of being *greater* the same way our Lord Jesus did when said ‘The greatest among you shall be your servant’ (Matthew 23:11)—a concept germane only to the Kingdom-minded!

<sup>+</sup> = These six gifts are found in Romans 12, a beautifully-balanced passage in which Paul names three speaking and three serving gifts (plus *servicing* itself, a category)—painting the same contrast of serving and speaking gifts Peter does in 1 Peter 4:10-11.

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### A Brief Description of Eight Gifts

Six of the 14 gifts are straightforward—that is, they are simply what they say they are. For example, the gift of prophecy is manifested clearly when a believer speaks God’s Word and their declaration finds fulfillment. They speak, and what they speak becomes reality. Another

manifestation of this gift is when seekers come under the conviction of sin because the secret things in their hearts are exposed by prophecy.

Whenever what the prophet spoke in the name of Yahweh, the thing does not take place and does not come about, that is the thing that Yahweh has not spoken to him. Presumptuously the prophet spoke it; you shall not fear that prophet (Deuteronomy 18:22; LEB).

... the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by Yahweh only if his prediction comes true (Jeremiah 28:9).

... if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare (1 Corinthians 14:24).

The gift of teaching is assisting people to understand God's Word by instructing them with lessons that include illustrations, examples, and practical application. It's using the art of pedagogy to transmit God's truths to those who are eager to learn the Bible.

The gift of faith is having the certainty that God will do something, asking him, and getting him to *move mountains* (Matthew 17:20)!

The gift of *word of wisdom* is when a believer gives the perfect advice for a situation. The possessor of this gift shares pearls of wisdom right when people need to hear it. These *pearls* are similar to the axioms we find in the Book of Proverbs.

The gift called the *word of knowledge* is when, for example, we say something that shows a profound knowledge of what people are thinking or feeling. Jesus used this gift to humble his rivals, proving that he knew the evil of their hearts. Jesus also used this gift to convince Nathaniel that he was the Messiah.

Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, 'Why do you think evil in your hearts?' (Matthew 9:4; NKJV)

But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: 'Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation...' (Matthew 12:25)

Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, ‘Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?’ (Luke 5:22)

Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, ‘Get up and stand in front of everyone’ (Luke 6:8).

But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their hearts, took a child... (Luke 9:47)

Nathanael said to Him, ‘How do You know me?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’ Nathanael answered and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ (John 1:48-49; NKJV)

Finally, among the six straightforward gifts, we have the *interpretation of tongues*. This gift is self-explanatory. Someone speaks in a different language, and the person with the gift of *interpretation of tongues* is able to translate what they’ve said. It’s a revelation to those who are eagerly listening. It may or may not be that the interpreter speaks the language being interpreted, but whatever they share is certainly revealed to them by the Holy Spirit.

As we said earlier, the other eight gifts require an expanded explanation. Let’s start with the gift of leading.

### **The Gift of Leading**

Think of the Israelites’ great leader Moses. How did he reach such an elevated status in the history of the Jews? Was it his training in Pharaoh’s palace? No, he renounced his identity as an Egyptian. Was it his eloquence? No, he claimed to have a speech impediment. Moses’ unrivaled humility is what made him great.

Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the Earth (Numbers 12:3).

Humility is the primary virtue of a God-ordained leader. What makes humility so important for leadership? It’s simply because a person who is humble before God will do things markedly different than other people. For example, Jesus is the first man in history to teach that we must

love our enemies and pray for them. This was unheard of previously in history, as was his commandment to his followers: ‘Love one another just as I have loved you’ (John 13:34; 15:12; LEB).

Leaders mark a difference. They don’t follow the crowd. They walk behind an invisible God, which makes them look like great leaders, but the truth is that they’re really just great followers. When a Christian leader walks ahead of the rest, they are not the ones really leading—God is!

God has made Jesus the Lord and every Christian leader knows that. The humility of a Christian leader inspires them to follow Jesus wherever he leads, but Jesus’ ability to lead them to new horizons, new life, and salvation is the real reason why Christian leadership is so blessed.

Everyone who acts according to the flesh—worldly people—are very predictable in their sinful tendencies, self-centeredness, love of money, and general patterns of behavior. The unconverted obey the laws of human psychology, but a Christian leader obeys the law of love. The unconverted follow the principles of this World, while Christian leaders follow the principles of the Kingdom. They seek to rule, we seek to serve. They follow demons, we follow the Holy Spirit of God.

The refreshing and unpredictable will of God is the guiding light of a Christian leader. His subjection to God frees him from subjection to men. His fear of God delivers him from the fear of man. He has the courage to follow God and not popular opinion. He walks behind the Lord, and that causes him to walk ahead of men. He speaks truth when no one wants to hear it. He has *boldness*.

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness... after they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly (Acts 4:29-31)

A second virtue necessary to back up the gift of leadership is moral excellence. You’ll note that the first requirement for a pastor is for him to be *irreproachable* (Titus 1:6; 1 Timothy 3:2). Accusations and slander will come—they are inevitable—but the accusations leveled against a pastor should always be unfounded. A pastor must be beyond reproach because his life must be an example.

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care... being examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:2-4).

Christian leaders also need wisdom. Don't they have to convince people to believe in the Bible? Of course they do! And that's not all, they even have to persuade people to obey the Word of God. They have to be skillful at winning others over intellectually and voluntarily for the truth. Developing arguments to defend doctrine and contending for the faith are both regular duties of a pastor. Debating well requires much wisdom.

[I]... urge you to contend for the Faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people (Judas 1:3).

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity... (Colossians 4:5; NASB)

In conclusion, a Christian with the gift of leading will manifest humility, moral excellence, and wisdom. These virtues must accompany the gift. If they do not, a believer will not be able to develop a ministry and lead. Among God's people, those with the gift of leading include apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers (of whom it says in Ephesians 4:11-12 that Jesus *gave to the Church for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry*). In other words, these four kinds of public-facing church leaders are Jesus' gift to us so that the everyone else in the Church might carry out Jesus' work.

If someone doesn't have the gift of leading, they will not be able to develop a ministry. They're welcome to prophesy, evangelize, pastor others, and teach, but we should not use the title apostle, prophet, evangelist, or pastor for them. Why not? It's because:

- To be an apostle, you must be more than someone sent from a church. You have to lead converts to form a new congregation.
- To be a prophet, you must be more than someone who prophesizes. You've got to lead Christians into an appreciation of God's revelations.

- To be an evangelist, you must be more than a guy who seeks to save people. You've got to lead in evangelism. That is, you've got to lead people to conviction of sin, warn them of judgment, and baptize those who have shown the fruit of repentance.
- To be a teacher, you must be more than someone who teaches the Bible. You've got to develop believers in their understanding of sound doctrine and train them in how to interpret Scriptures.

Consistency in the use of gifts builds a ministry. Building a ministry is what earns someone the designation of apostle, prophet, evangelist, or pastor-teacher. Holy Spirit-anointed leaders gain a reputation for consistently doing things well. Through wisdom and experience, they develop a ministry—even though God imparted the gift of leadership to them automatically, the instant they received Holy Spirit baptism.

### **The Gift of Encouragement**

A biblical evangelist preaches the Gospel to the unconverted. Another name for an evangelist is a *preacher*. The Gospel is not a teaching, but a proclamation, so teachers don't teach it—rather, preachers proclaim it. Evangelists declare the Gospel. Think of someone like John the Baptist.

There's a difference between a teacher and a preacher. A preacher proclaims the Good News of the Kingdom of God. A preacher's does not aim to transmit knowledge. Teachers speak to people's intellects, but an evangelist speaks to people's hearts. His goal is not just to get people to agree, but to get them to shout *amen*, stirring them to action. He has to get them to 'obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ' (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

A true evangelist exhorts repentant sinners to be baptized. Examples of such ministries were those of Phillip the Deacon and the Twelve Apostles. For example, Jesus charged the Apostles with baptizing repentant sinners. Few people know this, but to draw people into the New Covenant, we need the gift of encouragement.

... when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.... Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders

me from being baptized?’ Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God’ (Acts 8:12, 36-38; NKJV).

He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned’ (Mark 16:15-16).

... go 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)

The gift of an evangelist is not evangelism because evangelism is not a gift, it’s a *duty*. Evangelism is never called a *gift* in the Bible. Sharing the Gospel is the honor and privilege of every Christian. Nonetheless, it’s the particular duty of an evangelist to preach it! With a calling from God and a ministry to fulfill, an evangelist cries out ‘Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel’ (1 Corinthians 9:16; NKJV).

No one dares to say it, but the thought has crossed many minds: “Since I don’t have the gift of evangelism, I don’t need to evangelize.” The root of such a thought is fear—specifically, the fear of rejection. The solution to ridding ourselves of such thoughts is twofold: 1) Realize what a great privilege it is to be a messenger of Christ. 2) Pray for boldness. Here’s one such prayer:

‘Now Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly (Acts 4:29-31).

The inspiration to compose worship and praise music, an anointing of King David very evident in the Psalms, is very closely related to the gift of encouragement. Inspired lyrics (meaning *biblical* lyrics) blended with beautiful and moving melodies encourage other believers in their faith.

However, do note that worship does not appear on any list of gifts found in the Bible. In this manner, worship is like evangelism: both are activities natural to all Christians, they are Christian duties. We know that worship is a duty because Paul said that every Christian should have a song to share when they come to a Church gathering:

When you come together, everyone has a hymn... (1 Corinthians 14:26)

Someone might say that Cornelius and his group received the gift of worship when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit, but that's incorrect. Rather, their gift was tongues. The idea is that with the gift of tongues, they extolled God. The Greek word used there is from the root *me-gas* meaning *to enlarge, magnify, or exalt*.

... they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God (Acts 10:46; NKJV).

Cornelius' group, the first Gentiles to receive the Gospel, received the same gift as the apostles on the Day of Pentecost: tongues. Allow us to remind you of the reaction of the Jerusalem Jewish and proselyte visitors on the Day of Pentecost when they heard the apostles speaking in tongues:

... we hear them speaking in our own languages the great deeds of God! (Acts 2:11; LEB)

Can you see the parallel interpretation of Acts 10 with Acts 2? The Spirit gave the Gentiles the gift of tongues in order for them to declare God's great deeds. The story of Cornelius is not about how the Gentiles got two gifts: tongues and worship. It's about how *through* the gift of tongues, the Spirit equipped the Gentiles to declare the greatness of God—which is exactly what they proceeded to do as the Gospel began to spread around the World!

### **The Gift of Miracles**

Paul said that the *signs of an apostle* (that is, missionary founder of a church) include miracles.

... the signs of an apostle have been done among you with all patient endurance, both signs and wonders and deeds of power (2 Corinthians 12:12; LEB).

Someone sent by God to found churches must be able to perform miracles. It's true that an apostle must be anointed to lead, to encourage, and to teach; but he also must have the gift of



miracles. The unconverted need a good reason to believe in what an apostle-missionary says. In fact, they need the best reason: proof that God has actually sent the man who claims he was sent. Supernatural *signs, wonders, and deeds of power* furnish such proof, confirming that an apostle has been sent from God. As Nicodemus said to Jesus:

Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him (John 3:2).

There are dozens of stories of how Patrick, the fifth century evangelist of Ireland, performed miracles. Are those stories true? In contrast, Ulfilas, a fourth-century Arian missionary to the Goths (modern-day Germany), has no recorded miracles. Could the Roman historians have embellished history to make Patrick and the missionaries who preached their Trinitarian doctrine look superior to those who did not? It's likely.

Even in our day people credit the false preachers of the Prosperity Gospel—like Benny Hinn or Peter Popoff—with miracles. But none of the supposed miracles of these men have been substantiated by objective observers. On the contrary, they've been found to be falsified. Meanwhile, sincere preachers of the truth go about their labors, performing the supernatural works of the Holy Spirit while sharing the unadulterated Gospel, and get no press.

Biblical miracles were certainly real miracles. God testified to them through the Scriptures. But all other miracles—from Patrick's day to modern times—need to be verified. If we can verify a miracle, we must pay close attention to the message of the person performing the miracle. Since the source of true miracles is always God, we can conclude that the source of the message is also God. Fraudulent miracles will be common in the Last Days, so anyone who wants to be ready for the End Times has to approach miracles with a discerning eye.

... [the Antichrist is] the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and false signs and wonders... (2 Thessalonians 2:9; NASB)

He [the False Prophet] performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of the sky to the Earth in the presence of people. And he deceives those who live on the Earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the Beast (Revelation 13:13-14; NASB).

Jesus Himself warned us:

... false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect (Matthew 24:24).

### **The Gift of Healings**

When we read of *the gift of healings* in the NT, the word *healings* is in the plural for a reason. Someone in a church may be able to heal people from a particular virus while another brother may be able to heal people of cancer. Still another might specialize in healing headaches, or stomachaches, diabetes, or glaucoma. Those are all specific *healings* (plural)—it's very uncommon to find a gift of healing in a general sense.

The reason why a healing gift works this way is because certain demons produce certain illnesses and maladies. Particular demons are defeated by particular anointings of the Spirit in the same way you would defeat an ancient Babylonian warrior with a different weapon you would use against an ancient Spartan, a Medieval Gaul, a German WWI infantryman, or a modern Muslim jihadist. You would use a sword with the Babylonian, a short-sword with the Spartan, a crossbow with the Gaul, and a sharpshooter for the terrorist. So, the healing gifts are weapons, each healing gift is appropriately suited to wage spiritual warfare against disease-inciting demons.

This is not to say that it's impossible to obtain authority to heal every sickness. It is possible! Notice the word *every* in the verse below.

Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness (Matthew 10:1).

If the apostles got the anointing to heal every disease and sickness prior to their baptism in the Spirit, why shouldn't we be able to get the same anointing now, having obtained the baptism of the Spirit?

### **The Gift of Discerning of Spirits**

The gift of discernment is necessary for anyone who is developing a ministry of deliverance. To cast out demons, one first needs to discern the type of demons they are dealing with. You have to

understand the nature of the underlying evil in a person's life before you can free that person. So, you must discern the spirit within a person. Only then will you be able to expel the impure spirit.

Notice how our Lord performed an interview to discern the kind of spirit within a young man before he freed him. Through the interview, Jesus discovered that a *deaf and mute spirit* was in the young man. The fact that Jesus' interview preceded the exorcism proves the importance of discerning spirits. Since Jesus made discernment a priority in his ministry of deliverance, anyone else with that ministry does well to use the same wisdom.

A man in the crowd answered, 'Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid...'

Jesus asked the boy's father, 'How long has he been like this?'

'From childhood,' he answered. 'It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him.'

... [Jesus] rebuked the impure spirit. 'You deaf and mute spirit,' he said, 'I command you, come out of him and never enter him again' (Mark 9:17-25).

## **Testing Preachers**

Often, an invited preacher speaks to a church. The gift of discernment of spirits is very useful in those cases too. With it, a congregation can determine what kind of person has come to preach to them.

There are many charlatans and deceivers, so when an unknown preacher comes to your church, someone should test them. It's not enough for members of the church to listen closely to what the preacher says to detect lies. Someone needs to be equipped with the gift of discernment of spirits to tell whether a preacher has the spirit of the Antichrist or the Spirit of God.

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the World. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the

flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist... (1 John 4:1-4)

As you can see from the passage, someone who exercises the gift of discernment *tests spirits*. As the Last Days draw near and false prophets increase, this gift will become more and more important. Only churches blessed with the gift of discernment will be prepared to face the spirit of the Antichrist.

### **The Gift of Tongues**

You have the gift of tongues if you can speak in the language of angels (1 Corinthians 13:1)—a language that should only be used in personal prayer, and not in public.

... if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding (1 Corinthians 14:14-15).

You also have this gift if you can supernaturally speak in one of the thousands of *tongues of men*. Worldwide, the most commonly spoken tongues (as of 2022) are: Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, English, Hindi, and Arabic (in that order). Some of the less-known world languages include: Igbo, Uzbek, Pashto, Fula, and Swahili.

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal (1 Corinthians 13:1).

It is to note that although the apostles spoke in foreign languages on the day of Pentecost, that doesn't mean that the language *tongues of angels* aren't real. They are real, and are spoken in Heaven.

Just because the apostles spoke in the Parthian, Mede, Elamite (a southern Iranian language), Mesopotamian, and Cappadocian languages, doesn't mean that they didn't have a separate ability to pray to God in angelic tongues. On the day of Pentecost, the apostles spoke the languages of Pontus, Asia (modern-day Turkey), Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Cyrene (modern-day Libya), Latin, Cretan, and Arabic—fourteen languages in all, not counting the Hebrew and Aramaic they already spoke from childhood. So there were twelve men (mostly fishermen) speaking 16 different languages on Pentecost—that sounds like a gift of the Holy Spirit!

All of them [the apostles] were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under Heaven... a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken... ‘How is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ...we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!’ (Acts 2:4-8, 11)

Take special note: The languages spoken with the gift of tongues are spoken *with one’s spirit* as opposed to with one’s *understanding*.

So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding (1 Corinthians 14:15).

Not that the tongues we use with our understanding are useless. On the contrary, learning *the tongues of men* undoes the limitation God established at Babel! Since this gift communicates the Gospel to unbelievers, the Holy Spirit gives it to cross-cultural evangelists and missionaries—that is, church-starters (known in the Bible as *apostles*).

## **The Gift of Giving**

Every Christian should give. However, some believers have a special insight that shows them what, when, and how much to give. For example, they know that they should give a laptop to a fledgling student with a calling to Internet evangelism. Those who know to whom to give their resources have the gift of giving. Often, they give precisely the amount of money necessary for someone to meet a need.

Many members of the original Jerusalem church had this gift. Barnabas was one of them. He sold a field and gave the proceeds to needy Christians, alleviating much suffering and hunger in the Church community.

... God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means *son of encouragement*), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:33-37).

### **The Gift of Showing Mercy**

The gift of showing mercy is evident in a person who is good at visiting the lonely, helping the needy, assisting prisoners, the sick, the elderly, or orphans. All such people need mercy. Tabitha had this gift, along with a strong anointing for giving.

In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha... she was always doing good and helping the poor... she became sick and died... All the widows stood around him [Peter], crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them (Acts 9:36-39).

How special it is to have someone in the Church who's not just sensitive and sympathetic, but wise in dealing with the plight of the poor! As Jesus said, we will always have the poor among us. Because of that, this ministry is endless.

The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want... (Mark 14:7)

There will always be Christians who are hungry, thirsty, without sufficient clothes, sick, or in prison because we are the most despised people on Earth. Paul said that he and the apostles were considered *the scum of the Earth*. That is, when you help people who have been rejected, among them you'll find those who are most beloved of Christ.

We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment (1 Corinthians 4:13).

Among the poor, you'll find Jesus, who was also rejected by society.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with

pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem (Isaiah 53:2b-3).

Why do we mention the unfortunate rejection Jesus received? Because he lives today within those who are rejected. Yes, those who bear a cross are the people who have his Spirit! Our world is just as Antichrist as it was at the time of Jesus, so people who “get the short end of the stick” are often the Christians. If you minister to them, you are not seeking a reward in this life, you are not seeking to get more tithes for your church, you are not seeking to need strength—and we can get strength through people who have an anointing of mercy, you are not seeking to grow a megachurch. You are serving the Kingdom, in which you will receive a reward. That’s the inspiration behind the gift of mercy.

Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the Creation of the World. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me... Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me... (Matthew 25:34-36, 40).

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their affliction to keep oneself unstained by the World (James 1:27; LEB).

... seek his Kingdom and these things will be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father is well pleased to give you the Kingdom. Sell your possessions and give charitable gifts. Make for yourselves money bags that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in Heaven (Luke 12:31-33; LEB).

A strategy for money management: Invest in eternal relationships. Use your money to win friends for eternity. People with the gift of giving are going to be very popular after Jesus has returned to Earth. Why? Because, as Jesus says: They have used ‘worldly wealth to gain friends’ for themselves, so that when the money is gone, they ‘will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.’

... when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the Resurrection of the Righteous (Luke 14:13-14).

There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’

The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg—I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’

So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’

‘Nine hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied.

The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.’

Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’

‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied.

He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’

The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly...

I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings (Luke 16:1-9).

### **The Haves and the Have-Nots**

You either have a gift or you don’t have a gift. You’ll know it if you have one because gifts are supernatural. You will realize you have a superpower in the same way the comic book superhero



Peter Parker came to realize that he had spider powers in the Marvel comic series Spiderman. You just notice it because it's so remarkable. It's not human.

No amount of human talent can generate a gift. Neither Mozart, the Beatles, DaVinci, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, or Cervantes have a fraction of the grace of someone with an authentic Holy Spirit-given gift. No amount of study, training, or money could obtain a spiritual gift. Yet God wants to give it to you free of charge and without specialized academic training.

If you don't have a spiritual gift, you simply haven't been baptized in the Spirit yet. And, why have you not been baptized in the Spirit yet? It's simple: You must be missing one or more of the four experiences necessary for the baptism of the Spirit. You either lack repentance, saving faith, baptism in water, or the laying on of hands.

Don't be offended, but it's our duty to tell you that you haven't yet become a member of the Church. If you haven't been baptized in the Spirit, you're not part of the Body of Christ. You're not a part of his Body even if you're on a church roster, a list of tithers, a list of ushers, or a steering committee. You could even be a senior pastor of the biggest congregation on the planet, with 70 different certificates lining your office walls from your baptismal certificate to your PhD in Biblical studies—but none of those will join you to the Body of Christ. You must be baptized in the Spirit, and that cannot be purchased. It cannot be written on paper. It must be engraved on your heart.

Even if you're the World's most popular radio Bible teacher and have millions of followers, as Jesus told 'Israel's teacher' Nicodemus, you must be born again! Being a teacher in the Church of God does not guarantee that you have experienced the new birth. The only thing that guarantees it is that God has dealt with your soul properly.

[Jesus said to him] 'You must be born again. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.'

'How can this be?' Nicodemus asked.

‘You are Israel’s teacher,’ said Jesus, ‘and do you not understand these things?’ (John 3:7-11)

As you can see from Jesus’ wind illustration, being a born of the Spirit does not depend on human choice, but on God’s choice. Yes, a person must want new life, and they have to do whatever it takes to get it—repent, believe, be baptized, and seek the laying on of hands—but only God decides whether he’ll send his Spirit or not. The Spirit proceeds from God.

Your job is to repent of your sins, believe with all your heart, get baptized in water, and seek someone anointed by the Holy Spirit to lay their hands on you. If you can’t find such a person, then you wait. You wait just like the apostles did. Your hope in God will give you the patience to wait for the Spirit—and you’ll know it when he comes because you will never be the same. You will have supernatural power like never before. Jesus will have given you the *Promise* of his Father—the *Gift* of the Holy Spirit—and power from On High!

Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from On High (Luke 24:49; NKJV).

... wait for the Gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you (Acts 1:4-5, 8).

### **Personal Testimony**

When I was 15 years old, my religious education teachers told me that I was about to receive the Holy Spirit. After five years of weekly classes called Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD), I was prepared for the Roman Catholic sacrament of confirmation. Our teachers assured us that during confirmation, each of us would receive the Holy Spirit.

I expected something to happen. Each of us donning bright red robes with immense golden-hemmed white flames on the back, we marched to the front of the sanctuary to the altar. I found myself standing in front of Bishop Howard Hubbard, the head of my diocese. He gave me a light tap on the cheek as he uttered some unintelligible words while managing a half-grin, but nothing changed.

I was disappointed to find that my confirmation had no real impact on my life, but I'm not disappointed anymore. I did indeed receive the Holy Spirit 11 years later! Getting the Holy Spirit was well worth the wait. I got him on a day nobody designated for a baptism in the Holy Spirit—the day of my ordination as an Evangelical pastor.

Catholics designate confirmation as the day when a believer should receive the Holy Spirit. The Bible establishes that it should be at baptism, but I got the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands at my ordination ceremony. In other words, I got the new birth in God's timing, not in the timing of men. I even expressed to the pastor in charge of my ordination ceremony (John Mulligan) that I was ready to receive a special anointing of the Holy Spirit, but he told me that the men ordaining me didn't believe in transmitting of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. Nonetheless, they couldn't stop the Spirit. God overrode them!

There was one man I invited to my ordination, a servant of God from a charismatic church near the seminary. His name was Bill Adams. He was the only man in the seminary who practiced the gifts of the Holy Spirit and had a reputation for participating in long fasts—his life was a stark difference from the Baptist seminary professors who were mostly obese, some who boasted of habits such as drinking two 2-liter bottles of Coke daily.

It's indisputable that through Bill's laying on of hands, I received the Holy Spirit. God gave a sign to accompany that event: He sent a ray of light through a stained glass window (with a depiction of John the Baptist baptizing Jesus) on an overcast day. Amazingly, a colorful beam fell right on me as the men were praying. There were dozens of witnesses to this event, including many relatives, my parents, and an old friend from middle school, Joe Girard.

Since my baptism in the Holy Spirit, I have participated in miracles, wonders, healings, and demonic deliverances. I have dreamed dreams, received visions, and have seen signs. I have received revelations and interpretations. I have given Holy Spirit-inspired teachings and prophecies. I've seen sinners broken and brought to repentance under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and have seen believers encouraged by the Spirit's ministration. To this day, I have at least three gifts: teaching, prophecy, and healing (of headaches and hiccups). I've also manifested anointings in angelic tongues, the tongues of men, pastoring, signs, and dreams. The

most remarkable dream was one which warned me of a tragic landslide that took place in the neighborhood La Gabriela on December 5, 2010 where 80 people died.

I believe in all the miracles of the Bible: that Elijah called down fire from Heaven, that Joshua caused the sun to stand still in the sky, that Moses opened the Red Sea, that Peter walked on water, that the apostles resurrected the Dead, and that Jesus multiplied loaves and fish.

I also believe that more miracles are to come, especially through the mighty hand of God's Two Witnesses who, before the Return of Christ, will stop the rain from falling on certain countries, and who will shoot fire from their mouths, killing their enemies.

If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies...

They have power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want (Revelation 11:5-6).

What experiences have you had with the Spirit? Does he live within you today? If he does, then you should be able to provide at least a few concrete examples of what he has done. For example, you should be able to describe your gifts and give examples of how you've used them to minister to others, with witnesses. "I laid my hands on John Smith in July 2022 and God healed him of coronavirus. Betty and Dave were there," for example. More importantly, you should be willing to use your gifts more and more.

### **The Most Important Question**

Paul was wise in dealing with other believers. We need his wisdom. For example, what do you like to say to someone you just met who professes faith? Paul went straight to the point. He didn't waste any time. His first question for new friends in the faith was:

Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? (Acts 19:2)

In the same vein, this book is not only about what you *think* of the Spirit. Our goal is not intellectual, but spiritual. You need a reckoning with God. Like Paul, we aim for you to come to grips with whether you *have* the Spirit or not. Unfortunately, it's very probable you don't.

Why is it likely that you don't have the Spirit? It's because the Church right now is filled with leaders who are *devoid of the Spirit* (Jude 1:19). These leaders cannot give what they do not have.

These are the ones who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, like shepherds caring only for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, churning up their own shameful deeds like dirty foam; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of darkness has been reserved forever... These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage... 'In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.' These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit (Jude 1:12-13, 16, 18b-19; NASB).

In spite of the current apostasy of the Church, don't let evil leaders push you to despair. God is still anointing his people. He is still giving the Holy Spirit to his people.

### **The Plan God had from the Beginning**

A refresher in Bible history is in order. In the Beginning, God created human beings in his image and likeness. That means that when Adam was created, he was like God. That is, Adam was a child of God. In Luke 3:38 he is called a *son of God*.

Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:26-27).

... in the image of God has God made mankind (Genesis 9:6).

Adam had many of God's characteristics: intelligence, authority, and freedom to love. Eve had those same qualities. But what made the First Couple most like God was the fact that God's Spirit was within them. That is, they were spiritual beings just like God, who *is spirit* (John

4:24). And it is to note that Adam got the Holy Spirit the instant God breathed into Adam's nostrils.

... the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the Breath of Life, and the man became a living being (Genesis 2:7).

If you're not convinced that *the Breath of Life* in Genesis 2 was the Spirit of God, consider that the effect of that *Breath* was life—then, and ask yourself “What is the source of human life?” If the *Breath of Life* was simply nitrogen, oxygen, water vapor, and carbon dioxide (the four main chemical compounds found in human breath), then you think that the source of human life is chemical. However, this was God's Breath. The Breath was more than just the source of human life. It came from God, so it had to have been the Holy Spirit.

Now, *breath* and *spirit* are the same word in Hebrew. The Hebrew word *ruach* can mean either. That is, the verse can say either that *God breathed the Spirit of Life* into Adam's nostrils or it can say that *God breathed the Breath of Life* into Adam's nostrils. Either translation works.

Consider the context: This is not a chemistry lesson. God breathed into Adam's nostrils and Adam became a *living being*. Nitrogen and oxygen do not get the glory in this Bible verse, and they never do in the Bible. The message here is that God is the Giver of Life. The message is that Adam's source of life is the Spirit from God. The rest of the Bible affirms the same thing: That our life comes from God through his Spirit.

[God will]... give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you (Romans 8:11; NASB).

The Bible demonstrates over and over again that God resurrects people. For example, God brought an army of dead bones back to life. If you examine the Valley of the Dry Bones passage, you'll notice that the central statement (Ezekiel 37:14)—which summarizes the entire passage—states that God resurrects the Dead through his Spirit!

I will put my Spirit in you and you will live (Ezekiel 37:14).

Returning to the Creation story, we can be certain that the so-called *Breath* God breathed into Adam was the Holy Spirit because, there's no *other* spirit God assigns the task of giving life to

humans. There's only *One Spirit* whom God commands to create and then resurrect us—the Holy Spirit. And that is why the Holy Spirit is certainly the spirit the Scriptures refer to when they speak of the *One Spirit*.

... by One Spirit we were all baptized into One Body... and all were made to drink One Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13; LEB).

There is one body, and One Spirit, just as you were called to one hope... (Ephesians 4:4)

But, you ask, "Precisely where in Adam's body did God put his Spirit?" That's a fair question. What is the exact location in our bodies where God places his Spirit? The answer: He does not put his Spirit within any particular organ (like our liver or lungs). Instead, he puts his Spirit within our own spirit.

If you need a physical identifier—that is, if you must know where our spirit is located in the body—it's located in our blood. The Bible repeats at least six times: *The life is in the blood* (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:11, 14; Deuteronomy 12:23; 1 Samuel 14:31-34; Acts 15:19-20)!

God created the first man, Adam. When he did so, God simultaneously gave Adam Adam's own spirit along with God's Spirit—the Creator of Adam's Spirit. To understand this very fundamental concept, we must first recognize that the Holy Spirit creates our spirit. This verse confirms it:

The Spirit of God has made me; the Breath of the Almighty gives me life (Job 33:4).

Secondly, we must recognize that when Adam sinned, the Holy Spirit departed from him—that's the death God said that Adam and Eve would experience if they ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. So, Adam died in the sense that the Supplier of eternal life, the Spirit of God, ceased to live within Adam. That was tragic, and it was death, just as God said it would be. However, Adam retained his own spirit. That is, he remained a spiritual being. He even remained an eternal being—but not an eternal being capable of being with God!

God continues to create human beings to this day, using a magnificent natural human process called reproduction. He creates us to be with him. Each human being God creates through

reproduction becomes alive when the Holy Spirit creates a personal spirit within us—and the Spirit stays with our spirit for a period of time after that creative act.

So, the Holy Spirit is our source of life. He was the source of life for the first man, and he has been the source of life for every human being since the first man.

The only real difference between Adam and us is that Adam got his personal spirit when God breathed into Adam's nostrils, but we get our spirit the moment blood flows through our body—that is, the moment we are conceived.

But there is a spirit in man, and the Spirit of the Almighty gives him understanding (Job 32:8; NKJV).

The verse above, words of Job, prove that every person has their own spirit. That spirit lives within each of us. It's our own spirit.

... who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? (1 Corinthians 2:11)

Your spirit is the deepest dimension of your being—it's a deeper part of you than your soul. It lives within your body. Your spirit is the essence of your personality. Your soul's emotions and your mind's thoughts of will fluctuate. Your body will age, change, and die; but your spirit will remain forever. Over and above your soul and body, your spirit is the true you—it is your true identity!

When you die, your spirit descends to Hades while whatever is left of your body (an embalmed body, a mummy, ashes, bones, or decomposed remains) awaits the Resurrection of the Dead. God resurrects the bodies of the righteous and the unrighteous, but do you know how, exactly? By joining our spirits to our bodies forever. Doing that, God restores our bodies to perfect strength and health—making them just as eternal as our spirits.

The Holy Spirit will do something special at the Resurrection of the Righteous. On that great day the Holy Spirit grants believers something more than a resurrection—he gives us the divine nature. This is exciting! We hope that you're looking forward to it, that is, that it is your hope.



Now, God resurrects unbelievers to be eternal like us—however, they do not get the understanding, power, and authority we get. Remember: We get more than our eternal spirits back. We get the divine nature. Unbelievers will eternally remain in the human nature. They will never die, but with the pain and agony they'll have to undergo since they did not accept Jesus' death on the Cross for them—they'll wish they could.

## **The Greatest Privilege**

Since Pentecost, the Spirit has dwelled inside believers—a privilege mankind did not experience for 4,000 years—from Adam to the apostles. Fifty days after Jesus was crucified, on the Jewish festival Pentecost, the Spirit came to dwell within human beings for the first time. Why didn't the Spirit do this earlier? Simply because a person must be in *Christ* if the Spirit will dwell in *them*. Exclusively those who have been baptized into Christ are capable of receiving the Spirit.

As anointed as they were, not even the Twelve Apostles had the Spirit living inside them prior to Pentecost. Before that day, the day our Lord Jesus sent the Spirit from Heaven, the Spirit was not willing to dwell within Jesus' disciples. But why not? There was one basic reason: The Apostles were too sinful. Do you remember all their bickering about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom? Do you remember their unbelief? Do you remember all the rebukes Jesus gave them?

An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him... 'It is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest' (Luke 9:46-48).

Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen (Mark 16:14).

Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, 'You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? ...How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? (Matthew 16:8-11)

Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!' He replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm (Matthew 8:24-26).

... a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. ‘Lord, have mercy on my son...I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.’

‘You unbelieving and perverse generation,’ Jesus replied, ‘how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?’ Bring the boy here to me’...the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, ‘Why couldn’t we drive it out?’ He replied, ‘Because you have so little faith’ (Matthew 17:14-17; 19-20).

Although the Spirit would *live with* patriarchs, judges, kings, prophets, and even the Twelve Apostles during special periods of anointing, the Spirit never lived *inside* any of them until Pentecost. The special day came and the Spirit began his personal ministry of living *within* believers—but it didn’t happen even one day prior to Pentecost!

... [Jesus said to his apostles] ‘You know him [the Spirit of Truth], for he lives with you and will be in you’ (John 14:17).

Notice the words *the Spirit of Truth... will be in you*. The future tense is indicated with the words *will be*. Christ spoke of the future Pentecost, and prepared his disciples for it.

And behold, I am sending the Promise of My Father upon you (Luke 24:49; NASB).

And being assembled together with them [the apostles], he [Jesus] commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ he said, ‘you have heard from me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’ (Acts 1:4-5; NKJV).

But after that day passed, the apostles spoke about the Holy Spirit in the present. The reason is simply because the Holy Spirit came at the Pentecost that followed Christ’s resurrection, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit became available to all. It is presently available, so we speak of it as a present reality.

And in him [Christ] you too are being built together to become a dwelling [a house] in which God lives by his Spirit (Ephesians 2:22).

Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us (2 Timothy 1:14).

This is the most transformative event in human history: The Holy Spirit has come to live within human beings! It brought such a transformation that it changed the period of history. We currently live in the period of history called *the Age of the Gentiles* (Luke 21:24; Romans 11:25). The Old Covenant has become outdated and the Jews are no longer God's only chosen people. Now, the Gentiles are also welcome to enter into covenant with God, and to receive all of his forgiveness and even his Spirit! *The Age of the Gentiles* began the moment the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost.

During the approximately four thousand years prior to this *Age of the Gentiles*, many Jews and a handful of Gentiles eagerly sought the coming of the Spirit, referring to him as *the Promise* (Acts 2:38-39) of God. Why did they use the term *the Promise*? Well, they expected to receive the Holy Spirit, knowing that God had promised him through the prophets. The prophets Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Joel had particularly clear prophecies about God's promise to send the Holy Spirit.

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a New Spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD (Ezekiel 37:14).

'The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will make a New Covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my Covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the Lord.

'This is the Covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,' declares the Lord. 'I will put my Law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and

they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the Lord. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more (Jeremiah 31:31-34; cf. w/ 1 John 2:27).

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days (Joel 2:28-29).

Peter was able to explain this last prophecy very clearly to the men and women who witnessed the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost:

... Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: 'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say... this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people... Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy"' (Acts 2:14-18).

The expression *the Promise* was used by Jesus and the apostles to refer to the Spirit's arrival at Pentecost.

Behold, I send the Promise of my Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from On High (Luke 24:49; NKJV).

He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' he said, 'you have heard from me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now' (Acts 1:4-5; NKJV).

Exalted to the right hand of God, he [Jesus] has received from the Father the Promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear... Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off... (Acts 2:33, 38-39)

Today, the *Promise* is within reach of everyone who will repent and be baptized. As it says in the last passage: “Repent and be baptized... and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Promise...” After Pentecost, the Church had been born, and the apostles wrote of the Holy Spirit as someone who was already with us. The Promise of his coming had been fulfilled!

... we know that he [God] lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us (1 John 3:24).

He [God] has given us of his Spirit (1 John 4:13).

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law... in order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that we might receive the Promise of the Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:13-14; LEB)

... having also believed [in the Gospel], you were sealed in him [Jesus] with the Holy Spirit of the Promise (Ephesians 1:13; NASB).

### **You Must Be Righteous**

You need righteousness in order to please God. That is, you must *do what is right* (that is, be *right-eous*) to avoid God’s judgment. We know that there will be a Judgment Day for the just and for the unjust. However, not everything we do is for the Judgment Day. We strive to be righteous now because if we don’t, the Spirit will not dwell within us.

Read the following verse carefully, and then reread it. It starts with the concept of Christ in you, which means having the Holy Spirit. It is a passage about what happens when you have the Holy Spirit living within you.

But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness (Romans 8:10; NIV alternate translation).

We invite you to focus in on the word *because*. That word indicates *the reason* that something happens. In this case it tells us how we can have a spirit which is alive. Do you want your spirit to be alive or dead? Do you want to have power or weakness? Energy or fatigue? Force or powerlessness?

Here is the secret to getting the Spirit's power: Do what is right. Read about the lives of Samson and King Saul and you'll see that their stories teach this principle. Although common sense should suffice to understand that you must do what is right, this Bible verse deserves repetition: *Your spirit is alive because of righteousness.*

You'll be hard pressed to find an Evangelical church which will dare quote this passage, even though it's a Bible verse found in one of the most oft-quoted chapters of the famous Book of Romans. In more than three decades I've never once heard an Evangelical teacher quote this passage. Not once. Rather, instead of dealing with this verse from God's Word, pastors will go on and on about how faith alone gets people saved.

Did you notice that they're missing the point? It's not about fire insurance. It's not about how to avoid Hell. The Bible's focus is how to receive the Holy Spirit. But most Evangelical pastors don't even address the issue—the central issue of how to determine if someone is saved from sin. Do we really want to confirm whether people have been born again or not? Do we want to know whether they are in the New Covenant or not? Those two things should be all that matters when a repentant sinner comes to Christ for salvation.

The trend among misguided pastors is to focus on the man-made evangelism of “receiving Jesus in your heart.” Because of this trend (popularized by Billy Graham in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century), they set aside Biblical evangelism—that is, the evangelism of Jesus and the apostles. And what did Jesus and the apostles do? They made sure that people received the Holy Spirit. They insisted that seekers be born of the Spirit, and they wouldn't settle for anything less.

... no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit (John 3:5-9).

Paul... arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ (Acts 19:1-2)

Today's pastors sugarcoat the Gospel with their cliché "receiving Jesus"—an expression which is so vague that it is often interpreted to mean that someone simply accepts what Jesus taught. Now, that's a good thing (to believe what Jesus taught) and it's also good to believe that he died for me. It's good to say to God "I'm a sinner, and I need Jesus' death on the Cross to count as the payment of my sins." Yes, all those things are good. However, a true evangelist will not avoid the real work of assuring salvation for someone by exhorting them to be baptized in water and the Spirit. In fact, they will not shy away from the laying on of hands so as to transmit the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the duty of everyone who will obey Jesus' Great Commission:

He said to them, "Go into all the World and preach the Gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well (Mark 16:15-18).

In spite of the feeble evangelism of today, Jesus still insists that everyone be born of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5), and Paul insists that anyone who gets the Spirit gets him *because of righteousness* (Romans 8:10). That is, doing good ushers the Spirit into your life. Everyone must stop sinning, but ceasing to sin is not enough. We must show the fruit of repentance by doing what is right.

... through Christ Jesus the Law of the Spirit Who Gives Life has set you free from the law of sin and death... [God] condemned sin in the [Jesus'] flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit...

if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, your spirit is alive because of righteousness (Romans 8:2,3-4, 10).

The spiritual formula contained in this passage can be summarized in two sentences:

Because of sin, your body will die.

Because of righteousness, your spirit will live.

Remember that to *do what is right* (to act in righteousness) is exactly what the Lord commanded Cain:

If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it (Genesis 4:6-7).

Few people take note of this, but Paul's message anywhere he preached had three parts: repentance from sin, turning to God, and performing good deeds. For the apostles, good deeds were the fruit of true conversion!

... to those in Damascus first, and in Jerusalem and all the region of Judea and to the Gentiles, I proclaimed that they should repent and turn to God, doing deeds worthy of repentance (Acts 26:20; LEB).

Let's get more specific. Some Biblical examples of what such *works worthy of repentance* are include: Sharing extra clothing with those who have none, sharing extra food with the hungry, working fairly without selfishly seeking financial gain, working honestly without abusing power, and showing gratitude to God for the money we earn.

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, '... every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.'

'What should we do then?' the crowd asked. John answered, 'Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.'

Even tax collectors came to be baptized. 'Teacher,' they asked, 'what should we do?' 'Don't collect any more than you are required to,' he told them.

Then some soldiers asked him, 'And what should we do?' He replied, 'Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay' (Luke 3:7-14).

John's exhortation to righteousness—although it doesn't sound much like the preaching of today—does sound a lot like Jesus' preaching. In the tradition of the prophets and John the Baptist, Jesus also exhorted his followers to practice good deeds:



... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven (Matthew 5:16).

Deeds of righteousness were very important for our Lord. If you're not convinced, then consider the way he concluded his most famous lesson of all time, the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus wrapped up his message stating that the one who *acts* upon his words has a foundation, but anyone who *does not do* what Jesus says will be destroyed!

... everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand... (Matthew 7:24-26)

So, the rock in the famous passage above, the concluding words to Jesus' most famous sermon, represents good deeds. Most pastors interpret Jesus as the rock of the passage, but that's clearly not what Jesus said. He said that building our house on the rock means *putting his words into practice*. That is, the rock is obedience to Christ—it's doing what he says!

If you're going to get anywhere in life, you will need to take action and do what Christ commanded. Leave no room for discouragement. Negativism was the mark of Cain's pathetic life. If you really want to live well, then you must believe God will give you the strength and wisdom to do so. You must believe in a generous and supportive God!

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do (James 1:5-8).

God will give you much more than wisdom. If you ask, he'll give you the Holy Spirit. Asking for the Holy Spirit brings us back to our main point: righteousness. God only gives the Spirit to those who obey him. So that's what you need to do if you will get the Spirit—obey God.

... the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him (Acts 5:32).

You won't easily find a church where this is taught, so grab tightly to the teaching. Examine it fully, and persevere in it if it's true. If you don't believe it, then you must prove how it is a lie.

Didn't the Spirit turn Adam into a living being? Didn't the Holy Spirit breathe life into the dry bones of Ezekiel 37? Didn't the Spirit of God resurrect Jesus? Yes, because the Spirit gives life. That's a teaching of Christ:

[Jesus said] 'The Spirit gives life...' (John 6:63)

However, it's also a teaching of Christ that to obtain this life, given by the Spirit, you have to persist in doing good. You have to obey God's Law. You have to be righteous!

God 'will repay each person [that includes Christians] according to what they have done.' To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life...

There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil... but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good...

It is not those who hear the Law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the Law who will be declared righteous (Romans 2:6-10, 13).

### **Righteousness and the Spirit**

It's our duty as Christians to ask ourselves whether the Spirit really lives in us or not. If he does, then make no mistake about it, he gives life *because of righteousness*. That is, the Spirit enlivens, revives, and quickens our spirit because we act well. That's what being *righteous* is—acting well. Let's repeat Romans 8 for the sake of review:

... you are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him.

If Christ is in you [that is, if you have the Holy Spirit], though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness (Romans 8:9-10; NASB).

This passage is no favorite for Christians influenced by Martin Luther: The majority of Protestants and Evangelicals, especially Baptists. It rubs against the grain of salvation “by faith alone”—one of their most cherished doctrines. This passage not only demands good works, it tells us that we are born spiritually through good works, making it doubly offensive to the “faith alone” group.

But let’s say that the promoters of “faith alone” find a way to circumvent Romans 8. Let’s say that they discover a way to cancel it out and explain it away. If they do, then we’ll take them to Romans 1 which explains why the same righteousness Paul speaks of in Romans 8 is so important:

... in the Gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’ (Romans 1:17).

What is Paul reinforcing in this famous passage? That Christians live by faith. Specifically, we live by a faith which produces righteousness. Yes, there is a righteousness which comes from God, and we obtain that righteousness through faith. This has nothing to do with *self*-righteousness. This is a righteousness which comes from God. It’s God’s righteousness alive in us through faith in Christ Jesus.

This God-sourced righteousness is a capacity to do good through Christ. That is, anyone who follows Jesus *can* love, they *can* forgive, and they *can* be patient. Anyone who follows Jesus *can* do what is right. We have the ability because the Holy Spirit gives us the power to live in truth and justice—that is, if we believe in Jesus. And “believing in Jesus” means following in his footsteps—by faith.

... [to] be found in him [Christ], not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law, but that [righteousness] which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith (Philippians 3:9).

## Two Conditions

Every Christian wants spiritual life. However, not all Christians do what they need to do to obtain spiritual life. We have to fulfill certain conditions to get it. Let's not overlook the conditions God has established for us to be *in the spirit*.

Are you ready to get answers in the Bible? Please read the two verses below, and read them slowly. Read them as many times as you need until you're able to see the conditions God has established for us to be *in the spirit*. Hint #1: Those conditions are marked by the words *if* (3x) and *because* (1x). Hint #2: Being *in the spirit* means being a spiritual person, as opposed to being a carnal person. That is, being *in the spirit* is the opposite of being *in the flesh*.

... you are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.

But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him.

If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness (Romans 8:9-10; NASB).

Do you want to have a spirit that's alive? You won't be interested in reviving your spirit in the least unless you come to terms with the deadness of your spirit. You need to come to terms with the fact that your spirit died.

When did your spirit die? Why did your spirit die? It died when you first sinned in the manner which Adam and Eve sinned—that is, when you first willingly acted against a command of God you fully understood. The Bible speaks of a group of people who did *not* sin in this way:

... death reigned from Adam until Moses even over those who did not sin in the likeness of the transgression of Adam (Romans 5:14; LEB).

So, here Paul is talking about children and the mentally impaired. If there are human beings who did not sin *in the likeness* of the sin of Adam (children and the mentally impaired), then there are those who did sin *in the likeness* of Adam's sin. That latter group consists of people like you and me who have sinned of our own free will, acting against what we have understood—one or various commandments of God.

Everyone who sins breaks the Law; in fact, sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4).

Let's consider Adam and Eve's law-breaking. They heard God's command not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but they ate of it anyways. They were not children, but mature adults with a fully-developed sense of responsibility. They were just as free to make their own choices as you and I are, and they chose disobedience—just like you and I once did. With that choice, their spirits died.

... God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the Garden; but you must not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die' (Genesis 2:16-17).

God told Adam and Eve that they would die, but after eating the forbidden fruit, their bodies were still alive, provoking us to ask ourselves "What exactly happened in the Garden of Eden?" Either a) their staying physically alive proved that God was a liar (a God of empty threats), or b) their staying physically alive proved that sin brings about the death of the human spirit. We deduce from the Genesis story that although they remained alive physically, Adam and Eve's spirits died when they sinned against God.

We also conclude that just as Adam and Eve's spirits died when they sinned, that our spirits also die when we first sin. Our spirit is not dead when we are conceived. We are not born with Adam's guilt, but we are very prone to sinning the way he did and when we are at the age of accountability, around age 12-13, we become part of that large group of people who sin *in the likeness* of Adam's sin (Romans 5:14). Our spirit dies when we transgress the law of God, having understood his commandment.

If our dead spirit will be revived, we need the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. In other words, we need the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We need him in us in order to obtain a proper resurrection. But we need something else: We also have to practice righteousness. If the two conditions of having the Spirit and practicing righteousness are met, then God will grant us a resurrection unto eternal life. He will revive us!

Fulfilling these two conditions is extremely difficult. Most of the stories of the Bible are about people who failed to obtain life. The Bible describes spiritual death more than it describes

spiritual life because that's the stark reality of the human race. Think about Esau, Aaron, and Solomon. Each of them started in the faith, but drifted away from God.

Were the Twelve Patriarchs holy? No, they were not. On the contrary, only one among them was spiritual, Joseph—and he was sold into slavery by his brothers. They would have killed him, but chose instead to make money off of him—so only their greed stopped them from their murderous intent. Among the Twelve Patriarchs were two religious deceivers / mass murderers, a client to prostitutes, chronic liars, one who slept with his daughter-in-law, and another who slept with his father's wife! They had a terrible reputation with the neighboring Canaanites.

Then we've got Samson, a man who came dangerously close to losing the Spirit completely. David didn't do much better. Listen to the prayers of these well-known Bible characters as they attempted to redeem themselves and retain the Holy Spirit in their souls:

[Delilah] called, 'Samson, the Philistines are upon you!' He awoke from his sleep and thought, 'I'll go out as before and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the LORD had left him... Then Samson prayed to the LORD, 'Sovereign LORD, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes' (Judges 16:20, 28).

[David prayed] 'Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me' (Psalm 51:11).

Like Samson and David, we too could fall into sin. If we do, then we will lose the Spirit just as they did. As you can see from their prayers above, we have to pray that God would restore the Spirit to us after we sin.

But believers do not have to fail. God has never been unfair with anyone. God has always provided the grace and strength for us to be righteous and to continue living with the Holy Spirit indwelling us to the end. Yes, this is possible. In fact, it is required of a NT believer! We are commanded to keep a clear conscience.

Consider a success story: Simeon. We meet him in the Gospel of Luke. He was a Jewish believer who lived in the hope of the Kingdom—but he had even more than the hope. He had the Holy

Spirit. Having the Holy Spirit *on him* meant that Simeon could get revelations and be *moved by the Spirit* just like we can—that is, NT believers.

... there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him (Luke 2:25).

The Spirit caused Simeon to have a divine encounter. If that weren't enough, the Spirit also inspired Simeon to act boldly, to prophesy, and to praise God. These are all things the Spirit can do with NT believers like us. But what do we need for these things to happen? The same thing Simeon needed: righteousness and devotion. Observe (in the verse above) that the Bible introduces Simeon as a man who was *righteous and devout!*

It had been revealed to him [Simeon] by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the Temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace...' (Luke 2:26-28)

### **A Higher Level of Success**

Righteous Simeon was in good company: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Job, Melchizedek, Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac were also righteousness people. Simeon was also like post-conversion Jacob and Moses (one was once a scammer and the other was once a murderer) who became righteous after their conversions. Simeon was also like Joseph, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, Mordechai, Esther and many other OT believers—righteous men and women who had the Spirit with them to the end of their lives.

But what of Cain, Ham, Ishmael, Esau, Rebecca (who deceived her husband, taught her son to lie, dividing brothers, and invoked God's curse upon her life), Rachel (who stole an idol from her father and lied to him about it), Aaron, Balaam, and Solomon? None of these ended their lives well. They began their lives hearing the Word of God, but could not finish what they started. We're not saying that they're in Hell or in Paradise because we don't know what happened on their deathbeds. We're nobody's judge, but we can't ignore the testimony of Scriptures either. And the Scriptures testify to the backsliding of these infamous Bible characters.

For NT believers there is a much higher success rate for persevering in the faith than there is for OT believers. Eleven of the Twelve Apostles succeeded, but only one of the Twelve Patriarchs succeeded. That's 11/12 compared to 1/12! Compare the improbable failure of Judas Iscariot to the improbable success of Joseph. To whom can we attribute the high rate of success in the NT? Hint: He lives in NT believers and he never lived inside OT believers. Yes, It's the Holy Spirit! He gets the credit for spiritual success.

### **Prepping Them for Success**

Jesus revealed to his disciples that the Spirit would come to live in them. He prepared them for the coming of the Holy Spirit and for the power the Spirit was going to bring them. Note carefully what he said:

... the Spirit of Truth... lives with you and will be in you (John 14:7).

There is a big difference between having the Spirit *in* us and having the Spirit *with* us. Jesus made the distinction here. Consider how the Spirit was *with* Old Covenant believers—including the Twelve Apostles—up until Pentecost. But from Pentecost onward, the Spirit lived *in* them! Today, he lives in us. His closeness (the Spirit is no longer just *with* us, he is *in* us) is the reason behind the spiritual success of New Covenant believers.

One lesson Jesus shared with his apostles came to them as he pondered the life of the greatest man to have ever been born—John the Baptist. Jesus commented:

... among those born of women there is no one greater than John (Luke 7:28).

But what made John so great? He started his life in power, being filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. His preaching transformed hundreds of thousands of lives, drawing many people to God—but he ended his career in weakness.

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?' Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see... Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me' (Matthew 11:2-6).



In spite of Jesus' warning, John did *stumble on account* of Jesus. In the despair of his prison cell, he lost hope in Jesus as the Messiah. Knowing that he wasn't going to get out of Herod's prison alive, John sent messengers to Jesus in a last-ditch attempt to prod Jesus to start his Messianic rule. But John didn't succeed. It wasn't yet Jesus' time to rule!

From the encounter of John's disciples with Jesus, we learn that the timing of Jesus' rule would be later than John had expected. But we learn much more than that. We learn about what it means to be in the Kingdom of God. Jesus said:

... among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he (Luke 7:28).

According to Jesus, John was not in the Kingdom of God. That's not because John was depressed and in despair. It was related to something else. We can figure out what that "something else" is when we contrast John who was not *in the Kingdom* to us who have been brought *into the Kingdom*.

... joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the Kingdom of Light. For he has rescued us from the Dominion of Darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he Loves (Colossians 1:12-13).

Obviously, the Kingdom of God hasn't come to Earth yet, but because we are no longer subject to Satan, the Prince of this World (John 14:30), we are no longer governed by the World. Freed by Christ, we are citizens of the Kingdom of God! Through the New Covenant, we are registered in Heaven. We are citizens of the New Jerusalem. We have "arrived" at the City of the Living God.

... you have come to Mount Zion, to the City of the Living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the Church of the Firstborn, whose names are written in Heaven (Hebrews 12:22-23).

We serve God's Kingdom now. Even though it hasn't come to Earth yet, we are rightly called *workers for the Kingdom*.

Aristarchus... Mark... Jesus, who is called Justus... These are the only Jews among my co-workers for the Kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me (Colossians 4:10-12).

But how is this possible? What's the great difference between us and John the Baptist so that we should be greater than him? Let's remember the main idea: We have the Holy Spirit *in* us. He is not just *with* us (John 14:7) as he was *with* the apostles prior to Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is *in* us—and if the Spirit is *in* you, you have obtained victory over a spirit—here called “he who is in the World” but who in other places is called *the Prince of this World*. That is, you have overcome the spirit that spearheads Satan's World system!

... greater is he who is in you [the *Spirit* as per vv. 2 and 6] than he who is in the World (1 John 4:4; NASB).

You belong to the Coming World, the Kingdom. God *has qualified* us *to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the Kingdom of Light* (Colossians 1:12). Our qualifying is possible through the Holy Spirit. Having the Spirit in us qualifies us to be heirs of the Kingdom of God.

John the Baptist never experienced such a blessing. The least in the Kingdom is greater than he was, the greatest man to have been born of a woman until our Lord Jesus came along. Imagine the privilege we have! And it's all because we have the Holy Spirit in us.

### **He who is in the World**

This *he who is in the World* is not the Devil (as is commonly believed) nor is it the Antichrist—rather, it's the Spirit of the Antichrist. This spirit is a powerful deceiving demon and that's his name—the *Spirit of the Antichrist*. Hence, we capitalize it. To see that the passage is speaking of a demon, you need to read the entire passage carefully:

... every spirit [preacher] that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the Spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the World. You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the World (1 John 4:3-4).

This passage affirms that we have a monumental struggle against the Spirit of the Antichrist. Notice that John tells us that the Spirit of the Antichrist is already in the World—even now! He never said that of the Antichrist himself—a human being. If John were to say so, he would be affirming that we are close to the final seventh week of Daniel’s 70 Weeks prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27).

Since we must know our enemies in order to defeat them—what do you know about the Spirit of the Antichrist? As we said before, he’s not the Devil, he is an envoy of the Devil—a minion of Satan.

In 2 Thessalonians we learn that *the Lawless One* who *will be revealed* is the Antichrist. He is *the Beast* of Revelation 13, who receives his power from *the Dragon*, the Devil. The Antichrist’s coming is in accordance with the work of Satan—and that means that the Antichrist is not Satan.

... the Lawless One [Antichrist] will be revealed... whose coming is in accordance with the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with every unrighteous deception (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10).

Satan gives his power and throne and authority to the Antichrist. They are worshipped together much as God and Jesus are worshipped with their Thrones so close together. The Devil is an expert at deception, so he takes this imitation one step further: He gives his spirit to the Antichrist. This is a counterfeit of God giving his Spirit to Jesus.

The spirit the Devil gives is called *the Spirit of the Antichrist*. He is a demon, and a demon who is very tricky. This particular demon is capable of deceiving the whole World!

The Dragon [Satan] gave the Beast [the Antichrist] his power and his throne and great authority... People worshipped the Dragon because he had given authority to the Beast, and they also worshipped the Beast (Revelation 13:2, 4).

So, the Spirit of the Antichrist is the arch-enemy of the Holy Spirit. He is the Holy Spirit’s nemesis. These two will compete against each other for the souls of men in the Last Times, and they’re already competing now. The Spirit of the Antichrist is in the World and the Holy Spirit is in us (1 John 4:4). Fortunately, the Spirit—being in us—guarantees our victory.

The Holy Spirit is greater than any of the Devil's associates, including the Antichrist and the Spirit of the Antichrist—and you must remember that this Spirit of the Antichrist speaks through many “Christian” preachers John calls *spirits* or *false prophets* (see 1 John 4:1-3). We will not believe their lies, influential as these preachers may be.

Although Satan is the *Prince of this World* (John 12:31) and the *God of this World* (2 Corinthians 4:4), we will not be overcome. We don't underestimate him, but we are confident that the victory will be ours. What is our confidence? That the Holy Spirit living within us guarantees our triumph over darkness and death.

You... have overcome them [the *false prophets* or *spirits*]<sup>19</sup> because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the World (1 John 4:3-4).

Be warned: Many OT believers did not overcome the World. Moses, for example, fell into the sin of anger at the end of his ministry—the same sin he committed at the start of his ministry when he killed an Egyptian. Consequentially, God would not let Moses enter the Promised Land, sending him up Mount Nebo in plain view of the Promised Land—to take a glance at Zion, but to die unfulfilled—in hope.

But we follow Jesus—a human being just as we are. A man who obtained the maximum victory. What was Christ's victory? He overcame the World. He didn't fall into the temptations this

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<sup>19</sup> These false prophets are characterized by one false doctrine in particular: They do not 'acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh' (1 John 4:2). They deny the *Doctrine of Christ*, that is, the elementary Church teaching that Jesus came in the flesh—the human nature of sin—and not in the divine nature. As Paul put it, God sent his Son *in the likeness of sinful flesh* (Romans 8:3).

So, if you want to know whether a teacher is sent from God, you only need to give him this simple test: Does he preach the Doctrine of Christ or not? Pray for valor and boldness, then (if you can) deal with them according to the instructions found in the following verses.

This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God (1 John 4:2).

... many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist (2 John 1:7).

Whoever goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house... (2 John 1:9-10; NKJV)

World has to offer, but maintained a good clean conscience till his last day. That's why he could declare to the apostles the night before his crucifixion:

... take heart, I have overcome the World! (John 16:33)

How did Jesus overcome temptation—every kind of temptation the World has to offer? Love of God, obedience, and hope in Kingdom rewards certainly played a big part. But let's recognize that Jesus also maintained the fullness of the Spirit. The Spirit was his ally in our Lord's victory against temptation.

To overcome temptation, we need to sustain a life in the fullness of the Spirit, just like Jesus. Instead of being filled with wine, we should be filled with the Spirit. Instead of following our flesh, we should follow the Spirit. If we follow the Spirit, we are not only made strong in our spirit, but we are free from the power of the OT Law, which is weak through our flesh.

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons and daughters of God (Romans 8:14).

For the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what was impossible for the Law, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law would be fulfilled in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

For those who are living according to the flesh are intent on the things of the flesh, but those who are living according to the spirit are intent on the things of the spirit. For the mindset of the flesh is death, but the mindset of the spirit is life and peace, because the mindset of the flesh is enmity toward God, for it is not subjected to the Law of God, for it is not able to do so, and those who are in the flesh are not able to please God.

But you are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him. But if Christ is

in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the Dead lives in you, the One who raised Christ Jesus from the Dead will also make alive your mortal bodies through his Spirit who lives in you (Romans 8:2-9; LEB).

Indeed, the mark of a strong believer is that he constantly seeks more of the Holy Spirit's anointing. More anointing will lead to more power—and that's something believers should long for. It's something we should *eagerly desire*.

Now eagerly desire the greater gifts... (1 Corinthians 12:31)

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit... (1 Corinthians 14:1)

In sum, OT believers didn't have the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We do. With the baptism of the Spirit as our base point—that is, with the Spirit having begun to dwell within us—we should continue to ask the Father for more and more of the Spirit. He wants us to have more and more anointing because he wants us to live in power.

Additionally, the Spirit is the greatest the Lord Jesus can send us. Together, the Father and Jesus have decided to send us the Holy Spirit. Won't we receive him from them?

### **The Ministry of the Spirit**

God has assigned responsibility for the New Covenant to the Jesus, who now administers a ministry much more glorious than the ministry of the Law. Moses managed the ministry of the Law, and its result was condemnation. Jesus manages the ministry of the Spirit, and its result is righteousness.

... a New Covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?

If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! (2 Corinthians 3:6-9)

The ministry of the Spirit is the most glorious ministry that has ever existed. Do you have a deep appreciation for it? No other ministry has been more effective at saving souls. We are greatly privileged to live in the times that we live in. It's no wonder that the crowning moment of his ministry, after +3 years of teaching, healing, and deliverance—and even after having been crucified and resurrected—was when Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to mankind!

The ministry of Jesus far outdoes the ministry of Moses. Moses had a ministry of condemnation because the Law can only condemn, it cannot give life. We cannot respond to the Law in obedience because our flesh will not assimilate it. But our spirit can respond to the grace of the New Covenant in obedience—because our spirit is revived through the power of the Holy Spirit, giving us power over our fleshly tendencies.

### **Where God Writes**

The Old Covenant was written on dead stones by the finger of God, the New Covenant is written on living hearts by the Spirit of God. Notice the superiority of the latter! God is a God of covenants, but to write his Word on our hearts is something he never did before in any prior covenant. It's revolutionary, but that's the NT experience.

... you are a letter from Christ... written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the Living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Corinthians 3:3).

Paul uses the term *heart* in this verse to refer to the deepest part of our being, our spirit.

Someone who puts their trust in Jesus is opening their hearts as if they were opening a notebook. They are giving permission to the Spirit to engrave God's Word on their heart; that is, to leave a lasting impression on the deepest part of their being. They are opening the door to their heart and soul. The result is that the Spirit will leave an indelible mark!

When we allow the Spirit to teach us, we experience a new fresh approach to hearing God. It's not like receiving the Ten Commandments on a stone tablet. It's not like a priest receiving a scroll of Leviticus.

But now... we may serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter of the Law (Romans 7:6; LEB).

So we don't do things the old way, but the new way. For example, the OT priests would read in Leviticus about how to manage the Temple ministry, but a NT believer in Christ has actually become a temple—our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. He becomes our resident teacher after baptism. Once he begins to dwell in our hearts, we have no further need of a teacher. We get guidance directly from the Spirit.

As for you, the Anointing you received from him [Jesus] remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his Anointing teaches you about all things and as that Anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as he [the Anointing] has taught you, remain in him [Jesus] (1 John 2:27).

OT believers would read God's commandments, and agree with them intellectually, but would be incapable of fulfilling them. To this day, an Orthodox Jew will affirm God's righteous commands, but will struggle with their natural tendency to disobey. Paul, a devout Jew raised in the strictest traditions of Judaism, expressed his struggles like this:

... in my inner being I delight in God's Law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me (Romans 7:22-23).

The Old Covenant's Ten Commandments were a very good body of law—especially in their day, when Moses led the Israelites out of slavery—but they were never the best. The best was never the Code of Hammurabi or U.S. Civil Codes. The best for any human being right now is the New Covenant's *Law of the Spirit*. Under this new Law, the Spirit leads us by speaking to our heart.

I will give you a new heart and put a new Spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

... I will make a New Covenant... It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt... 'This is the Covenant I



will make with the people of Israel after that time,' declares the Lord. 'I will put my Law in their minds and write it on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-32, 34).

Under the Law of the Spirit, we learn to love our worst enemies, like Jesus did. Under the Law of the Spirit, we can interpret the OT in the light of the Gospel. That is, we are able to see the Messiah in the stories and promises of Scriptures. For example, Jesus was the Angel of the Lord, the Angel of Yahweh, in the OT. Jesus was the Passover Lamb whose blood had to be painted on the doorposts of the houses to save the firstborn sons.

This new way actually works—that is, it really frees us from our flesh. Our flesh normally gets the upper hand because the law of sin and death governs our flesh—that law is also called the sinful nature. It always draws us towards rebelliousness and disobedience. It will always cause us to rebel against God's authority and to disobey him, if left unchecked. You'll see your own sinful nature in action when you get an order and you feel the urge to do the opposite. The sinful nature is rooted in human pride and the love of pleasure.

When we receive the Holy Spirit, we get a second nature: the divine nature. That is, we keep our sinful nature—which is bound to our body as long as this life lasts—but our spirit is awakened from its deadness, and we get the divine nature too. We receive the life of God within our heart.

With this spiritual life we get power to live in self-control because the Holy Spirit transforms us from the inside out, and one of the things he produces is self-control. Living under the Law of the Spirit, Jesus really becomes our Lord. Since he sent the Spirit, and the Spirit only speaks the words of Jesus, we effectively become free from the power of sin!

... through Christ Jesus the Law of the Spirit who Gives Life [the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus] has set you free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1-2).

... whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do (1 Peter 4:1-3).

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23).

## Who to Obey?

The OT Law demanded obedience to Moses, but the NT Law demands obedience to Jesus. Moses was a humble man, but Jesus is humbler. That makes him easier to obey. Jesus invites us to commit ourselves to him, and to work with him.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Matthew 11:29).

Jesus taught a great truth: that loving God and our neighbor is the summary of all of God's previous commandments. Jesus taught that these were the two great commandments.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments [the other is to love God] hang all the Law and the prophets (Matthew 22:39-40; NRSV).

One of the teachers of the Law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is One and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God" (Mark 12:28-34).

In addition to these two great commandments, Jesus gave his disciples—which would include you and me—his commandment of loving one another. In this New Commandment, we see how precious Christian fellowship is to our Lord Jesus.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another (John 13:34).

If we love one another—that is, love other Christians—the Spirit will transform us from the inside. The OT Law could never transform OT believers from within. That’s because OT believers often fell into the temptation of focusing more on external actions than on the heart. For example, they would sacrifice a lamb and not reflect on what the lamb meant. (God meant for it to show that an innocent blood sacrifice had to be made as substitution for their sins—pointing them to faith in Christ).

The few OT believers who reflected deeply on God’s OT commands ended up trusting in a coming Messiah and obtained the forgiveness of their sin like we do, by faith. However, many of them just went through the motions and fell into the Devil’s trap of thinking that doing so was good enough. God never tricked them because he declared that someone whose words would supersede those of Moses would come. He also always held before them the examples of believers who were justified by faith long before the Law was ever given.

Yahweh your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your midst, from your countrymen, and to him you shall listen (Deuteronomy 18:15; LEB).

For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you (Acts 3:22).

And he believed in Yahweh, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6; LEB).

What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness (Romans 4:3).

The fact that Jesus has already come means we can study his behavior. His example is now manifested for all to see in the pages of the New Testament. We can walk in Jesus’ ways because God’s Word presents them to us, but more importantly, Jesus has given us his power—the power of the Holy Spirit. By doing so, Jesus has empowered us to do even greater things than he did!

Truly, truly I say to you, the one who believes in me, the works that I am doing he will do also, and he will do greater works than these because I am going to the Father (John 14:12; LEB).

So, we can do even greater supernatural works (miracles, healings, and deliverances) than Jesus. But more importantly, we can love. We can obey Jesus' Law of love. Fulfilling it sets us free! Loving produces liberty.

... the one who looks into the perfect Law of Liberty and continues to do it, not being a forgetful hearer but a doer who acts, this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1:25; LEB).

So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the Law of Liberty (James 2:12; NKJV).

Love is the law by which we'll be judged by Christ, the giver of that law. We must follow his Golden Rule in every situation, especially when it's hard. For example, we should pray for our enemies. If we respond to mistreatment with blessings and respond to evil with kindness, our mercy will earn us mercy from God. We won't be judged if we do not judge.

Do not judge, so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you (Matthew 7:1-2; NASB).

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in Heaven... (Matthew 5:43-45)

If your enemy is hungry, feed him bread, and if thirsty, let him drink water. For coals of fire you will heap upon his head, and Yahweh will reward you (Proverbs 25:21-22; repeated in Romans 12:20)

... to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you (Luke 6:27-28).

In conclusion, NT believers have a huge advantage over OT believers—we know the name of the Messiah. We know the life, teachings, and example of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. The difference

between OT believers and NT believers is not that (as many think) “the Law is bad and grace is good.” On the contrary, the Law is good (Romans 7:12) but grace is better. NT believers have something better than all who came before us: those who lived under the Law of Moses, and all those who preceded them: Adam, Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph!

... the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good... We know that the Law is spiritual (Romans 7:12, 14)

The Law has existed since the time of Moses, but God extended grace to those who preceded Moses. For example, Abraham was justified by faith long before Moses. Jesus affirmed that same grace, the grace that Abraham received, without destroying the Law. In fact, Jesus fulfilled the Law so that grace would come to the current generation.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until Heaven and Earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished (Matthew 5:17-18).

The main difference between OT and NT believers is not that we don't fulfill the Law—we do! The Bible says *we uphold the Law* (Romans 3:31). The difference between OT and NT believers is that we go *beyond* the OT Law. We follow a higher Law than the Law of Moses. We follow the Law of Liberty.

The Law of Liberty is higher than the Law of Moses. It's the law the prophets were pointing to all along. Many people call it *the Golden Rule*. Jesus commanded it in the Sermon on the Mount:

... in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 7:12).

We fulfill the law of love because it's our Lord's commandment. Anyone who follows the leading of the Holy Spirit, will instinctively fulfill the requirements of the Law. We make no effort to follow the Law of Moses—not because we don't believe that it's good, but because we know that it's *so* good that our flesh will react to it inappropriately—generating pride, self-

righteousness, and judgment towards others. We'll keep God's holidays, Temple regulations, and the sacrificial system perfectly in the Kingdom, after we've been resurrected.

In the meantime, anyone who has repented of their fleshly lifestyle, and who now lives according to the spirit is a law keeper. The person who walks in the spirit and not in the flesh fulfills the requirements of the Law. They fulfill the Law through love. That person will be justified before God!

... it is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous in the sight of God, but the doers of the Law will be declared righteous (Romans 2:13; LEB).

... what was impossible for the Law, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law would be fulfilled in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the spirit (Romans 8:3-4; LEB).

... there is only One God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the Law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the Law (Romans 3:30-31).

### **The Laying on of Hands**

Every human being has a great need to receive the Holy Spirit. The anointing of the Holy Spirit is what God most wants for our spirit. Remember this verse:

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:13)

We have our own spirit, which God wants for himself. That is, he desires our spirit. God is a jealous God and he wants all human beings he created to be his children. Our spirit fully belongs to God when his Spirit fills our spirit. James tells us:<sup>20</sup>

He [God] jealously desires the spirit which he has made to dwell in us (James 4:5; NASB).

So, how can we get the Spirit? God is certainly willing to give us his Spirit—there is no doubt about that. The only question is whether we are willing to pay the price to obtain the Spirit. If we are, then we must do more than pray. We should make sure that during prayer, an anointed brother or sister in Christ lay their hands on us.

### **The Few and the Brave**

Most professing Christians have experienced very little of the Spirit. Sadly, although a handful of Pentecostals may have received a miracle, witnessed a deliverance, or experienced a healing of the Spirit, most professing Christians have never actually received a spiritual gift. Where that's the case, it means that such professing Christians have never been born again. They've likely experienced some of Holy Spirit's anointing, but have never been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

That's a huge problem because there is no exception to the rule: Every true Christian has been born of the Holy Spirit. That is, God always confirms a person's new birth by granting them the Holy Spirit, and gives each believer at least one gift!

... by One Spirit we were all baptized into one Body (1 Corinthians 12:13).

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<sup>20</sup> The context of this verse is that God wants us "all in" for him, not for the world. He wants all of our being, especially our spirit. We are enemies of God if we make the world our friend. God gives grace to the humble. If we will but humble ourselves, God will draw close us.

... don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he [God] jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?

But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble.' Submit yourselves, then, to God... Come near to God and he will come near to you (James 4:4-8; NIV).

... each one has received a gift... (1 Peter 4:10; LEB).

Compassionately, we must test people in church communities to see whether they have ever really experienced the Holy Spirit. To do so, two questions are very appropriate.

### **1. Have you ever had a spiritual gift?**

This question will work only if we get a specific response. A vague response won't do, so encourage the interviewee to give details about the gift they claim to have. Kindly ask them to detail the timeframe in which they manifested the gift. Ask them how they used it to minister to others. They must be able to name other people who have witnessed God's power in them, and those people must be able to testify to the veracity of the supernatural power.

Finally, check to see whether your friend got the gift subsequent to water baptism. You should do this to be sure that what they experienced was not just a temporary anointing. God gives the baptism of the Spirit to those who have entered into a covenant with him through Christ. Now you understand why the fundamental listed in Hebrews 6 is specifically called *the doctrine of baptisms*—plural! Baptism in water and baptism in the Spirit go hand in hand, and the first is intended to precede the latter.

### **2. Are you learning the Bible under the Holy Spirit's instruction?**

With this question, you'll want people to state precisely what the Spirit has taught them. If what they've learned agrees with the sound doctrine of the Bible, you should be able to judge whether they have truly learned from the Holy Spirit or not. Be careful here since many Mormon friends will be happy to tell you about the "burning in the bosom" they felt when the Spirit spoke to them through the Book of Mormon. If they say that—knowing that this is not a book inspired by the Spirit, you can be sure that the Holy Spirit was not speaking to them.

Others will have had other supernatural experiences such as Catholics who have had visions of "the Virgin" or Pentecostals who have received false visions and dreams. A handful of people will have received unvalidated healings—and they may boast of a healing that cannot be proven. It may just be a figment of their imagination. Certainly, falling back while someone prays for you (i.e., being "slain in the Spirit") does not count as a spiritual gift.



We'll also add that it's not wise to question whether someone's gift of tongues is authentic or not. Many in the Pentecostal movement will have the gift of tongues of angels—a gift which God designed to enhance personal prayer time. If praying in tongues truly enriches someone's prayer time, building fervor and making them heard on High, then recognize it as a gift from God. If it's something they only do while in group meetings, then there is a possibility that it's a behavior induced by peer pressure. But since speaking a word against the Holy Spirit is an unforgiveable sin, you do well not to challenge it.

### **God is Willing, People Are Not**

Be sure that nobody on Judgment Day will be permitted to excuse themselves saying “I couldn't become spiritual. I couldn't get the Holy Spirit.” Our Judge Jesus will not allow this excuse because his Father is overwhelmingly willing to give us his Spirit.

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? (Luke 11:13; NASB)

That said, do the people in your congregation ever lift up a cry to God for his Spirit? If God yearns to give the Spirit to us, then why do we hear so few prayers requesting the Holy Spirit? Worse than that, there is little evidence that people in churches even have the Spirit. We should see concrete proof of supernatural gifts, but there is very little evidence. Indeed, it's not even common to hear testimonies of people exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

To their shame, some congregations are even happy to explain why those of us who have spiritual gifts are not welcome among them. You can read their restrictions in their statements of faith. I highly recommend that you read the statement of faith of any church you visit. For example, one congregation my family visited in 2019 in Arlington Virginia wrote:

- ...tongues, interpretation, healing, and miracles... were evangelistic gifts in the beginning days of the Church... and were not intended by God to be part of... church worship and service.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Retrieved on January 1, 2020 from [https://mcleanbible.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/What-We-Teach-Booklet\\_Electronic.pdf](https://mcleanbible.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/What-We-Teach-Booklet_Electronic.pdf), from McLean Bible Church located in Arlington, Virginia.

That congregation officially closed its doors to anyone who would bring tongues, interpretation, healing, or miracles to their church. They have prohibited the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They call this a “statement of faith” but it rather resembles a “statement of unbelief.” Men who call themselves pastors have the audacity to restrict four of the gifts of the Holy Spirit? They won’t let the Spirit do four things in their congregation? Not even Jesus would have been welcome among them.

What’s to stop these leaders from restricting another five, seven, or ten activities of the Holy Spirit? There are 14 gifts listed for us in the Bible. What if someone in their congregation simply wanted to experiment with one of them to discover if they have a gift? Or what if God commands one of his prophets to go to their church and prophesy? Shall that person be removed from the meeting?

Have these men never read Paul’s statement forbidding anyone from prohibiting the use of gifts? It’s hard enough to act by faith. The world discourages us from living by faith. We don’t need pastors discouraging it as well.

... my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:39; NASB).

Since the congregation in Arlington states “evangelistic gifts in the beginning days of the Church... were not intended by God to be part of... church worship and service,” we have to ask what their list of “evangelistic gifts” are. Are tongues, interpretation, healing, and miracles the only “evangelistic gifts” of the apostles? Since the apostles used other gifts for evangelistic purposes, maybe the Arlington pastors should prohibit those too: the word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, prophecy, and discerning of spirits. Will they only limit the use of the former gifts and not the others? Why not prohibit serving and teaching? Why not be consistent and limit encouragement and giving? They could tell people to not even bring tithes to the worship service.

### **The Slippery Slope**

Congregations like the one mentioned above are on a slippery slope. The Holy Spirit is the life of God’s Church, so once these pastors forbid the use of certain gifts, they have set their churches

on the road to decline. In many congregations, there was never any power of the Holy Spirit in the first place, so pastors have nothing to restrict. They have no real church to destroy. But if there is a church, the process of church decline typically looks like this:

- pastors get uncomfortable with the Holy Spirit's leading in their congregations
- they prohibit the use of one or more of the spiritual gifts (often beginning with the restriction of tongues, prophecy, and/or healings)
- anointed believers become discouraged and stop doing things in God's power
- nobody notices anything special about the church community anymore
- nobody feels like God is at work—they don't feel his presence
- there is no reason to go to church (since it's just like any other social group and people can make friends, eat food, and provide better activities for their kids in other venues)
- the church falls apart

Complacency is another very common phenomenon among failed congregations. It's different from church decline in that complacency is a way dead congregations maintain social status as "churches." Complacency has the ability of making a group of people appear to be a church when they're not.

When self-identifying Christians become so satisfied with church activities, traditions, and customs that they cease to ask God for the Holy Spirit, complacency gets the upper hand. If in a congregation no one seeks the Spirit, the religion of that congregation has become an outward appearance and nothing else. They have rejected the true power of the Christian faith by rejecting the Holy Spirit!

... know this, that in the Last Days difficult times will come, for people will be lovers of themselves... loving pleasure rather than loving God, maintaining a form of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid these people (2 Timothy 3:1-5; LEB).

To combat the trend of complacency, Paul's advice is:

1. Stay away from hypocrites who have the *form* but reject the *power* of godliness.
2. Know that self-centeredness and love of pleasure are signs we are close to the Last Days.

## Biblical Evangelization

It's high time Evangelicals set aside the famous question "Have you received Jesus in your heart?" and replace it with the Biblical question: "Have you received the Holy Spirit?" Modern-day so-called "evangelists" invented the former question, but the latter comes to us courtesy of the Scriptures—it's what the apostles asked people.

... [the apostle Paul] found some disciples and asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit' (Acts 19:1-3).

If you're brave enough, ask believing friends the same question as Paul. If we ask them this question, we'll help them to earn their security—that is, to be sure of eternal life. We'll also be aligning ourselves with the Lord because we'll be using his evangelistic method. His method was *plain dealing*,<sup>22</sup> that is, direct conversation through face-to-face engagement.

Observe how the Lord confronted Nicodemus, a venerable Jewish rabbi. Jesus pointed out to Nicodemus what Nicodemus lacked:

Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again.'

'How can someone be born when they are old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!'

Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit' (John 3:3-5).

So, what did Nicodemus, a leader in his religious community, lack? He lacked the new birth in the Spirit. Jesus told him so, but are you willing to tell other people the same thing? It's what so many people in churches need to hear today, but who has the boldness to tell them?

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<sup>22</sup> This is an expression used by the 17<sup>th</sup>-century British Puritan pastor Richard Baxter.

The thing is, if anyone will be resurrected unto eternal life, then they will need to both have the Spirit and to follow the Spirit. If you love someone enough to urge them to be sure of their eternal life, then share these two points with them: 1. Have the Spirit. 2. Follow the Spirit.

## **1. Have the Spirit**

You need the Spirit. The Spirit has to be *living in* you today if you're going to live forever. That's the truth explained below. As you read the passage, notice that Paul uses the expression *the Spirit living in you* three times. That's not empty redundancy. That's Paul emphasizing the thing which is most important in his message!

... [you] are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you ... And if the Spirit of 'Him who raised Jesus from the Dead' [God] is living in you, 'He who raised Christ from the Dead' [God] will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you... (Romans 8:9, 11)

In the span of three verses, Paul defines what it takes to be resurrected. Why does he repeat the same phrase three times? Because he is emphasizing a truth so important that our eternity depends on it: The Spirit must be living within us.

Paul used the conditional particle *if* twice in this little passage because he had to clarify how uncertain it is that someone has the Spirit. You can't presume that someone has the Spirit. You can't presume that you have the Spirit. Don't fall into the trap of presuming that because someone calls themselves a Christian that they have the Holy Spirit. You have to ask speak to them the way Paul spoke to Corinthians. Tell them "if the Spirit of God lives in you ... And if the Spirit of 'Him who raised Jesus from the Dead' [God] is living in you..." then you will have eternal life. But if not, then you will not have eternal life!

## **2. Follow the Spirit**

How else do we know we'll be resurrected? By honestly evaluating whether we're following the Spirit, or not. That is, as you make decisions in life, if you actually *do* what the Spirit tells you to do, you're on your way to glory. We live by the spirit and not by the flesh, if we are led by the Spirit and not by the Devil.

... if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God (Romans 8:13-14).

Just wanting to follow the Spirit doesn't count. You have to actually *crucify yourself* to sin. Only if you do away with sin can you live by the spirit.

The process Paul describes in Romans 8 is called *mortification*. This uncommon word can best be defined as "putting off the old self." Becoming spiritual is all about ceasing to sin and putting on the new self. It's about ceasing to speak lies, and speaking the truth.

... put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor... (Ephesians 4:22b-25)

How many people you know have actually done this? How many have *put off the old self* and *put off falsehood* completely. How many people can say like Paul did (with all sincerity) 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me' (Galatians 2:20)? If Christ lives in them, it's because they have the Spirit, for *the Lord is the Spirit* (2 Corinthians 3:17).

### **Not Everybody Has the Spirit**

Let's speak as the apostles spoke. The apostolic way of talking about who has the Spirit is using the word *if* a lot. For example, Paul says: 'if the Spirit... is living in you, you will live.' Paul uses the word *if* three times in the passages we just read (Romans 8:13-15), but who dares to ask why?

People don't ask why Paul uses *if* a lot because they don't want to hear the simple answer: Not everybody in Christian congregations has the Spirit of God. But the apostles were realistic, and said things plainly. They were not negative men, but their faith was based on reality, and the unfortunate reality of life is that not all people who have been baptized into Christ, remain in Christ.

The apostles were aware that in their church communities, some had turned away from Jesus, and the Holy Spirit had turned away from them. That harsh reality inspired them to pen the following three passages which speak of people who were *under the Cloud* [a reference to the OT manifestation of the Holy Spirit], people *who have shared in the Holy Spirit*, and people who are *devoid of the Spirit*—all people who were once part of Christian fellowship.

Each of the following passages speaks of people who were part of God's people, and who experienced God's power, but who turned away from him. We hear of Cain, the Exodus Israelites, and the prophet Balaam. The passages also mention Korah, who led a rebellion against Moses, and some NT apostates—all who were at one time inside God's fold.

... our ancestors were all under the Cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the Cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink. . . Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness... (1 Corinthians 10:1-5)

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the Coming Age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance (Hebrews 6:4-6).

... the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. . . they [ungodly people in the Church] have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves [literally: *pastoring* themselves] . . . the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit (Jude 5, 11-12, 19; NASB).

How are we to respond to the frightening reality that *many* among us will turn away? Paul warns us of the Apostasy, a mass turning away from sound doctrine, on more than one occasion:

... the Day of the Lord. . . will not come unless the Apostasy comes first... (2 Thessalonians 2:3)

... the Spirit explicitly says that in Later Times some will fall away [lit. *apostatize*] from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons... (1 Timothy 4:1; NASB)

... the time will come when people [in the Church] will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth... (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

In addition, love will wane in the Church.

... many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold (Matthew 24:10-12).

Knowing that these dangers exist, what are we to do? The answer is below: Be warned and don't presume that you're *standing firm*. Rather, be on the alert and take care that you don't fall into sin. Learn from the examples in the Bible of falling and failure.

Now these things [the failures of OT believers] occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were... We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did... We should not test Christ, as some of them did ... And do not grumble, as some of them did... These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us... So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall (1 Corinthians 10:6-10, 11-12)!

### **If A then B**

It's critical to understand this truth: You need the Spirit in you now if you're going to be resurrected in the future. At the very least, you'll need to be born of the Spirit to participate in eternal life. That's what we read in the following verse:

... if the Spirit of... [God] is living in you... [God] will also give life to your mortal bodies... (Romans 8:11).



Now, this verse deserves our close attention. It expresses a monumental truth in stark terms: If we're going to live forever, the Holy Spirit must live in us now. The word *if* carries the weight of the sentence—making it a conditional statement. To paraphrase: The Holy Spirit must be living in us in this life if we will enter the Next Life.

Your mother doesn't make you a child of God. Your pastor can't do it either. You yourself can't do it on your own because a baby can't be conceived of his own will. Nobody decides who their father will be. Likewise, you can't make God your Father. You cannot become a child of God of your own will. You need the Holy Spirit to give you a new birth. Jesus spoke to Nicodemus this way:

You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit (John 3:7-8).

## Understanding + Experience

The formula for knowing the Holy Spirit (that is, knowing him intimately) is to both understand what the Bible says about him and to experience him first hand:

understanding + experience = knowledge

That's why we have written two books: *One Spirit* and *One Baptism*. These provide a framework for both understanding and experiencing the Holy Spirit. The book *One Spirit* lays out the basic truths to give you a conceptual understanding of who he is. The book *One Baptism* guides you towards experiences with him.

Let's take Peter as an example of understanding + experience. Peter obtained a sound doctrinal understanding of who the Spirit is through Jesus, who spoke about the Holy Spirit on various occasions. Peter then experienced the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

When the Holy Spirit did surprising things (like causing a group of Galilean fisherman to speak fluently in foreign languages), it wasn't a mystery to Peter. Why not? Because Peter already

knew about the Spirit. He had the substantive knowledge to be able to interpret what was happening.

[Peter said] ... let me explain this [the phenomenon of speaking in tongues]... These people [the apostles] are not drunk, as you suppose... No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people' (Acts 2:14-17).

How did Peter know what was going on when the Spirit anointed the apostles with the gift of foreign languages? Quite simply, Peter had already read the Bible. He knew the prophecy from Joel which promised that God would give his Spirit to all people. So Peter had understanding, he added to it an experience, and the result was him knowing the Spirit better!

In addition to Peter's personal Bible study, Jesus personally prepped Peter for Pentecost. On at least two occasions Jesus readied Peter and the apostles to receive the Holy Spirit.

... behold, I am sending forth the Promise of my Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on High (Luke 24:49; NASB).

... wait for the Gift my Father promised which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).

That final verse proves that the return of the Holy Spirit was a topic that Jesus taught frequently. Notice that he called the baptism of the Spirit 'the Gift my Father promised which you have heard me speak about.' That implies that Jesus spoke about the baptism of the Holy Spirit often. He expected the apostles to be familiar with the subject. Are Christians familiar with it today?

Just like Jesus prepped the apostles, we wrote this book to prepare you for the Spirit. If the Holy Spirit has already come into your life, then congratulations! What you read here will confirm what you have already experienced. If he hasn't, then the information you glean from this book will prepare you so that when he comes, you'll understand what he's doing. You'll be ready for the experience which will lead you to know him.

## Law or Faith?

The Old Covenant didn't free the Israelites from sin. Only faith can do that. Indeed, God has always made sure that human beings had access to faith, and he gave us such access to allow us freedom from sin. Gentiles such as Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Eliezer, and Abraham; and Jews such as Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Elijah, and Nehemiah walked by faith. Discovering freedom from sin, the Bible calls such people *the righteous*.

The righteous shall live by faith (Romans 1:17; ESV—see also Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38; and Habakkuk 2:4).

These men were examples of faith in God, but one stands out above the rest. One man's story has become the primary OT example of living by faith: Abraham. God made Abraham an example for Jews and Gentiles, earning him the title *the father of the faith*.

But if we already had Abraham, why did God ever give us Moses? If an example was already established in Abraham, why did God have to add the Law? Let's note three important points with regard to the giving of the Law:

- a) God was helping the Jews become aware of sin when he gave them the Law. He was not misleading them, but developing their conscience—their awareness of sin.
- b) God never intended to save anyone from sin through their adherence to the Law. Salvation was always through hope in the Kingdom and its Messiah. In fact, the Law is filled with signs meant to lead adherents to faith in Christ such as the Sabbath, the Temple ministry, and the Passover.
- c) From the very start of the existence of the nation of Israel, God insisted that Abraham was the example to follow. He gave as *father* to the Jews, a man who was justified by faith.

Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was only one man, and I blessed him and made him many (Isaiah 51:1-2).

Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants (Joshua 24:3).

... he [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith (Romans 4:11-13; NASB).

This last passage proves that Abraham is a spiritual father to all who believe, not only to the Jews! In fact, the passage goes on to argue that he is the father to the Gentiles:

... if those who depend on the Law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, because the Law brings wrath. And where there is no Law there is no transgression. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the Law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: 'I have made you a father of many nations' (Romans 4:14-17).

Jesus, agreeing with the verses above also called Abraham *your father Abraham* (John 8:56). But our focus right now, in this chapter, is not Abraham. It's whether we need the Law to be saved. Is faith enough for salvation, or do we need to keep God's OT commandments, the Law.

So also Abraham 'believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the Gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Galatians 3:6-9).

So, what's the answer? Do we need the Law for salvation? Absolutely not—and here are four reasons why we don't:

1. The purpose of the Law was always to develop the human conscience, not to justify anyone.

... by the deeds of the Law no flesh will be justified in his [God's] sight, for by the Law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20; NKJV).

2. You would have to keep every word of the Law if you would be justified by it. That means that you would have to abstain from work on Saturdays, eat kosher, and participate in all of the Temple sacrifices if you plan on being justified by God's Law.

For whoever keeps the whole Law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it (James 2:10; KJV).

3. Faith will be credited to you as righteousness if you trust God. Trying to justify yourself by performing the works of the Law will bring you exactly what you are due.

... to the one who works, his pay is not credited according to grace, but according to his due. But to the one who does not work, but who believes in the One who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness (Romans 4:4-5; LEB).

4. You are under a curse if you trust in the Law as your means of justification before God, unless, of course, you continually do everything written in the Law!

For all who rely on the works of the Law are under a curse, as it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.' Clearly no one who relies on the Law is justified before God, because 'the righteous will live by faith' (Galatians 3:10-11; KJV).

## **The Promise**

God sent a special promise to sustain the Jews while they lived under the Old Covenant. They needed a promise because the Old Covenant didn't remedy their sin problem. The Old Covenant was good but it was not effective in deterring the power of sin within them. The Promise made up for that weakness in the Law—and faithful Jews clung to it expectantly.

Jesus liked to call the Promise *the Promise of the Father* (Acts 1:4; NKJV). When he explained it, he made it clear that he was talking about the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Note Christ's words in the following passages. He told the apostles to wait expectantly for the coming of the Holy Spirit:

... behold, I am sending forth the Promise of my Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on High (Luke 24:49; NASB).

... wait for the Gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).

And, using a gesture (with more than words) Jesus demonstrated that the Promise was the arrival of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's arrival was going to deserve a response: The disciples would need to receive him—so the Lord gave them a heads up!

And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (John 20:22).

The Spirit's grand arrival could only take place once the New Covenant was established—but why? Because the Spirit came to us like new wine. New wine will make an old wineskin burst. The ministry of the Spirit does not match the ministry of the Law. They are not compatible. Someone following the Spirit, but living among Orthodox Jews, for example, would cause such a big stir that they would have to kick that person out of their community.

Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved (Matthew 9:17).

There are at least four OT passages which promised the arrival of a New Covenant. God's intention was for the Jews who were living under the OT to read them and to understand that the Mosaic covenant under which they were living was going to fade away.

... if there had been nothing wrong with that First Covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: 'The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a New Covenant... It will not be like the covenant I

made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my Covenant... by calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear (Hebrews 8:7-8, 13).

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a New Spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD (Ezekiel 37:14).

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days (Joel 2:28-29).

You may have noticed how the promises of a New Covenant were coupled with the arrival of God's Spirit. This is how the Spirit gained the reputation of being called *the Promise*. He was so tightly associated with the New Covenant that the promise of a New Covenant and the promise of his coming collectively became known as *the Promise*.

Jesus reminded the apostles of this Promise—and Moses, about 1,300 years before Christ, made a direct statement to the Israelites that they should be prepared to heed a prophet greater than him. That prophet would be the one to announce the arrival of a New Covenant. The words of this up-and-coming Prophet would be weightier than those of Moses.

Yahweh your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your midst, from your countrymen, and to him you shall listen (Deuteronomy 18:15).

The apostles discovered that the One Moses had promised was Jesus, and learned from him about the New Covenant. In their preaching, they demonstrated that they knew that God was

giving them the Holy Spirit. They knew what they were getting in the New Covenant—the long-awaited Promise of the Father. In fact, Peter declared the coming of the Holy Spirit as the climax of his triumphant Pentecost sermon.

Exalted to the right hand of God, he [Jesus] has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear... Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off... (Acts 2:33, 38-39)

Peter knew that he was living the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. Speaking of *the Promise*, Peter demonstrated that the time had come for the Spirit of God to come upon believers in such a way that we would receive power!

... Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say... this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people... Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy’” (Acts 2:14-18).

### **Jesus: Our Model of Faith in God**

The apostles knew about the New Covenant, and they understood baptism’s role in the New Covenant. They knew that anyone baptized in Jesus’ name had become joined to Jesus spiritually. They had become *one in spirit* with Christ through baptism. Being baptized in Jesus’ name means receiving his Spirit. Being joined with Christ in spirit is when our spirit becomes bound to his Spirit.

But whoever is united with the Lord<sup>23</sup> is one with him in spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17).

We’re all tempted in the fleshliness and carnality of our minds to see Jesus as someone different from us. You may have noticed in your heart the sinful tendency to make him a unique case—

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<sup>23</sup> This being “united to Jesus” is equal to being “washed” (see v. 11) which is baptism as per Acts 22:16; Romans 6:4; and Colossians 2:12.



someone with both a human and divine nature (what many Evangelicals call the “God-man). Resist such thoughts, and think instead on the Scriptures:

... in all things he [Jesus] had to be made like his brothers [us] (Hebrews 2:17 NASB).

To think of Jesus as someone who came in both the divine and human natures will hinder you from being one with Christ. The fact that Jesus came in the flesh and was *in all things* like us is the very basis of our unity with him.

Christ has become our example in everything. Just like us, Jesus was incapable of performing miracles until he received the Spirit. In fact, our Lord Jesus didn't even attempt to preach until he had received the Spirit. At approximately age 30, he performed his first miracle. At that same age he began to preach in public for the first time.

This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee ... (John 2:11; NKJV)

Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry (Luke 3:23)

Having the Spirit in him was the reason behind Jesus' miracles, healing, and power. The Bible makes this abundantly clear. We must obtain the same power, and we have to get it the same way Jesus got it—through baptism in water and the Spirit!

When someone believes, they should immediately be baptized in water and the Holy Spirit. That is, once you've believed upon the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit wants to anoint you with power, so seek it by getting the laying on of hands. Every believer who is born of the Spirit receives at least one spiritual gift through the power of the Holy Spirit. This reality was affirmed by Jesus:

And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well (Mark 16:17-18).

## **The Spirit Living in You**

So, let's say you've believed, have been baptized, and you've received the Holy Spirit—then what? Your body has become a temple of God. His Spirit has begun to live within you.

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? (1 Corinthians 6:19)

It's a big deal to have the Spirit of the Eternal God living in you. What else is he going to do in you besides give you a gift? He's going to help you to analyze everything. That is, the Spirit will give you the ability to know right from wrong in every circumstance. This ability is called *discernment*—a capacity to judge circumstance to be good or evil. It's a new level of freedom. The unconverted do not experience this. Below, Paul calls them *the natural man*. We, on the other hand, are called *spiritual people*.

... we have received not the spirit of the World, but the Spirit who is from God, in order that we may know the things freely given to us by God, things which we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people.

But the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Now the spiritual person discerns [*judges*] all things, but he himself is judged by no one (1 Corinthians 2:12-15; LEB).

## **Judged by No One**

We've finally come to our conclusion. The last phrase of this verse says that a person with the Holy Spirit is *judged by no one*. Having the Holy Spirit means that you have no judges. No Pharisees can lord over your faith. No legalistic pastor has the right to impose his rules on you. Why not? It's because you are in a New Covenant. Through the New Covenant you are freed from the Old Covenant.

You're not subject to Moses, you're subject to the Holy Spirit. You don't follow the Ten Commandments, the *letter* written on stones. You follow the Law of Love which the Spirit has written on your heart.

He [God] has made us competent as ministers of a New Covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6).

... now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter (Romans 7:6; NASB).

Are you ready to serve God in this new way? Are you thirsty for the Spirit? Do you want real life and freedom from the sinful human nature? Do you want to have life welling up from within you? Then come to Jesus and take from him what God sent him to give us: abundant life in the Holy Spirit.

‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, Rivers of Living Water will flow from within them.’ By this he meant the Spirit... (John 7:37).