

# Conversion

**By Perry B. Cotham**





# CONVERSION

*Third Printing*



*A compilation of sixteen tracts*

**Published by**

**PERRY B. COTHAM**

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*Preface to  
Fifth Edition*



**T**his book is a compilation of sixteen tracts I have written which have been widely distributed. In this fifth edition of the book, an additional chapter has been added. Too, some textual alterations have been made for clarity. I am deeply grateful to several friends of mine for assistance in preparing this work for the press. My prayer is that the book may be used in teaching God's Word, as the tracts have been.

—PERRY B. COTHAM

January 5, 2006



## INTRODUCTION

**T**HE GOSPEL SERMON is the stateliest and most noble form of human speech. The sermons of this volume deal with the most profound and vital subjects that can engage the attention of mankind. The author of these sermons combines, in a remarkable degree, the essential elements of a great gospel preacher: clearness of thought, power of Bible saturated messages, and the gift of vivid expression. He sees the truth in its fullness and has a clear grasp of the fundamental verities of Christianity. When such a preacher has power to clothe his message in winning speech, and to breathe into it passion which it has begotten in his heart, his sermons have an added value and are entitled to a wider reading than they can receive from the pulpit, no matter how large the audiences may be.

The sermons which comprise this volume have been effectively delivered by the author in many places in the United States. God has used them and the author to convert thousands to Christ, and to build and strengthen the faith of thousands of Christians. Perry Cotham, author of this volume, declares his faith in the inspiration of the Scriptures, the sufficiency of God's Word as man's sole guide, and the majesty of the Lord's church as the divine body of Christ.

God has used this dedicated man in a wonderful way in the twentieth century, but the fruits of his labors, like those of righteous Abel, will continue to speak after he has gone home to be with his Lord.

It has been said that one knows God when he uses the Psalm in order to know the Shepherd. Knowledge of an author adds great meaning to his book. Because of the enrichment that the author has brought into my own life, it is my delightful pleasure to commend this volume to you. May it be read and used for the single purpose for which it is herewith given, the glory of Almighty God.

Delmar Owens

Tulsa, Oklahoma  
April, 1963



**PERRY B. COTHAM**

January 5, 1912 –

**TERESA OVERBY COTHAM**

September 17, 1914 – January 7, 1998



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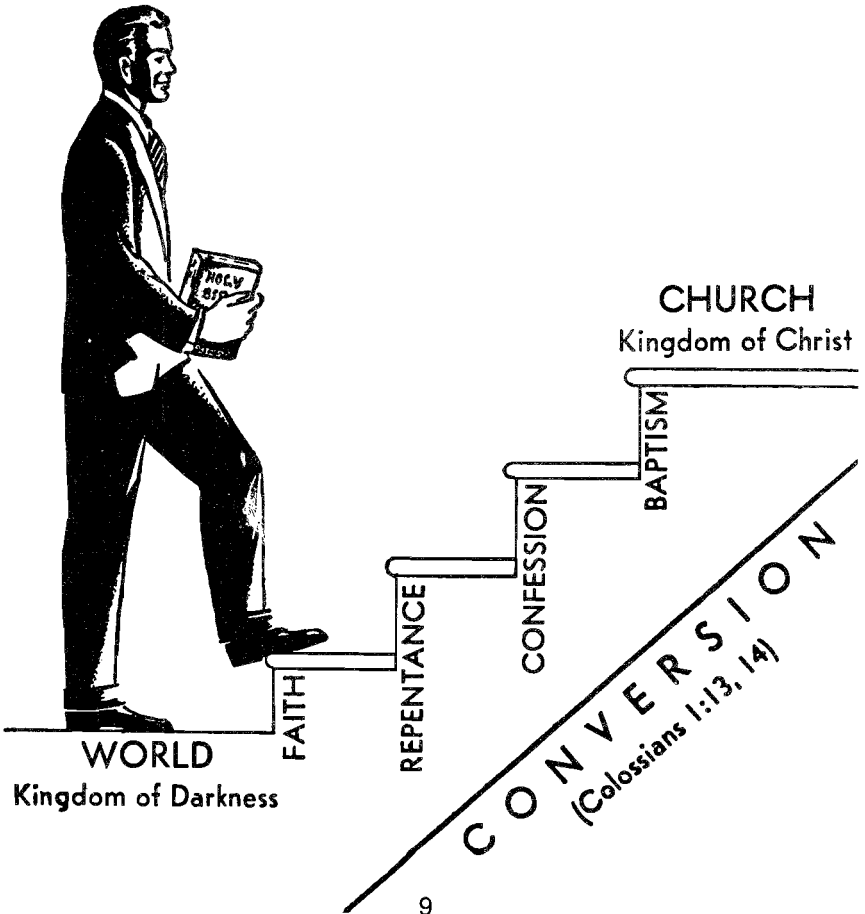
*(left) Perry B. Cotham preached at Cane Ridge (near Paris, Kentucky) Sunday afternoon, August 6, 1995. Here he is shown standing by the grave and tombstone of Barton W. Stone who preached here in the early 1800s. The picture was made that afternoon prior to Perry's speaking inside the church building close by.*



*(right) Perry standing by the chair close to the pulpit inside the old Cane Ridge meeting house. Perry was born in Murray, Kentucky, and began preaching in 1929.*

# CONVERSION

By Perry B. Cotham



# CONVERSION

**A**LL PEOPLE of an accountable age must be converted to the Lord, or be lost. Without conversion, one cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said:

“Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

Although people generally believe in the *necessity* of conversion, many misunderstand *what* it is, *how* it is accomplished, and *when* and *where* it takes place. To answer these questions one must turn to the Bible, which makes the process of conversion clear.

## ***1. What Is Conversion?***

In common usage the word “convert” means to change, or to become changed. “Conversion” is the process of changing or turning from one state to another. For example: wood is converted into paper, ore into iron, iron into steel, skins of animals into leather, and leather into shoes.

In the Scriptures the word “convert” means to change or turn from one state to another. Biblically, “conversion” is a moral and spiritual change. It is the process of turning to God, by which one becomes a Christian. Paul said that the Thessalonians in their conversion to Christianity, “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9; cf. Acts 14:15; 9:35). He also spoke of “the conversion of the Gentiles” (Acts 15:3). In conversion man turns *from* sin *to* God.



### A. MAN IS ACTIVE IN TURNING

The Bible emphasizes the fact that the *individual* "turns himself" in conversion. The word in the Greek New Testament translated "convert" *always* denotes an act done by an individual to or *for* himself. The sinner is *active*, rather than passive, in his conversion. For this reason the King James Version of Matthew 18:3, "be converted," is more correctly rendered "turn" in the American Standard Version. Other translations of Matthew 18:3, too, show that "conversion" is active: "unless you turn," Revised Standard Version; "unless you turn around," New English Bible; "unless you turn," Moffatt's translation; "unless you change," Phillip's translation; "unless you change," Goodspeed's translation; "unless you turn," Weymouth's translation; "unless you turn," Williams' translation; "if you do not turn," American Bible Union Version; "unless you turn," Challoner-Rheims Version. "Except ye *turn*, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3 ASV).

### B. CONVERSION IS NOT PARDON

Conversion is not synonymous with pardon, yet pardon does follow conversion or turning to the Lord. God does the pardoning or forgiving; but he does so only when the individual first has turned himself from his evil ways to God. In proof of this note these passages:

"For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted

[turn again, ASV], and I should heal them” (Matthew 13:15; cf. Mark 4:12).

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted [turn again, ASV], that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7).

Hence, people must turn to God that their sins may be forgiven. Pardon takes place in the mind of God and *not* within the heart of the sinner. Man obeys God's law and turns to the Lord: *God*, thereafter, *forgives his sins* (Mark 2:7; Hebrews 8:12). Thus, turning to the Lord is something the *sinner does*, and pardoning of his sins is something that *God does*. Hence, one is not completely changed from sinner to saint until turning and pardon have taken place.

### C. SUMMARY

As has been noted above, conversion has two parts. First, man turns from wrong to right, from the love and practice of sin to the love and practice of righteousness. Thereafter, God pardons this changed person of his sins.

Conversion is the process which takes the sinner out of the kingdom of Satan and causes him to be translated into the kingdom of Christ, which is the church (Colossians 1:12,13). Conversion is, therefore, the whole gospel process by which a sinner becomes a Christian. Hence, the converted person is a *changed* individual, one turned to God.

## *II. How Does the Sinner Turn to God?*

Conversion to Christ is produced as the result of the sinner's hearing, believing, and obeying the gospel, as shall later be shown in this study. God does not turn man by miraculous, irresistible power, but He motivates him through His inspired word, the Bible, to turn to Him. Both God and man perform vital functions in the conversion process.

The Bible teaches that man is an accountable being and is, therefore, responsible for all his decisions (Matthew 23:37, 38). Since conversion is a turning, the choice between right and wrong is man's own act. Joshua called upon the people saying, "... choose you this day whom ye will serve ... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). Christ said to some, "... ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). The Scriptures teach that the Lord will not compel anyone to obey Him. They also teach that the sinner is a free moral agent; he makes the choice and turns to God out of his own free will.

### **A. CONVERSION IS NOT MYSTERIOUS**

Conversion is not some miraculous, better-felt-than-told process. God gave the Bible to man, and through it He tells man what to do to be saved.

The Scriptures do *not* teach that the Holy Spirit comes directly into a sinner's heart to convert him without his cooperation. Conversion is not "getting religion." This is an un-scriptural expression based upon an un-scriptural idea. Those who plead for a power directly from heaven to convert people are asking God to be a respecter of persons. If this process is genuine, why are not all people who thus plead converted? This theory of conversion by

abstract, irresistible power from God is *false* for the following reasons:

1. It destroys man's moral freedom, removes all human accountability, and makes the sinner *passive* in his conversion. (Passive conversion is contrary to the Savior's teaching in John 6:29; 8:24; Matthew 7:21-27; Mark 16:16. It has been shown above that the sinner is active in conversion.)
2. It requires that a person do nothing to obtain his pardon; thus salvation is made wholly *unconditional*. (This, too, contradicts the statements of the Bible in Hebrews 5:9; Revelation 22:14; Acts 2:37-38; 16:30-31; Romans 2:7-8; 6:17-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; 1 Peter 1:22).
3. It makes *God a respecter of persons*. (But the Bible says, ". . . God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him"—Acts 10:34-35; cf. Romans 2:11).

Now, if God sends a direct operation of the Spirit to *one* person, he must send it to *all*, or show respect to persons. According to this theory, if an individual dies without receiving this power and is eternally lost, who is to blame? God is. It is clearly evident, then, that this doctrine cannot be true, for it contradicts the plain teaching of God's Word. Man himself can and must turn from sin.

**B. THE GOSPEL IS GOD'S ONLY POWER TO SAVE**  
Often it is asked, "Does not God exert a power

over sinners to cause them to turn?" Yes, but *the gospel is God's converting power. God exerts this power through the gospel.*

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

What is God's power to save man? The passage says that the power to save man is the gospel of Christ. The gospel is God's *only power* unto salvation and is complete for converting sinners.

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm 19:7).

There is not a recorded example of anyone having been converted to Christ without gospel teaching. In the Bible no inspired man ever told an individual that he needed to receive the Holy Spirit for conversion: neither is there command nor example for people to pray for God to send down "converting power." Conversion is a sane, sensible, and reasonable process. The Spirit does His work in this process through the word of truth and not in some direct, mysterious manner. (Cf. John 6:63; 1 Peter 1:23; James 1:18.)

The Lord draws people to the Savior by teaching (John 6:44-45). He persuades people *through His word* to turn to Him and live, saying, ". . . turn yourselves from all your transgressions, . . . ; *Amend your ways and your doings*" (Ezekiel 14:6; 18:23, 30-32; 33:11, 14-19; Jeremiah 7:3).

Hence, if people were not accountable and active in their conversion, there would be no need to

preach to them. Therefore, if any are lost eternally, the reason will not be because the Lord would not accept them but because they did not turn to Him and have their sins blotted out (Acts 7:51).

### **C. ONE MUST BECOME AS A LITTLE CHILD**

Jesus said, "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3 ASV). By the phrase "as little children" Christ did not mean that people are to become little children but to become *like* little children--to become innocent, teachable, trustful, humble, and obedient. The kingdom of heaven is not composed of little children, but of people *as* little children: that is, with the above *characteristics* of little children (cf. Matthew 19:14).

### ***III. What Changes Occur in Conversion?***

The *necessary changes* through which one passes in the process of conversion to Christ are three: (1) change of *heart* by faith, (2) change of *life* by repentance, and (3) change of *relationship* by baptism. No person turns to God, according to the New Testament, without undergoing these three distinct changes.

#### **A. A CHANGE OF HEART BY FAITH**

Since Christianity is a religion of the heart, a change of heart must occur in conversion to Christ. The heart, as the Bible often uses the word, refers to the mind; i.e., the part of man that thinks, reasons, believes, understands, desires, trusts, purposes, and obeys (Matthew 9:4; Mark 2:6; Romans 10:10; Matthew 13:15; Romans 10:1; Proverbs 3:5; 2 Corinthians 9:7; and Romans 6:17).

Then it is the intellect and emotions of man and not the physical heart which must be changed in conversion. This change takes place through *faith* which comes by hearing God's Word (Romans 10:17). After one believes, his confidence, trust, and affection are turned from Satan to Christ. In conversion, therefore, one must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and cease to love sin and determine to love righteousness (John 8:24; Matthew 22:37). Thus, the effect of faith is what is called a change of heart.

#### **B. A CHANGE OF LIFE BY REPENTANCE**

After one's confidence or trust in Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord has been established through the preaching of the gospel, his *life* needs to be reformed. One's *faith* in Christ should lead him to change his life; that is, he should *turn from sin* and purpose to forsake every sin and "do that which is lawful and right" (Ezekiel 18:5; 33:14, 19). This change in conduct is brought about by *repentance*. Repentance means a change of mind, or will, regarding sin; it is produced by Godly sorrow for sin and results in a reformation of life (cf. Matthew 21:28-29; Luke 15:17-20; 3:8; Jonah 3:10; Matthew 12:41; 3:8; 2 Corinthians 7:9-10; Luke 13:3-5; Acts 17:30). The sinner must resolve to turn and travel in the opposite direction. He must do more than believe in Christ; he must turn completely from the practice of all sins, and renounce them altogether! Repentance, however, does not change the *past* life; it re-directs the future.

#### **C. A CHANGE OF RELATIONSHIP BY BAPTISM**

Having pledged himself to God and right living through faith and repentance, man needs to change his *state*. This state or relationship is changed by

*baptism*, preceded by one's confession of faith in Christ as the Son of God. (Cf. Matthew 28: 19, 20; Romans 10:10.) Paul declared:

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were *baptized into Jesus Christ* were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4; cf. Colossians 2:12-13).

“For as many of you as have been *baptized into Christ* have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27).

Baptism, however, does not change the heart or the life, but it changes the state of the person whose heart and life have been changed by faith and repentance. Baptism is the consummating act of conversion in which the sinner and God play a part. The believing penitent is baptized into Christ, and the person in Christ is a “new creature,” or a member of His body, a Christian (cf. II Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 1:12,13,24; Ephesians 1:22,23). It takes this final act—immersion in water—to change one's relationship.

#### D. CONVERSION IS ILLUSTRATED BY MARRIAGE

Every one who is converted to Christ is a member of the church. The church is referred to as the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22, 23; Romans 7:4; II Corinthians 11:2). Since when one is converted, he becomes a part of the bride of Christ, the parallel is drawn in the Scriptures between marriage and conversion. In every true marriage the woman experiences three changes: (1) change of heart, (2) change of life, and (3) change of state.



When a woman meets the man whom she eventually will marry, she may lack faith or confidence in him. At any rate, at first her faith is limited, but it steadily grows. However, although she may have attained *complete* confidence or faith in this man, she is not yet married. After her change of heart, she changes her life by limiting her associations and by making plans to marry this man. One step, the marriage ceremony, yet remains to change her state.

Many advocate that the sinner is converted to Christ when he merely reaches the point of faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. But, *change of heart* is *not* the *entire* process of turning to the Lord. One might as well contend that the woman is married when she attains complete confidence in her future husband, as to contend that the sinner is completely converted when he attains faith in Christ during the process of his conversion.

Suppose that after the couple's betrothal had been announced, but before the wedding ceremony was performed, the man died. Would the woman have been married? If the man had had a very large estate, she would not have received any benefits from it because she lacked *one step* in completing the process of marriage—the ceremony. The act of baptism is the ceremony that completes the process of conversion to Christ.

#### **IV. *When Is One Scripturally Converted?***

To be Scripturally converted to the Lord requires a *change in heart*, in *life*, and in *state—all three*; and the order of change must follow this sequence. Only after the change in heart and in life—and not before—is one prepared for the change

in relationship. A person is not saved, he is not in the kingdom of God, and he is not a Christian until he has been baptized into Christ. By this means he is brought into Christ, saved from past sins, and added to the church (Acts 2:47). Jesus declared:

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16).

In the process of conversion there is an additional turning that comes *after* faith and repentance. Luke records that “. . . a great number believed, *and turned unto* the Lord” (Acts 11:21). Peter commanded the people to “turn again” *after* repenting (Acts 3:19, American Standard Version). The *turning* act of these passages is baptism.

Faith changes one’s attitude toward sin; repentance changes one from the practice of sin; and God cleanses one from the guilt of sin in baptism. One may cease to love and practice sin but yet be guilty of his past transgressions. For example, a thief may abhor his theft and wish he had never committed it, but abhorrence alone will not free him from this guilt. Thus, God’s plan for the remission of sins is: faith, which changes the heart and overcomes the love of sin; repentance, which changes the life and stops the continuance of sin; and baptism, which changes the relationship and frees from the guilt of sin.

Consequently, in conversion the heart is changed by faith; the life is changed as a result of repentance; and the state, or relationship, is changed by baptism (which is preceded by a confession of one’s faith in Christ). *Only then is the sinner Scripturally converted and pardoned of all past sins.*

The gospel, when believed, will change one's attitude toward sin and cause him to cease from loving it. Upon seeing that his life has not been pleasing to God, he will repent of his sins and cease to practice them. Having done this, the believing penitent will then confess his faith in Christ and be baptized in order that the guilt of his sins may be removed. The sinner needs to be saved from the *love* of sin by *faith*, from the *practice* of sin by *repentance*, and from the *guilt* of sin by *baptism*.

### ***V. Where Are the Examples of New Testament Conversion?***

*The Acts of the Apostles* is the only book in the New Testament with examples of conversion. If man would learn what to do to become a Christian, he must study *Acts* and learn what the apostles preached and what the people did *in turning* to God. One can follow these examples and be absolutely safe, for they occurred under the preaching of inspired men.

Now notice some of these cases of conversion from the Book of Acts:

#### **1. The Pentecostians**

On the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ, Peter preached Christ to a great multitude, and three thousand souls were converted to Christ and added to the church (Acts 2).

One asks, "Did the Holy Spirit convert these people?" All agree that he did. But *how* did he do it? The answer is, through Peter's preaching. It was the word of God, preached by the Spirit *through the apostle*, which led them to become Christians. To those assembled Peter proclaimed

the good news of the crucified and risen Lord. This proclamation caused them to be "pricked in their heart," convicting them of their sin of crucifying the Son of God (Acts 2:36-37). It was *faith* in the truth that Peter preached which caused them to ask, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Guided by the Holy Spirit, Peter answered:

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

To some the expression "for the remission of sins" seems difficult to understand, because they think remission of sins occurs before baptism. Scripture makes it very plain that baptism is necessary before one's sin can be forgiven. Matthew 26:28 makes it very plain:

"For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many *for the remission of sins.*"

Just as Jesus shed his blood for (or "unto") the remission of sins [that is, *in order that sins may be forgiven*], so Peter said that baptism was for (or "unto") the remission of sins [that is, in order that sins may be remitted]. Goodspeed's translation of Acts 2:38 reads as follows:

"Peter said to them, you repent, and everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, in order to have your sins forgiven."

Acts 3:19 also discusses the necessary steps in conversion. The steps in Acts 3:19 are the same as in Acts 2:38. (Note parallel phrases indicated by numbers in parentheses.)

Acts 2:38

(1) "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, (2) and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ (3) for the remission of sins, (4) and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Acts 3:19

(1) "Repent ye therefore, (2) and be converted (turn again, ASV), (3) that your sins may be blotted out, (4) when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

Thus, by believing on Christ, people turned to the Lord in heart; by repenting of sins, they turned to him in their conduct; and by being baptized, they turned to him in relationship.

**2. The Samaritans**

The people who were converted in Samaria *heard* the gospel message, *believed*, and were *baptized*.

Luke records the story of their conversion in these words:

"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did . . . But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:5-6, 12).

**3. The Eunuch**

The Ethiopian officer *heard*, *believed*, *confessed* his faith in Christ as God's Son, and was *baptized*. The latter part of the story of his conversion reads as follows:

"Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way,

they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:35-39).

The eunuch learned from Philip’s preaching that he must believe in Jesus—the first step in conversion, and it was this faith that led him to request baptism—the final step in the process.

#### 4. Saul of Tarsus

One of the most dramatic spiritual changes recorded in the Book of Acts occurred in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-22; 22:1-16; 26:9-18). On the road to Damascus, Jesus appeared to Saul and convinced him that He [Jesus] was the Christ. Jesus instructed him to go into the city, and there he would be told what he *must do*. On the road (after Jesus had said to Saul, “I am Jesus . . . whom thou persecutest”), Saul attained complete confidence in Jesus as the Messiah (the first stage in his conversion). After this, in Damascus, he was penitent and prayerful for three days and nights. This indicates that Saul had reached the second of the three steps in the process of his conversion. He now needed to take only the last step—baptism. Ananias was sent to tell Saul what he *must do*. He said:

**“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).**

If prayer alone could save anyone, why did it not save Saul? The answer is: Alien sinners were *never* commanded in the New Testament to pray as a condition of pardon. Prayer, therefore, is not a substitute for baptism.

If Saul were saved before he met Ananias (as some contend), he was saved before his sins were forgiven. These sins were not forgiven until he met Ananias—which was three days after Saul had believed in Christ, had confessed Jesus as Lord, and had begun praying. Saul was *not* saved on the road to Damascus. If he had been pardoned at that time, he did not know it; Jesus was not aware of it; nor did Ananias have knowledge of it. If he were saved, he was surely the most miserable converted man ever known; for, he neither ate nor drank during the three days between his experience on the Damascus road and his meeting with Ananias. Saul surely was not saved *before* his *sins* were washed away since the Bible teaches that this was done through his baptism (Acts 22:16).

#### 5. Cornelius

The first Gentile convert to the Christian faith was Cornelius (Acts 10; 11:1-18). He is described as a “devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.” Some ask, “Why should a man like Cornelius need converting?” The answer is: he was still an alien sinner; he had not experienced the three fundamental changes necessary for conversion to Christ.

An angel appeared to Cornelius and told him to

send for Peter, who would tell him *words* whereby he and all his house should be saved (Acts 11:14). This shows that Cornelius was unsaved. After preaching Jesus as the Christ, Peter commanded him and those of his household "to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:48).

#### 6. Lydia

Likewise, Lydia and her household *heard* the gospel preached by Paul, *believed* it, and were *baptized* (Acts 16:14-15).

#### 7. The Jailer

Also, the Philippian jailer and his household *heard* the word, *believed* it, and were *baptized*. After the earthquake, the jailer

"... called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they [Paul and Silas] spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house" (Acts 16:29-34).

Here again it is evident that salvation does not occur before baptism. The jailer was not saved by believing on the Lord until he was baptized.

#### 8. The Corinthians

Paul preached Christ in the city of Corinth, "... and many of the Corinthians *hearing believed*,



and were *baptized*" (Acts 18:1-8).

So the Book of *Acts* makes the Lord's law of pardon very plain. Clearly, all who were converted under the preaching of the apostles were converted in the same manner. Every conversion was produced by the word of God. Their conversions *began* with *teaching* and concluded with *baptism*. They *heard* the gospel, *believed*, *repented* of their sins, and upon confession of their faith, were *baptized*. Note the *simplicity* of the process. What a contrast to the procedures of modern times!

The things which were done by those who were converted then must be done by all sinners now—for the terms of pardon have not been changed.

One often hears of hundreds being "converted" in a "revival," but many times not one of these is converted in the New Testament sense of the term. People need to return to the Scriptural teaching of the apostles. The gospel of Christ offers salvation to all alike, but the terms of salvation are *specific*. The obedience to these terms constitutes New Testament conversion and makes one a child of God and a member of the church. The process which made one a Christian in the days of the apostles will make one a Christian today.

Conversion, therefore, is accomplished by obedience to the gospel; for in the gospel one is commanded to believe on Christ, to repent of all sins, and, upon a confession of his faith in Christ as the Son of God, to be immersed in water in the name of the Lord Jesus. It requires obedience to *all* of these commands for one to be converted *completely* to the Lord. The person who stops short of this divine process has not been truly converted to Christ.

## **VI. Do Religious People Need Conversion?**

Many think that because one is religious and honest, he is acceptable to the Lord. But many people whose conversions are recorded in *Acts* were sincere, religious people.

*The following are some Bible examples of religious people who needed to turn to the Lord:*

### **1. The Jews at Pentecost**

The Jews on Pentecost were religious. "Jews, *devout men*, out of every nation under heaven" were those from whom the first converts to the Christian faith were made (*Acts* 2:5). They had assembled at Jerusalem to observe the religious worship which was celebrated at that time. Although they were religious, they needed conversion.

### **2. The Ethiopian Nobleman**

Another example of a religious person who needed salvation was the Ethiopian eunuch (*Acts* 8:26-39). That he was very religious is evidenced by his coming from Ethiopia in Africa to Jerusalem to worship. On his journey home he was reading the sacred writings of his religion. Philip came to him, and the eunuch was willing to have Philip guide him in understanding Isaiah's prophecy. This man was religious and also religiously *honest*, which is very commendable. Ask yourself this question: "If I were to learn that the religion which I have been professing was not in harmony with the will of God, would I give it up, as this officer did?"

### **3. Saul**

Saul of Tarsus was a very religious man (*Acts* 23:1; 24:16; 1 Timothy 1:12-16), and his conversion is only one more New Testament example of a religious person who needed to change (*Acts* 9:1-2). Although he was conscientious, he was wrong.

*No man is right merely because he thinks he is right.* His conscience may tell him that he ought to do right, but it does not tell him what is right. That is taught by God's Word.

#### **4. Cornelius**

No better moral or religious man can be found in the Book of Acts than Cornelius. Yet he needed to obey the gospel of Christ. No one is saved merely because he is *good*. Today there are many good, moral people outside of Christ who need Scriptural conversion just as Cornelius did (Acts 10:1, 2).

**All religious persons who have not obeyed the commands, as recorded in *Acts of the Apostles*, have not been truly converted to Christ, and they still need to follow the steps outlined above in order to receive pardon.**

#### *VII. Summary*

The Bible teaches that conversion is a simple, understandable process, and is not (as many have supposed) a vague and mysterious happening. The Bible also teaches that there are three changes which take place in every Scriptural conversion: namely, a change in heart, a change in will, and a change in relationship. When, therefore, an individual has a change of heart which is wrought by faith, a change of life wrought by repentance, and a change of relationship effected by baptism (preceded by a confession of his faith in Christ), he is then converted. The Lord has promised to forgive the sins of all who have experienced this change. The person changed in this manner will rejoice, as the Ethiopian officer did, for he is assured by the promise of God that his sins have been pardoned. All truly converted persons who remain faithful unto death will be saved eternally.

## THE NEW BIRTH

EARLY in Christ's public ministry a man named Nicodemus came to him by night to seek further information about the kingdom of God. No one knows why he came to Jesus by night, because the Bible does not say. He was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews--a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, Israel's Supreme Court. Moreover, he was an honest man and willing to investigate. (Cf. John 7:50-52; 19:39.) These are commendable traits of character. Nicodemus was also a man of discernment, for he recognized that Christ's miracles were proof that Christ came from God. He admitted that no man could do such works unless God had sent him. He sought God's will from the right and only true source...Jesus Christ.

When Nicodemus opened the conversation with the words, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him," Jesus knew the thoughts of his mind (John 2:24, 25). He overlooked the compliments and addressed himself directly to the question of *how* one becomes a citizen of the kingdom of heaven: "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (John 3:3).

The language of Jesus puzzled Nicodemus. He could not understand how mature men could experience another physical birth. Hence he inquired, "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (John 3:4).

The Saviour explained, "*Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*" (John 3:5). There are not two new births, one of water and one of Spirit, but one. Both--water and Spirit--are required in the one *new birth*.

*The new birth* does not mean a second physical birth. Even if Nicodemus could have been born again physically, this would not have been the birth that Jesus had in mind. Christ first expressed to Nicodemus the *necessity of the new birth*; then he told him *of what it consists*. Jesus said that *the new birth* is absolutely necessary in order to become a citizen of the kingdom of God. This is one of the most important subjects which has ever engaged the attention of men. It is of the utmost importance that all understand what being “born again” is. *But what is it to be born again? What is included?*

Many have considered this subject one that can neither be understood nor explained. It should be kept in mind, however, that what is necessary for one to understand in order to be saved has been clearly revealed in God’s Word. Let all, therefore, study the language of Christ carefully in connection with other statements in the Scriptures on the same subject and learn the full meaning of what *the new birth* is.

### **I. *The Nature of the Kingdom of God***

By “*the kingdom of God*” Christ meant *the church, the spiritual institution soon to be set up by himself*. (Cf. Matt. 16:13-19; Heb. 12:22, 23, 28.) To “see the kingdom of God” meant to experience the blessings of it. All had to be born anew to enter into it.

The Jews were expecting the establishment of an earthly kingdom. Doubtless this is what Nicodemus had in mind, but the Lord corrected him. Under the old covenant, all the Jewish people were included as members, whether good or bad, by the process of natural birth.

God sent Christ to establish a new kingdom and a new covenant. Nicodemus would have to be born again to partake of the blessings of this kingdom. (See Matt. 3:7-9; Jer. 31:31-33; Heb. 8:8-12.) Since Christ’s

kingdom is a spiritual one, a different kind of birth is required to enter it. Jesus made a *spiritual* birth essential to being a child of God. In effect Jesus said, "Nicodemus, the miracles testify of me, but if you think that because you are a Jew or because you are a privileged person you are entitled to a place in my kingdom when it is established, you are wrong. The kingdom that I shall soon establish is not an earthly, fleshly kingdom; *you* will have to be *born again*. Your Jewish birthright will not give you membership in it. A physical birth put you into the kingdom of Israel, it is true, but a *new birth* is essential to put you into the kingdom of God."

Indeed, no one can enter the kingdom unless he is born again . . . all must experience that great change called *the new birth* in order to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom.

## **II. *The New Birth-the Door into the Kingdom***

Christ used the words "born again" to describe the process of becoming a Christian because there is similarity in some respects between a spiritual birth and a physical birth, but the two are not identical. The child is begotten by the seed of the father and later brought forth, or born, by the mother. When a child is born he enters into a new physical environment, a new life; he moves from one state into another. In a similar way, when one becomes a Christian, he undergoes a spiritual birth; he moves from a sinful state into a spiritual state; he enters into a new environment, the kingdom of God. Because of its parallels to a physical birth, the process of becoming a Christian is called a spiritual birth, or being "born again." When one becomes a Christian or a child of God, he undergoes this *new birth*. In Scripture this birth from above is also called "conversion" or being "added unto the Lord" (Matt. 18:3; Acts 15:3; 11:24; 5:14; 2:41, 47).

This *new birth* is a spiritual change—a spiritual birth into a spiritual kingdom.

### III. “*Born of Water and the Spirit*” Defined

Since *the new birth* is necessary for entrance into the kingdom of God, note now the meaning of Christ’s term “born of water and of the Spirit.”

For a spiritual birth, two things are necessary: (1) a begetting and (2) a bringing forth. By this spiritual conception and bringing forth one becomes a Christian or enters into the kingdom of God.

1. *A begetting by God through the Holy Spirit is necessary for rebirth.* Since there cannot be life in either the physical or spiritual realm without first a begetting, and since God is to all Christians their spiritual Father (Matt. 6-9; Rom. 1:7; 1 John 3:1, 2), one is said to be *begotten of God*: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God” (1 John 5:1, A.S.V.; cf. 1 John 2:29; 4:7).\*

*One is begotten of the word of God.* The following Scriptures show how people are begotten by the Father: (1) “Of his [God’s] own will begat he us with the word of truth” (Jas. 1:18). (2) “The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). (3) “Being born again [Having been begotten again, A.S.V.], not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever . . . And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Pet. 1:23, 25).

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\*If the reader turns to the King James Version of the Bible in these passages he will note the word is translated *born* rather than *begotten*. In the Greek New Testament the word “*gennaō*” can refer to either the begetting or the bringing forth, or to both. When the birth relates to the father, “*gennaō*” is properly rendered *begotten*; when the birth relates to the mother, it is translated *born*; when the relationship of the child to both parents is referred to, it is translated *born* (cf. Matt. 1:2; 2:1). This is why the American Standard Version uses the words *begotten* in these passages. [Paul, in his allegory with reference to the two covenants, says that “Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26).]

Hence, God begets by the word of truth. The gospel is the medium through which spiritual life is communicated; the germ is in the living seed. The Holy Spirit gave man the gospel through inspired men (1 Pet. 1:12; 2 Pet. 1:21). Jesus promised the apostles that the Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 16:13), and when He came to them they spoke "as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). Today the New Testament is the inspired book which contains that gospel message. Thus, one is begotten by the Father through the word in believing the gospel and may also be said to have been begotten or born of the Spirit. The Spirit begets by implanting the word in the heart of man through the gospel. When the gospel, the incorruptible seed of the kingdom, finds a place in the heart and is allowed to remain there, it produces spiritual life. Through the word, both God and the Spirit impart the divine life in the process of begetting.

While the gospel (the spiritual seed) is the instrument of begetting, God employs human agents in the use of the instrument. Paul said to the Corinthians, ". . . for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15). God, through the agency of Paul and the instrumentality of the word, begat the Corinthians. For when Paul planted the incorruptible seed in the hearts of the people, and they believed it, they were then begotten of God, because it was God's seed he planted; and they were begotten of Paul because he was God's agent in preaching the gospel. So, in literal terms, Paul said to the Corinthians, "I have made you believers by preaching the gospel to you" (cf. Phile. 10). Therefore, in the Scriptures the begetting act is attributed to God, the Holy Spirit, and sometimes to the preacher (1 John 5:1; 3:8; 1 Cor. 4:15). Hence, the Bible contains such expressions as "born [begotten] of God," "born of the Spirit," and



“begotten through the gospel.” These all relate to the same birth. One is not born of God, then of the Spirit, and then of the word of God. Thus, the power to beget in people a spiritual life is in the gospel, without which there can be no spiritual life. The Holy Spirit only begets through the word.

*One is begotten when he believes.* Since faith comes by hearing God’s word (Rom. 10:17), and since the one who has faith is begotten, this is how God begets. Faith is produced in the heart by the word, the Holy Scriptures. When the word of God is preached to people and they believe it, they are begotten of God.

*The begetting is only part of the new birth.* A begetting alone is not *the new birth* any more than a begetting alone is the natural birth. The believer is spiritually begotten, but he is not born again at that time any more than he was physically born the moment he was conceived. When one is begotten, he may then be born into the family of God, or he may refuse to be born again. (In this particular there is no parallel between a physical and a spiritual birth. In a physical birth the person has no choice of being begotten or born, but he does with his spiritual birth; he must learn and obey the gospel.) When one believes, or is spiritually begotten, he has the privilege to become a son.

“He [*i.e.*, Christ] came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:11-13).

Obviously, those who merely have the right to *become* sons of God are not already sons of God. A man, therefore, is not saved by “faith only” (Jas. 2:24; cf. John 12:42, 43).

Although the begetting must always precede the delivery, a person may be begotten yet never see life. After the begetting there must be a *bringing forth* to complete the process of birth. Believing on his name, then, does not make one a child of God but prepares him for becoming a child. Hence, the expression, "that which is born" (John 3:6), used by Christ in his conversation with Nicodemus, denotes the entire process of birth from conception to deliverance. Thus in every rebirth, there is first the begetting; afterwards comes the birth or delivery.

2. *A bringing forth or birth of water is necessary for being born anew. To be "born of water" means to be baptized.*

Although the process of entering the kingdom of God is explained by the analogy of a birth, this does not mean that the words *water* and *Spirit* are figurative. The words *water* and *Spirit* are used literally; they mean what they say—water and Spirit. There is nothing in this conversation to indicate that Nicodemus did not understand what the Lord meant by the words *water* and *Spirit*. No one could ever read John 3:5 and think that Christ meant anything else but water and Spirit if there had not been so much false teaching on baptism. The word *water* is used in John 2:7 and John 3:23, and it means water; yet some say the word *water* in John 3:5 does not mean water.

If "water" means "Spirit," as some say, then the passage should read, "Except a man be born of Spirit and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." This is absurd! If *water* and *Spirit* mean the same, would Christ have needlessly repeated the words? *Water* and *Spirit* are not the same, nor is water a symbol of the Spirit. Some say "water" symbolizes the word of God. This statement is contradicted by Ephesians 5:26, where Paul speaks of the church being

cleansed “with the washing of water by the word.” If it is a washing of water *by* or *with* the word, they cannot be the same. Again, some try to make it read “living water,” as in John 4:10 and John 7:38. This idea is refuted by Revelation 22:17. The expression, “water of life,” means the spiritual blessings in Christ, which are only enjoyed by those already born again. In every passage where *water* is figuratively used, the qualifying term is always found. Jesus did not say to Nicodemus that one must be born of “living water,” or “the water of life”; he simply said, “Born of water.”

A common teaching is that “born of water” refers to the natural birth and “born of the Spirit” refers to *the new birth*. This theory does not agree with the language of Jesus. Christ did not say, “Except a baby be born of water and a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” He said, “Except a *man* be born again, born of water and of the Spirit, he [the man, already born physically] cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” The natural birth is not the birth of water in John 3:5. *Amniotic fluid* is the substance in the natural birth, not water. (See *Webster’s Dictionary*.) Nicodemus had been born of human parents—the natural birth; now Christ tells him he must be born again—not physically, but of water and of the Spirit (both) in order to become a citizen of the kingdom of God. Nicodemus had not asked how a child could be born into the world but “How can a *man* be born when he is old?” The answer was, “He is born of water and of the Spirit.”

Then there are others who say, “I do not know what Jesus meant in John 3:5, but I know he did not mean water.” How do they know this? Certainly not from the Bible!

The reason “water” does not mean *water* to some people is that it makes baptism essential to salvation.

They do not want to believe that baptism is a divine condition of pardon, but any theory which says that Jesus does not allude to baptism in the term *water* in this passage is misleading. By the order of Christ, baptism is made essential for obtaining all blessings of the kingdom of God.

*All scholars agree that the word "water" in John 3:5 refers to baptism.* According to William Wall, a reliable ecclesiastical historian of the Church of England, all writers from the time of Christ to the days of John Calvin said "born of water" meant baptism. Note his words:

There is not one Christian writer of any antiquity in any language but what understands it of baptism. And if it be not so understood it is difficult to give an account how a person is born of water. . . . All the ancient Christians (without the exception of one man) do understand that rule of our Saviour. (John 3:5) "VERILY, VERILY, I SAY UNTO THEE, EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN OF WATER AND OF THE SPIRIT, HE CANNOT ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD," of baptism. . . . I believe Calvin was the first that ever denied this place to mean baptism. He gave another interpretation, which he confesses to be new (Wall, *History of Infant Baptism*, Vol. 1, pp. 92, 443).

Dean Alford, a noted Greek scholar, said:

There can be no doubt, on any honest interpretation of the words, that *gennethenai ek hudatos* (born of water) refers to the token or outward sign of baptism-*gennethenai ek pneumatatos* (born of Spirit) to the thing signified, or inward grace of the Holy Spirit. All attempts to get rid of these two plain facts have sprung from doctrinal prejudices, by which the views of expositors have been warped (*Greek Testament*, notes on John 3:5, Vol. 1, p. 714).

Timothy Dwight, once Yale College president, said:

To be 'born of water,' as here intended, is, in my view, to be baptized. . . . That to be born of water, and of the Spirit, is the same thing with being born again, must be admitted by every one, who is willing that our Saviour should speak good sense, since he obviously mentions in this whole discourse but one birth (*System of Theology*, sermon C L V I, Vol. V, p. 223).

H. A. W. Meyer, a noted Greek commentator of the Lutheran Church, in his notes on John 3:5, said:

. . . the necessity of baptism in order to participation in the messianic kingdom (a doctrine against which Calvin in particular, and other expositors of the Reformed Church contend) has certainly its basis in this passage (*Commentary on the New Testament*, Vol. III, p. 124).

Albert Barnes, a commentator of the Presbyterian Church, said on John 3:5:

*By water, here is evidently signified baptism. Thus the word is used in Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5 (Barnes on the New Testament, Luke-John, p. 210).*

J. W. Wilmarth, a noted Baptist scholar, said:

Baptism and Renewal by the Spirit are the conditions of true citizenship in the kingdom of God on earth (*Baptist Quarterly*, July, 1877, p. 309).

J. R. Graves, a prominent Baptist writer, said that “born of water” refers to the baptism of one previously born of the Spirit, and nothing else. He then added that this is

an interpretation that is sustained by the consensus of all scholars of all denominations in all ages (*Tennessee Baptist*, Oct. 30, 1886, p.5).

The effort to destroy the reference to baptism in John 3:5 is of modern origin. The whole religious world agreed, *until recent years*, that to be *born of water* meant to be baptized. Truly, it can be said that this interpretation “is sustained by the consensus of *all* scholars of *all* denominations in *all* ages,” and that all attempts to get rid of this fact have sprung from “doctrinal prejudices.” There can be no doubt, therefore, that “water” in John 3:5 refers to water baptism, and nothing else. Baptism is the only religious ceremony pertaining to salvation which makes use of water. In the Christian system water is never used in any ordinance except baptism.

According to the Bible, in baptism one is submerged completely and comes forth from the water. This is why Jesus refers to baptism as a *birth* of water. The Lord was buried in the grave, and from it he came forth; hence, he was *born* from the dead, and Paul declared him to be “the first-born from the dead” (Col. 1:18). If to arise from the grave means to be born from the dead, then to arise from the water means to be *born of water*. There is nothing which corresponds to a birth of water in all of God’s scheme of redemption except immersion in water. Baptism is both a burial and a resurrection, the act by which one is placed in

and delivered from the water. Note the language of Scripture:

“Therefore we are *buried* with him by baptism into death: *that like as* Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, *even so we also* should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

That baptism consists in the immersion of the whole person is further affirmed in Colossians 2:12,

“*buried with him in baptism*, wherein also ye are *risen with him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”

Conybeare and Howson in their great work, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, made this fine comment on Romans 6:4:

This passage cannot be understood unless it be borne in mind that the primitive baptism was by immersion (New Edition, 1962, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., Grand Rapids, p. 511).

John Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist Church, in his *Notes on the New Testament*, said:

“We are buried with him”—alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion.

Therefore, to be *born of water* and to be *immersed and raised to walk in newness of life* are identical. It is not possible for a person to be *born of water* when only a few drops are used. The individual who has had water sprinkled or poured upon his head cannot truthfully say that he has been *buried* with Christ in baptism. In all the Holy Scriptures, *water alone was never sprinkled on any person, for any purpose, in any age, by the Lord's authority*. The person who has not been immersed in water has not been born anew.

*By following the Holy Spirit's instruction one is immersed*. He is baptized according to the direction of the Spirit after he hears and believes the Spirit's message: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). Baptism is the means

appointed by the Spirit for translating the believer from one realm into another. One must be *born of water* in obedience to the Spirit's command. Therefore, in being born of the Spirit the human heart is regenerated with new and holy principles of life, and the love of sin is abandoned. The person resolves to turn to God in complete obedience and is immersed in water, arising to live a life of holiness. In this way people are "born of the Spirit" and are made Christians by "the law of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:2). Every change in this entire process is directed by the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is the divine agent in both actions of the spiritual birth—the begetting and the delivery; the written word of God is the instrument the Spirit uses to accomplish his work. Thus, the one who has been born again by its influence has, in reality, been born of the Spirit.

As already observed, a birth is a translation; it is a change of state or relationship, which results in a new life in a new realm. Therefore, *the new birth* brings one into a new state or environment, *i.e.*, into the kingdom of God. Paul said:

"Therefore if any man be *in Christ*, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Since one is a new creature *in Christ*, he enters into the new life when he enters into Christ. When does one enter into Christ? The Bible teaches entrance by baptism:

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were *baptized into Jesus Christ* were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3).

"For as many of you as have been *baptized into Christ* have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27).

The Bible says that a person is *baptized into Christ* and the person in Christ is then a new creature. One is not a new creature until he *enters* into Christ, and one

is not in Christ until he is baptized into him. At this time one is raised from the water to “walk in newness of life,” but not before. The new life follows the resurrection from baptism in water (Romans 6:4).

Life begins when the gospel is preached and a person believes it; then the penitent believer is baptized into Christ, and it is in Christ that the new life is enjoyed. Hence, the Bible teaches that baptism is a part of *the new birth*. The new life is produced by *the new birth*, and as one comes forth from the grave of baptism, he is a newborn babe in Christ, having been born of water and of the Spirit.

In being born again one is translated from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of Christ, where he obtains the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13, 14). The birth “of water and of the Spirit” in John 3:5 is the process by which one is translated from the world into the church, from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. One birth, of one element and one agent—the water and the Spirit—translates a man into the kingdom. *The new birth*, therefore, includes the *entire* process of becoming a child of God. In plain terms, being born again simply means becoming a Christian.

Consequently, when *the new birth* in its entirety is accomplished (1) the mind has been renewed, the heart has been changed, faith has been produced—that is the begetting, and (2) the individual has been baptized into Christ—that is the deliverance.

The metaphor of *the new birth* is ruined by either of the following processes: (1) when baptism is put before faith, since in infant baptism the birth occurs before the begetting; (2) when immersion is changed to sprinkling or pouring, since by neither act is there a coming out of the water or a birth of water.

#### **IV. *The Spiritual Part of Man Renewed***

Since Nicodemus in his conversation with Christ



seemed entirely mistaken about the kind of birth Jesus had in mind, Christ further said to him, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). By this Jesus meant that the physical birth is a birth of the flesh, and *the new birth* is a birth of the spirit of man. In *the new birth* the human spirit undergoes a deep and vital change in its conceptions and affections, which is produced by the Holy Spirit. The inner man is renewed in knowledge (2 Cor. 4:16; 5:1; Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24), but the man who is born again is the same physical man as he was before. Hence, in the spiritual birth, the *spirit* of man, the inward man, is born anew (cf. Romans 1:9; 7:22, 25).

Nicodemus must have marvelled at the thought of a spiritual birth, for Christ continued by saying, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). Then Jesus used the wind for an illustration. He said, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Much of the discussion concerning the work of the Holy Spirit as an agent in *the new birth* has been caused by a misconception of Christ's language in this passage. Many think this verse teaches the direct, irresistible, and mysterious operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion; that *the new birth* is a sudden, miraculous, and inexplicable experience, better felt than told. They say as the wind moves mysteriously, so does the Spirit, breathing upon whom he will arbitrarily, thereby affecting the inward change called the birth of the Spirit. But Jesus did not say, "As the wind . . . so is the Spirit," or "so is the operation of the Spirit," or "so does the Holy Spirit operate in *the new birth*." Neither was Christ talking about *the new birth* as a miraculous

process, nor was he talking primarily about the operation of the Holy Spirit. He did not say that *the new birth*, or that the *Spirit*, is like the wind blowing. He said, “. . . so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” The illustration of the unseen blowing of the wind shows that the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom; and that it is the spirit of man, the inner man-invisible, like the wind-that is begotten or born of the Spirit. The soul is the one that is born again.

David Lipscomb, a prominent nineteenth-century gospel preacher and writer, explained:

That which is born, or begotten, of the Spirit is not the fleshly man that you can see, but the intangible, spiritual part of man-the spirit, invisible, like the wind. (*A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1939, p. 46.)

It is a fallacy to insist that the Spirit works like the wind, blowing here and there, converting people independent of their wills by an irresistible act of God's will. The Holy Spirit always works in *the new birth* through the gospel and never in some direct, mysterious manner. If the Spirit does the work directly and miraculously, then God would be a respecter of persons if the Spirit did not transform everybody (Acts 10:34, 35). Christ's statement in John 3:8, therefore, cannot support the theory of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit in *the new birth*. One is born of the Spirit by *hearing* and *obeying* the Spirit's message, the gospel of Christ.

## V. *The New Birth Demonstrated*

By studying the many examples of conversion one learns exactly what *the new birth* is. These are recorded in the Book of Acts. For it is here, after the church was established, that the process of being born again is amply demonstrated. Although there is no record of the apostles saying, “You must be born again,” they preached its equivalent. Now note some examples which describe how souls were born anew into the kingdom of God.

1. On the day of Pentecost, the kingdom of Christ was established, and, as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles to guide them into all truth (John 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26, 27; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4). On that day, for the first time, the full gospel of Christ (including the facts of his death, burial, and resurrection) was presented. After the people had listened to Peter's sermon, many were convinced that Jesus was the Christ and cried out, "Men, and brethren, what shall we do?" He said, "Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). They were then clearly instructed in the way of salvation, *the new birth*. Three thousand obeyed and entered the kingdom of God that day. Several years later Peter wrote to Christians scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia and told them that they had been "born again" (1 Pet. 1:1, 23). Some of these were among those who had been saved on that Pentecost day (Acts 2:9, 10). When Peter preached the first gospel sermon, he sowed the seed of the kingdom; men heard it, believed it, and received it into their hearts and were begotten. When they asked what to do to be saved, they were told to repent and be baptized, and they obeyed. And all those who believed, repented, and were baptized for the remission of sins, were added to the church. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). That made them citizens of the kingdom, for the Lord's church is the kingdom. Therefore, the same process by which one enters the kingdom also adds him to the New Testament church. One cannot be a new creature in Christ without being in the church, the family of God (1 Tim. 3:15). The conversion of the three thousand, recorded in the second chapter of Acts, is a clear example of *the new birth*.

2. The conversion of the Samaritans, as a result of the preaching of Philip, is another example of *the new*

*birth*. The inspired evangelist went to Samaria and preached Christ. Many heard, believed, and were baptized (Acts 8:5-12). They were born again, born of water and of the Spirit.

3. The Ethiopian treasurer heard the gospel, believed it, confessed his faith in Christ, and, having a contrite spirit, was immersed (Acts 8:26-39). The eunuch arose from the water to a new life. He “went on his way rejoicing,” a new creature in Christ. He, too, underwent *the new birth*.

4. The entire process of the Corinthians’ *new birth* is expressed in these words: “And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).

So John 3:1-8 should be studied in connection with the simple examples of people being born again. What occurred in these instances is what Christ had in mind when he spoke to Nicodemus about being born of water and of the Spirit. In their preaching the apostles set forth *the new birth* in a very simple way when they told sinners what to do to be saved. Hence, *the new birth* can be best understood by an example, and there is no better way to explain Scripture than by Scripture. Therefore, hearing the gospel, believing the gospel, sincerely repenting of sin, confessing Christ to be God’s Son, and being baptized in the name of the Lord constitute the new birth. When one does these things, he enters into the kingdom of God.

## **VI. Parallel Scriptures**

In addition, note some other passages relating to this spiritual change, the new birth.

1. *Note these three statement of Christ regarding entrance into the kingdom:* (1) Born of water and of the Spirit = enter the kingdom (John 3:5); (2) be converted = enter the kingdom (Matt. 18:3); (3) do God’s will = enter the kingdom (Matt. 7:21). If one cannot understand the expression, “born of water and

of the Spirit,” then perhaps he can understand “conversion.” But if conversion, or turning to the Lord, cannot be understood, then surely “doing the Lord’s will” can be. All these terms are the same; and the result is the same—entrance into the kingdom. A person who does not obey the will of God cannot be a citizen of the kingdom. These three are equal to the same thing and must, therefore, be equal to each other.

2. *Observe that the new birth is explained in these words of Christ:* “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15, 16). During the Lord’s personal ministry he taught the principles of the kingdom of heaven in parables and figures of speech, but after his resurrection he gave plain commands. Jesus here, prior to his ascension, stated the same requirements for salvation that he did to Nicodemus, but this time he did not use a figure of speech. The two statements of Christ, John 3:5 and Mark 16:16, are identical in meaning.

3. *Compare the language of Christ with the statements of the Apostle Paul on the subject of the new birth:* Christ said, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Paul said, “. . . that he [Christ] might sanctify and cleanse it [*i.e.*, the church] with the washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5:26); “. . . not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he [God] saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit. 3:5). The essentials of these passages, placed in parallel, are:

John 3:5	Ephesians 5:26	Titus 3:5
1. Born of water	1. Washing of water	1. Washing of regeneration
2. Born of the Spirit	2. By the word	2. Renewal of the Spirit
3. Enter into the Kingdom	3. Cleansed	3. Saved

People are cleansed “with the washing of water by the word.” The *washing* is baptism. (Cf. Heb. 10:22; Acts 22:16.) The “washing of regeneration” is the washing that pertains to, or is a part of, *regeneration*. It, too, is baptism. Literally, these passages teach that people are saved by faith and baptism in obedience to God’s word (a parallel to John 3:5 and Mark 16:16).

*The new birth* is “regeneration,” meaning “beginning again,” or being re-born spiritually. It includes the *entire* process of initiation into the kingdom of God—faith and baptism. The “renewing of the Holy Spirit” is the Spirit producing faith in the heart through the word of truth. It is a necessary *part of the new birth*, but it is not *all* of it. Baptism is also a part of it. Baptism is not, however, the whole process of regeneration. Baptism is not *the new birth*. But it is included in *the new birth*. After the inward change is accomplished by the Spirit through the word, the individual is ushered into the kingdom by immersion.

To baptize an unbeliever or one incapable of belief is not New Testament baptism. Baptism is not merely a physical act. Scriptural baptism requires that the subject believe. A baby cannot be baptized because it lacks the prerequisites of baptism. The law of Christ’s kingdom excludes infants. Teaching must precede one’s baptism (Matt. 28:19, 20); everyone who becomes a member of the church must first be taught of God (John 6:45). Those who are members of the church are members by *faith* (Gal. 3:26, 27).

Furthermore, since Paul says that God saves by the “washing of regeneration”—which is baptism—but *not* by man’s works, baptism, then, is not a work of the righteousness of men. It is a work of the righteousness of God. (Cf. Matt. 3:15; Rom. 1:16, 17; 10:1-3; Acts 10:34, 35; Ps. 119:172; Isa. 64:6; John 6:28, 29.) There is no mystical power in baptism

itself; neither is there any mystical power in faith. Christ the Saviour becomes the author of one's salvation when he obeys him (Heb. 5:8, 9). Salvation is extended only to those who obey the Lord.

"Joining a church" is not synonymous with being "born again," in spite of the fact that the struggle for numbers has placed the names of thousands of people on church rolls, many of whom have never been born again. In reality such people are not in the Lord's church. Christ's statement, "*Except a man be born again . . . of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God,*" puts *the new birth* between the sinner and the kingdom of God.

## **VII. Summary**

In this study these facts have been noted:

1. Christ told Nicodemus that none could enter the kingdom of God without being born anew of water and the Spirit.

2. In the spiritual realm a person is begotten of God through the gospel, the seed of the kingdom.

3. One is begotten of the Father through the Holy Spirit when he believes the gospel.

4. After being begotten, or made a believer, one is born again when his faith leads him to repent, confess, and be immersed.

5. When the believing penitent is baptized, he is *then* born of water and of the Spirit and enters into the kingdom of God, God's family.

6. Therefore, except a person is immersed in water, after believing in his heart that Jesus is the Son of God, he cannot become a Christian.

# *The Holy Spirit*

## *In Conversion*

**T**O BECOME a citizen of the kingdom of God, a member of the church, one must be spiritually regenerated—born of the Spirit. In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus emphasized the necessity of one's being born again to enter the kingdom of heaven:

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the *Spirit*, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

All admit that an influence is exerted by the Spirit in conversion, or the new birth; but, the question is, “*How* is this influence exerted? Is it direct or indirect?” The issue is not what the Holy Spirit *can* do, but what he *does* according to the teaching of the Bible.

Some teach that in conversion the Holy Spirit acts in addition to and distinct from God's Word.

In this study it shall be shown that the Scriptures clearly teach that the Spirit *always* operates upon the sinner's heart through the Word and *only* through the Word. The Bible does not teach a direct, mysterious operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion.

### ***1. The Spirit and His Instrument***

The Bible plainly teaches that the Holy Spirit is a divine person and not a mystical influence. He is a *person* of the God-head. He is *one* with the



Father and the Son; he is a personal, intelligent and divine being. Things are said of him that could only be said of a personality. (See Acts 17:29; John 14:16; 16:7-14; 4:24; Romans 8:26, 27; Ephesians 4:30; I Timothy 4:1; Acts 20:23; 21:11.)

Jesus said the Holy Spirit, "when *he* is come, will convict the world in respect of sin" (John 16:8, American Standard Version). But *how* does the Spirit convict of sin? ". . . by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20; cf. Romans 7:7). The Holy Spirit, as a *person*, uses law as an *instrument* to convict of sin. The medium through which the Holy Spirit accomplishes his mission is the Word of God. There is no other way to convict of sin.

One should keep in mind the distinction between the Spirit and the words of the Spirit; the Spirit is a person; the word is an instrument. People are not converted by the Word only nor by the Spirit only, but by the Spirit acting through the Word. The Word of God is the instrument employed by the Holy Spirit in dealing with the hearts of men.

Note the following example: "Mr. Doe cuts down his tree with an ax." Doe cuts down the tree; the ax cuts down the tree. Doe, the man, exerts his power indirectly through an instrument to cut down the tree. Now, apply this to the Holy Scriptures. The word is the "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17). In conversion, the Spirit pierces the heart. But, does the Spirit, the person, pierce without his sword? No. The conversion of the Pentecostians is a good example of his work (Acts 2). On that day hearts were "pierced," people were convicted, and three thousand turned to the Lord. Now, the gospel was the power which converted these individuals. The Spirit influenced them by his *words*. The Holy Spirit did the work, but

not in a *direct* manner: he used his sword. It was the word of God, preached by the Spirit through the apostle Peter, that "pricked" these people in their hearts. The Bible says, "Now when they *heard* this, they were *pricked* in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, does not say, "When they *felt* this . . .," but "When they *heard* this. . . ." By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter preached Christ as the Son of God. The Spirit, by the words of Peter, made believers—convinced them that they had taken the Christ and killed him and assured them that God had raised him from the dead. In his sermon Peter used the Spirit's sword, the Word of God (cf. Acts 7:54).

The baptism of the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4) came not to the sinners but to the apostles, and its purpose was to guide them into all truth. Peter did not tell his hearers that they needed "Holy Spirit baptism," nor that they should remain passive to the will of God. Instead, after they had believed in Christ, he told them to "repent, and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:36-38). All who complied—*obeyed* the commands of the Spirit—were saved and added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). Therefore, by this example it can be clearly seen *how* the Holy Spirit operates upon the sinner in conversion. The Holy Spirit does not by-pass the ordinary human faculties in conversion. Rather he works through these faculties, the intellect and the emotions, to convict men of sin and bring them to obedience. One learns how the Spirit works in conversion or regeneration by a study of the examples of rebirth in the Book of Acts of the Apostles (cf. Acts 8:35-39; 16:25-34).

One may ask, "Were the three thousand born of water and of the Spirit?" All agree that they were. But how? A Spirit-filled man, directly endowed, preached the word; people received the word; they believed the word; they were baptized. The events of this day may well be summarized as follows: (1) The Spirit descended upon the apostles, fulfilling the promise made in John 16:7-15. (2) The apostles, filled with the Spirit, preached the gospel to the people, and through the gospel the Spirit convicted the great multitude of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. (3) The preaching worked on the minds of the hearers, changed their convictions and feelings, and brought them to believe in Jesus as Lord and Christ. (4) Then they were taught to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. (5) As many as were quickened by the Spirit of God through the words of the apostles were baptized (born of water and of the Spirit). These were admitted into the kingdom of God.

Thus, (1) the Holy Spirit is the agent; (2) the gospel is the instrument employed by the Spirit; (3) the gospel is proclaimed by men; (4) the word of God is received by the sinner. These four facts are always found operating together in the work of regeneration. No one is born again in unbelief. There is no example in the Bible of any one's being born anew until he himself humbly submitted his will to God. When individuals hear, believe, and obey the gospel (the message given by the Spirit), they are born from above—born again by the Holy Spirit. Hence, when believing penitents are immersed in water in obedience to apostolic precept, they are acting under the guidance, direction, and influence of the Holy Spirit.

## A. THE SPIRIT AND THE WORD IN CONVERSION

*The gospel is the instrument which the Spirit always uses in his work of conversion:*

1. Life of every kind is preceded by birth. Jesus says that a man must be born again before he can see the kingdom of God. But in order for one to be born again, one must be *begotten*. Now, how is a person begotten? The Bible says it is by the Word of God.

“Of his own will begat he us with the *word of truth*” (James 1:18).

“For in Christ Jesus I have *begotten* you through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15).

Peter declares that all Christians have been born again by the Word:

“Being *born again*, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the *word of God*, which liveth and abideth forever” (1 Peter 1:23).

Is one born again by the Spirit? Yes, but only as the Holy Spirit works through the Scriptures. He does not convert one by direct operation outside of the Scriptures. The new birth is affected through truth—that is, by hearing and obeying the inspired message, the gospel of Christ. When an act is said to have been performed by a *person* and by a certain instrument, it is clearly understood that the person did the act but used the instrument as a *means*.

2. One must be *quickened*. But how is the sinner quickened, or made alive? He is quickened by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God.

“This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath *quicken*ed me” (Psalms 119:50).

“I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast *quicken*ed me” (Psalms 119:93).

“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1).

The Bible says that the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6). But *how* does the Spirit give life? Jesus said concerning his teaching:

“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

So, the Spirit gives life through the gospel of Christ.

3. One must be *converted*. But how does conversion occur? One is converted by the perfect law, God’s Word.

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul” (Psalms 19:7).

4. One must be *saved*. But how is salvation wrought? One is saved by the Lord through submission to his Word.

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). Cornelius was told to send for Peter, “. . . who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:14).

5. One must be *enlightened*. But how does enlightenment come? God enlightens through the Word.

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a *light* unto my *path*” (Psalms 119:105).

“The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth *understanding* unto the simple” (Psalms 119:130; cf. Psalms 73:24).

“The commandment of the Lord is pure, *enlightening* the eyes” (Psalms 19:8).

6. In order to be saved one must have *faith*. But how does faith come? The Bible says it comes by the Word of God.

“So then *faith* cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye *might believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:30-31).

“And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should *hear the word of the gospel, and believe*” (Acts 15:7).

7. One must be made *free*. But how does freedom come? Jesus taught that it is through the truth that freedom may be obtained.

“And ye shall know the truth, and *the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:32).

8. One must be *called*. But how is a person called? He is called by the gospel.  
 "Whereunto he *called* you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:14).
9. One must be *drawn*. But how are people drawn to the Lord? They are drawn by the teaching of the Word. The man who hears and learns comes to the Lord; but he cannot come unless he is drawn. *God draws him by teaching*.  
 "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me *draw* him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all *taught* of God. Every man therefore that hath *heard*, and hath *learned* of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:44-45).
10. One must be *cleansed*. But how is an individual cleansed? He is cleansed by the blood of Christ (I John 1:7; 2:2) through obedience to his teaching.  
 "Now ye are *clean* through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3).  
 "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word" (Psalms 119:9).
11. One must be *sanctified*. But how? One is sanctified by the Lord (I Thessalonians 5:23) in obedience to the Scriptures. The Bible also teaches that a person is sanctified by the Spirit (I Corinthians 6:11). The Spirit sanctifies through the Word, and never apart from it.  
 "*Sanctify* them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

12. One must be *purified* in soul. But how is it done? One's soul is purified by the blood of Christ in obedience to the truth.

"Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to *the truth* unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently" (1 Peter 1:22 ASV).

#### B. THE POWER OF GOD IN SALVATION

Again, the Bible very plainly affirms that the Lord, in saving men, exerts his power through his word; *the gospel is God's power to save all who believe.*

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

In this passage of Scripture two facts are clearly stated: (1) The complete efficacy of the gospel to save and (2) the universality of the gospel power in reaching all who will believe, without any distinction in race or nationality. Truly, the world needs to learn that the power by which God saves is his gospel, that this message is the only hope for salvation.

The gospel, when preached in its purity and simplicity, is the most potent force in all the world. It is more powerful than atomic bombs. They can abolish cities, but they cannot save souls. Neither the opinions of men nor the wisdom of philosophers can save the souls of men. The gospel is the power by which God saves and makes people his children. The Bible does not mention any *additional* power in conversion. Of a truth, the *gospel* of Christ is the power of God unto salvation.

Inspired men never prescribed anything else



except the power of God for saving the lost. When people pray for God to send down "converting power," they thereby deny that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. But, since the gospel is God's power to save, and the word contains that gospel, praying for God to send down "converting power" is useless. What further power is needed? Remember, the means of conviction are the Scriptures, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." The Holy Spirit, therefore, does not need to act, in addition to the Word, upon the heart of a sinner. The Bible does not teach that sinners will receive the Spirit miraculously nor that they feel any direct impact of the Spirit. The sinner need not wait to hear a "still, small voice" or experience a miraculous conversion "better felt than told." An unsaved person must hear the gospel, believe it, and obey it.

#### C. THE GOSPEL—THE SEED OF THE KINGDOM

The Parable of the Sower teaches the absolute necessity of the Word of God, *the spiritual seed*, for conversion (Luke 8:4-15; Mark 4:1-20; Matthew 13:3-23). Neither in the natural nor in the spiritual realm can there be life without seed. Seed is essential for making Christians. The word is the seed of the kingdom. Christ said:

"The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11).

The word of God is to the spiritual kingdom what the grain of wheat is to the natural kingdom: it contains the germ of life. If no seed is planted, there is no harvest; if no gospel is preached, there are no Christians. The human heart is the soil, and the seed enters it when man hears.

Why does Satan try to remove the word immediately from the minds of those who have heard it? He knows its power. The seed will bring forth

new life. The Bible says that all the saved are begotten again by this seed (1 Peter 1:23). This passage says that the word of God is the means by which a new life is created within the heart; and it also asserts that the seed of the kingdom possesses a vitality that can never decay or be destroyed. Unlike the seeds of the physical world, which are corruptible, God's word lives and abides forever. And Peter adds, "And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (vs. 25).

This gospel, preached by the apostles, is life-begetting and indestructible. This disproves the pernicious idea that the word of God is utterly powerless until the Holy Spirit operates upon the sinner in some mysterious manner. The quickening power which the Spirit originally imparted to the gospel is still retained. The Holy Spirit imparts life through the gospel—the living, life-giving seed. Thus, Satan is never more successful than when he persuades men that the Bible is a *dead letter*; for when he does this, he robs man of his means of salvation.

The transmission of life is somewhat mysterious to the human mind. The farmer may not know all about the beginning of life in the vegetable kingdom, but he sows his seed anyway, knowing that life is transmitted through it. This is true in the realm of *grace*. The gospel must first be preached. Without this seed there can be no conversion. *How* spiritual life is transmitted through the word is not the point. The point is that *Christians cannot be made without it*. The importance of this issue is not how the seed gets into the heart but the result it produces. Satan knows how people are converted; so, whenever it is possible, he steals "the word out of their hearts, lest they should

believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). In view of these facts, the Great Commission given by the Savior to his apostles assumes vast importance:

"Go ye into all the world, and *preach the gospel to every creature*. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16).

What is it one believes? It is *the gospel*, "for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." What is it that will damn him if he does not believe? It is his *disobedience to the gospel*.

Because of what God's Word does, Paul solemnly charged Timothy to "preach the word" at all times (2 Timothy 4:1,2).

#### D. THE POWER AND ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES

Now note some further facts about the power of God's Word. The Scriptures assert that the world was created by the Word of God. In all ages, scientists and philosophers have speculated about the beginning of things. The Bible says that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). The means used in this process was the Word.

"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth . . . he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalms 33:6, 9).

The Creator *spoke* the universe into existence—a truth which all must accept by faith, since no one is capable of telling by observation how the world began:

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which

do appear" (Hebrews 11:3).

While Christ was upon the earth, his words were powerful. All of the miracles wrought by Christ were by the Word of his power. (Cf. Matthew 8: 26-32; 14:19; Luke 7:1-15; John 11:43). He had but to speak the word and the deed was done. Likewise, in his teaching, "his word was with power" (Luke 4:32).

Through Isaiah God declared that his Word would not return unto him void but would accomplish the purpose whereunto it was sent (Isaiah 55:10, 11). Again, through Jeremiah, God said:

"Is not my word like as a fire? . . . and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:29).

The Bible declares that no word from God is void of power (Luke 1:37, ASV). God's Word has always been powerful.

Like its Author, God's Word is eternal; it shall never pass away (Isaiah 40:8; I Peter 1:24,25). Jesus said:

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35).

The Bible is not dead, as some say; rather it is *alive, active, and powerful*. It abounds with the energy of spiritual life.

"For the word of God is quick [living], and powerful [active, energetic], and sharper than any two-edged sword . . ." (Hebrews 4:12).

The word (in the heart, not on the printed page) saves, quickens, and converts. There is no power in paper and ink; the power lies within God's thoughts in the words. The Bible contains God's revealed thoughts. Surely, God's Word is no less powerful when written than when spoken concerning the truth of man's salvation.

The Lord has given to man in his Word "*all things that pertain unto life and godliness*" (2 Peter 1:3). The Bible emphasizes that the Holy Scriptures are an all-sufficient guide to man in all of his religious duties; there is not anything that people need in being saved that is not supplied by the Word of God. There is not a single step that a person is called upon to take from the time he leaves the world of sin until at last he enters heaven, the eternal home of the soul, which is not affected either directly or indirectly by the Word of God. All that man needs, therefore, for his soul's salvation is furnished in the Holy Scriptures, his only divinely-given rule of faith and practice.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

Furthermore, regardless of the extent of a man's degradation, he can be transformed into a Christian by obeying the gospel. The power of the gospel to save the worst of sinners is clearly evidenced in the record of Paul's preaching at Corinth, a city of drunkards, extortioners, and libertines. The converts were generally humble people who had sunk in iniquity. "For ye see your calling, brethren," wrote Paul to them afterwards, "how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." Then, after naming the vices which were common to the Corinthians—idolatry, adultery, sodomy, drunkenness, and thieving—Paul said significantly, "*And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

If the gospel could save the Corinthians from sin, it can save anybody from sin who will accept it. Describing their conversion, the Book of Acts says, "Many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). The New Testament describes several conversions, but that of the Corinthians suffices to demonstrate the power of the gospel to save.

The Bible says the Word of God is "able to save" souls, regardless of their sinful condition (James 1:21). Then, why do some say that the Word requires *additional* power to save? The *gospel, as it is, is able to save man as he is, when he obeys it*. God's written word as contained in the Bible is powerful enough to accomplish all that the Lord intended for it to accomplish. It is not, therefore, a weak and powerless thing. Today God's power to save the lost is in the gospel or his teaching; this is all Jehovah uses in conversion.

After one becomes a child of God, he needs *food* that he may grow and become strong in the Lord's family. Children of God grow by feeding upon his Word.

"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (I Peter 2:2; cf. Acts 20:32; Job 23:12).

". . . give attendance to reading . . . Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them . . ." (I Timothy 4:13, 15; cf. Revelation 2:7).

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

At the day of final reckoning all people will be *judged*. People will be judged by the Word. Speaking of the judgment, Jesus said:

“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48; cf. Revelation 20:12).

The Scriptures plainly teach that the Holy Spirit does not operate either on aliens or Christians except through the instrumentality of revealed truth (the Bible). (Cf. Ephesians 3:3-5, 17; 5:18, 19; Colossians 3:16.) The Spirit leads, guides, and directs the child of God through the Word, by faith, and in no other way (2 Corinthians 5:7; Romans 10:17). The Bible is the inspired, final, complete and perfect revelation of God—man’s only inerrant and authoritative guide in all spiritual matters (1 Corinthians 2:10-13; 2 John 9-11; Jude 3).

## II. *The Nature of Man*

Many have a false view of the nature of man. They think that people are totally depraved from birth and that a direct operation of the Spirit is necessary for conversion. The Bible, however, does not teach hereditary depravity. “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). Sin is committed by a *person*; it is an act; it cannot be inherited.

“The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son” (Ezekiel 18:20).

Infants are not born in sin. They cannot inherit the *acts* of their parents. Sins are not transmitted from parent to child (cf. Matthew 18:1-3; 19:14).

Again, concerning sin, the Scripture says:

“And you did he make alive, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins . . . and were by nature children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:1, 3, A.S.V.).

Notice, this verse does not say “dead by inheritance,” nor “born dead,” but “dead through *your* trespasses and sins.” The word “born” does not appear in this passage. “By nature” in Verse 3 means, as in 1 Corinthians 11:14, “custom,” “practice,” or “second nature.” The expression is used to describe the Ephesian’s conduct before they obeyed the gospel. They were dead in sin because of their own trespasses. (See also verse 5.) It is true that *physical death* comes to all mankind because of Adam’s sin (1 Corinthians 15:22), but it is *not* true that all people are *born* in sin because of Adam’s transgression. It is *man’s* sins that separate him from God.

“. . . your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1-2; cf. Colossians 1:21).

When the gospel is preached, the Spirit operates through the word on those who hear. They can obey the teaching and be saved; or they can reject it and be lost (Acts 28:27). One resists the Spirit when he rejects the words of the Spirit, for he has the moral freedom to obey or disobey the gospel (Acts 7:51; Nehemiah 9:30). Jesus said, “And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40). He did not say, “Ye *cannot* come,” but “Ye *will* not.”

There is no power in all the universe that will save sinners when they refuse to obey the gospel. God will not *force* anyone to obey him. If the sinner rejects the message of salvation and is eternally lost, the fault is his own. He could have been saved. God would have been delighted to save his soul rather than damn him for his disobedience. “The Lord is not . . . willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter



3:9; cf. Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11; Acts 24:25; 28:23-28).

### **III. No Direct Operation of the Spirit**

The Bible does not recount anyone's having been reborn by a vague, unexplainable influence of the Spirit. Nor is there an example of any sinner's experiencing a direct impact of the Spirit during his conversion. Moreover, no inspired man taught that such an operation was necessary. No inspired man of God ever taught sinners to come to the altar and "pray for pardon." None mentioned "instantaneous conversion," or "getting religion," or "having an experience of grace." Such phrases are modern; they indicate a misunderstanding of the Biblical teaching. People mentioned in Bible accounts of conversion were converted by the power of God's Word. In every example, the gospel was preached. Although the sinner did not regenerate himself, he was regenerated by hearing and obeying the gospel, the Spirit's message.

If the Holy Spirit converts in a direct way, separate from the word, why are not all people converted? Why are the heathen not converted by the thousands? But Christians are *not* found where the gospel has never been heard. Hence, missionaries are sent to preach the word to the lost in order that they may believe it and be saved. If the theory of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion were true, why send men into all the world to preach the gospel? Men who hold the position that the Holy Spirit converts in a direct way cannot answer these questions.

If a direct operation of the Spirit is necessary in conversion, then God is showing partiality when he does not convert all. If the Lord withholds his

converting power from some and sends it to others, he is a respecter of persons. However, the Bible plainly says that "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; 1 Peter 1:17). This theory of the special operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion eliminates all human responsibility. If true, this theory makes God wholly responsible when the sinner is damned at the Judgment.

Eve was influenced to sin by the *words of Satan* (Genesis 3:1-6, 13). Man today is influenced to righteousness by the Word of God. Are Satan's words more powerful than God's? According to the direct-operation theory, God is not able by his word alone to reach the hearts of sinners.

Furthermore, if the Holy Spirit exerts a direct influence in conversion, *apart from the word*, the gospel is not God's power to save (Romans 1:16).

As already observed, in the beginning of the Christian era the Spirit came to the apostles, and they spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. When the people heard the apostles, they heard the Spirit speaking. The new birth was produced when they believed and obeyed what they heard. Today when people hear the gospel, they hear the voice of the Spirit. This is the only manner by which one hears the Spirit's voice. Although inspired men are not living today, their writings exist; the Holy Scriptures are inspired (Nehemiah 9:30; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:21; 2 Samuel 23:2).

In the apostolic age many were not converted. But it was not because some special power was withheld; their own wills decided the matter (cf. Acts 24:25; 26:28). However, those who were saved heard the gospel, believed it, repented of their sins, and, following a confession of their faith in Christ as God's Son, were baptized. There-

by they entered into the kingdom (Acts 2).

The rich man in torment is the only one recorded in the Bible who ever asked God for help beyond his inspired Word. His request was denied (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead and warn his five brothers on earth to repent that they might escape the terrible place where he then was. Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." If the rich man, then in torment, had given heed to the law and the prophets, he would not have been where he was. The same plight could be avoided by his brethren if they would only hearken to the teachings of the Sacred Scriptures. Today people have both the Old and New Testaments (Moses and the prophets, and Christ and the apostles). This is all that God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit will ever send to produce repentance. No miracle will be performed. The Scriptures are sufficient for the accomplishment of that which God intended—namely, the salvation of the souls of men and women. All should take heed, therefore, *how* they hear (Luke 8:18), and *what* they hear (Mark 4:24).

#### ***IV. Conclusion***

In this study it has been learned that in the conversion of a sinner the Holy Spirit always works through the Word and not independently of it; He never works in some direct, mysterious manner.

The truth of God is the medium through which the Holy Spirit begets, quickens, and converts the sinner. He who repents of his sins, after being taught the gospel, confesses his faith in Christ and is baptized, becomes a Christian and may enjoy all the promises of God. If he is faithful until death, *he shall receive the crown of life* (Revelation 2:10).

## *The Thief on the Cross*

**W**HILE Christ was on the cross, crucified between two thieves, both of them at first railed on him. But later one changed his attitude:

“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42, 43; cf. Matthew 27:32-44; Mark 15:27-32).

Notice the meaning of the account of this thief on the cross.

### *1. What Did the Thief Ask of Jesus?*

Did the thief ask for forgiveness? He said, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” Now, what did he mean by this request? What *kind* of kingdom did he have in mind?

During Christ’s life on earth, the kingdom of heaven was preached as being near, or at hand (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). But people generally thought of an earthly, material kingdom. The apostles themselves held this view, even until some days after Christ’s resurrection (Matthew 20:20-28; Acts 1:6). Is it likely that this thief knew more about the nature of the kingdom of Christ than did the apostles, who had been closely associated with Jesus for a little more than three years? Possibly, the thief, having heard about Jesus and his mighty miracles, thought that if Jesus could open the eyes of the blind, raise the dead, walk on the waters, and

do other miraculous things, he could (or would) come down from the cross, establish his kingdom, and rule over his enemies. Changing from his mockery, therefore, the thief repented and said, "Lord, remember *me* when thou comest into *thy* kingdom." His question might have meant, "Will you also take me down, Jesus?" However, Christ did not at this time explain to him the nature of his kingdom (cf. John 18:36). He simply said to the thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

## II. *What Did Christ's Answer Contain?*

What did Jesus mean when he answered the thief? Was he forgiving his sins? It is usually thought that he did. However, to what did he refer when he said, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise"?

Jesus could not have been referring to the grave, for Paradise does not mean the grave. He had reference to their *spirits* and not to their bodies. He meant that they were both going to die and that their spirits would be together that day "in paradise."

On Pentecost, when he spoke of Christ's resurrection, Peter said: ". . . his soul was not left in hell [or "Hades," as the American Standard Version renders it], neither his flesh did see corruption" (Acts 2:31; cf. verse 27). Christ's spirit was in "Hades" while his body was in the tomb.

The word "Hades" refers to the place to which disembodied spirits (or souls) go at death to await the resurrection.<sup>1</sup> "Paradise," as used here by Christ, refers to a compartment of Hades and is the abode

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, New York: American Book Co., 1889, page 11.

of the righteous spirits, the blessed dead<sup>a</sup> (cf. Luke 16:22, 23; 2 Peter 2:4).

Christ's spirit left his body when he died on the cross (John 19:30). The spirit of the thief likewise left its tabernacle (or house of clay) when he died. The spirits of both Christ and the thief went into Paradise *that day*. Jesus and the robber were together in Hades while they were together in Paradise. However, Christ's spirit came out of Hades on the third day, the first day of the week; and his body, by the power of God, was raised from the dead and did not see corruption (Luke 24:1-8; 1 Corinthians 15:4; Acts 13:36-37). The body of the thief, on the other hand, did not arise but remained in the grave; it will remain there until the day of resurrection, when Christ shall come and "all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth. . . ." (John 5:28-29).

Neither did Christ in his statement to the thief refer to *heaven*. Christ ascended to heaven *forty days after* his resurrection (Acts 1:3-11; Mark 16:19). When the thief died, he *did not* go to heaven where God dwells; he went with Christ to Hades, the unseen abode of the spirits of the dead, and will not go to heaven until after the resurrection of the last day. At the judgment, the Lord will say to the righteous: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom . . ." and to the wicked: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire . . ." (Matt. 25:34, 41).

### **III. Is His Case Applicable Today?**

What the thief did or did not do for his salvation has nothing to do with what the Lord requires

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<sup>a</sup> *Ibid*, p. 480.

today. Why? It is because man now is living under a *different will*.

#### **IV. The Conditions Are Different** **"While the Testator Liveth"**

The Lord had the right, before his death, to bestow his blessing of forgiveness whenever and upon whomsoever he pleased and on any conditions that pleased him. Suppose that a man makes a *will* for the disposal of his estate; while he lives, he may give of his property to whomever he chooses. So it was with Christ. During his ministry he extended forgiveness of sins to whomsoever he desired and upon various conditions. Note some examples:

##### **1. The Palsied Man**

Four men brought to Jesus a man sick of palsy. Jesus said to the man, "Son, thy sins be forgiven." When some were amazed at his right to forgive sins, he replied:

"Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that *the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins*, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house" (Mark 2:5-12).

People ask, "Was that man told to be baptized?" Of course he was not! Neither does the passage state that he was *told* to believe on Christ nor to repent to be forgiven. Nevertheless, the Bible plainly declares that Jesus forgave the man's sins. But does this imply that anyone today need not do these

things in order to be forgiven? No! For the *will* of Christ, which requires baptism of a penitent believer for the remission of sins, was not then in force; the New Testament was not then binding because this was during the earthly ministry of Jesus.

### 2. The Sinful Woman

Once a penitent woman came to Christ and bathed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair.

“And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. . . Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace” (Luke 7:48-50).

Again people ask, “Since she was forgiven and was not told to be baptized, why cannot a person be saved today and not be baptized?” The *will* of Christ under which man lives now had not become effective. *This is the answer to it.* One may conclude that she was never baptized, but it is immaterial insofar as *salvation* today is concerned.

### 3. Zacchaeus

The same could be said concerning the case of Zacchaeus:

“And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forso much as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:9, 10).

One should remember, however, that these people were under the law of the Old Testament. All Israelites were referred to as “the children” to distinguish them from the Gentiles who were “aliens” and “dogs” (cf. Matthew 15:25-26; Deuteronomy 7:6; Amos 3:2). It is true that many of



the Jews were called "lost sheep" (Matthew 10:6), but they were never referred to as aliens. Note that Jesus referred to Zacchaeus as "a son of Abraham." The publican who said, "God be merciful to me a sinner," was not an alien (Luke 18:10-14). When the law of Moses was removed by the death of Christ and the New Testament became operative, the Israelites ceased to be God's chosen people. (cf. Ephesians 2:11-16; Romans 2:28-29; 9:6; Galatians 3:24-29.) Jesus told Nicodemus that Jewish blood would avail nothing in the *new* kingdom which was about to be established, and that to enter his kingdom, one must be born anew, of water and the Spirit (John 3:1-5). Hence, the thief, the penitent woman, the palsied man, and Zacchaeus were forgiven as *erring children* and not as *alien* sinners.

#### 4. Rich Young Ruler

Christ told the rich young ruler to sell what he had, give it to the poor and follow him (Luke 18:18-23). But this he did not do. Now, why not tell everyone to sell all his goods and give to the poor in order to receive eternal life? Of course everyone understands that this was not a universal command. But neither were the other conditions which Christ sometimes prescribed to forgive men before his death.

#### 5. The Thief on the Cross

While Christ was still living, he said to the thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." But a testament, or *will*, is in effect only *after* the death of its maker. Therefore, since the thief lived and died before the New Testament could become effective, he was *never* subject to its conditions.

Today one is under the New Testament of Christ; the "first" Testament has ceased and is no longer binding (Colossians 2:14; Romans 6:14). Man must keep in mind that he is *living on this side of the cross of Christ and that the thief lived on the other side of the cross*. The thief received his promise of being with Christ in Paradise while the Old Testament was still in force, for the old one continued in force until Christ died. Therefore, the thief's salvation *cannot* be a model case of conversion under the *Christian* dispensation, for the thief was never under Christ's new *will*.

The cross of Christ stands between the old law and the new.

"For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Hebrews 7:12).

While living under the priesthood of Christ, man is under his law. Regardless of what people did to obtain pardon while Christ was *on the earth* before the law was changed, salvation today is not affected. People now live *after* Christ's death and after the *New Testament* has gone into effect. So, *all must obey it*. Hence, people now *cannot* be saved as the thief *even though they* may desire it (Romans 10:9-10; Mark 16:16). Christ made a *will* in which he named the conditions of forgiveness, and people today must comply with these conditions. That *will* is to continue in force until the end of time.

All agree that during his personal ministry Christ forgave sins by means of various conditions. Christ forgave the thief, the palsied man, and the penitent woman; but these cases do not annul the fact that one must *obey the conditions* prescribed in the *New*

*Covenant* in order to have forgiveness of sins. Those events during the personal ministry of Jesus are *not* cases of *gospel* conversions; they do not apply now because the testator was living. After his death, Christ blesses men only upon condition of his *will*. Today no one receives remission of sins without complying with the terms of the *will*, the commands of the *gospel*.

#### *V. Paul Presents the Gospel as a Will*

“And for this cause he [Christ] is the mediator of the *new testament* [will], that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. *For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth*” (Hebrews 9:15-17).

The practice of people making *wills* has been customary for a long time. In this passage the writer is talking about the New Testament of Christ and especially of the *time when* it went into effect. This New Covenant is like a *will*. Now, the requirements of an effective *will* are:

1. A *testator*—The will-maker, who must be of age and in his right mind. (Christ, as testator, fulfilled this requirement—Luke 3:23.)

2. A *legacy*—Something to bequeath. (Jesus had the gift of salvation to bestow—John 10:10; 2 Corinthians 8:9.)

3. *Heirs*—Individuals to receive certain benefits of the estate. (Our Lord offered pardon to the whole world—Matthew 11:28; Titus 2:11; Revelation 22:17.)

4. *Conditions*—A *will* may or may not be conditional; if there are conditions, they must be given in clear language by the testator and performed by the heirs in the precise manner required. (The *will* of Christ is conditional; the commands of the gospel are the conditions.)

5. *Witnesses*—To be legal a *will* must have competent witnesses. (Christ's apostles were his witnesses—Luke 24:38; Acts 1:8, 21, 22; 2:32; 26:16-18).

6. *The death of the testator*—The testator must first die before his *will* becomes operative. (Our Savior died on the cross—John 19:30, 33, 34.)

7. *Executors*—After the death of the testator, the *will*, when probated, becomes effective; then the executors administer the estate according to the *terms* of the *will*. (Following the death of Christ, the Holy Spirit was sent to the apostles to guide them into all truth that they might make known unerringly the conditions of pardon as given by Christ in his *will*—John 14:26; 16:13; Luke 24:49.)

The Bible emphasizes the fact that there *must* be the *death* of the will-maker before the *will* becomes operative; a *will*, or testament, is not in effect until *after* the death of the testator (Hebrews 9:16, 17). While the testator lives, he may do

what he pleases with what he has; but after his death the only way he can dispense the blessings of his estate is through his *will*. Too, while the testator lives, he may change his will, tear it up, or have no will at all. But if he makes a *will* and later dies, that will goes into effect after his death. Everyone understands that clearly. Now, when did the New Testament, the *will* of Christ, go into effect? The answer is, *after the death of Christ*.

The question now is, "What are the *conditions of pardon* of Christ's *will*?"

The terms of forgiveness in the *will* of Christ, which are to be made known through preaching and teaching, are: (1) faith, (2) repentance, and (3) baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These he stated in the great commission.

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and *teach* all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:18, 19).

"Go ye into all the world, and *preach* the gospel to every creature. He that *believeth* and is *baptized* shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15, 16).

"And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that *repentance* and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all

nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46, 47).

*Forty days after his resurrection* and prior to his ascension (Acts 1:3), Christ gave this worldwide commission, wherein he named the conditions of pardon. In it he also told his apostles to tarry in Jerusalem until they should receive power from heaven (Luke 24:49). Only then could they preach the terms of his *will*. *Ten days after his ascension* the Holy Spirit came to the apostles on Pentecost,<sup>\*</sup> and on *that* day salvation was proclaimed for the *first* time according to the conditions of Christ's *will* (Acts 2). That day marked the *beginning* of the New Testament and the Christian dispensation, the birthday of the church—Christ's kingdom (Acts 11:15). Pentecost is the day the *will* went into effect.

### ***VI. The Will of Christ Has Been Executed***

The new law in effect now is revealed by the preaching of the inspired apostles. It is noticed in *every conversion described in Acts*, the book of conversions, that the people were baptized. There is *baptism in every example of New Testament conversion*. There is no statement anywhere that someone who refused to be baptized was forgiven. There is no example of remission of sins except under the terms of the *will*.

Note the following examples:

On the day of Pentecost, after hearing the gospel preached and becoming believers, the people asked, "What must we do?" (See Acts 2:37.)

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<sup>\*</sup> Pentecost always came fifty days after the Passover and upon the first day of the week (Leviticus 23:15, 16).

# The Last Will and Testament

Hebrews 9:16, 17; 10:9

Hebrews 7:12; Colossians 2:14

## THE DEATH OF CHRIST

### OLD TESTAMENT

Before the death  
of the testator

#### A WILL IN FORCE DEMANDS

1. Testator
2. Legacy
3. Heirs
4. Conditions
5. Witnesses
6. Death of Testator
7. Executors

#### VARIOUS CONDITIONS BEFORE WILL IN FORCE

#### PERSONAL MINISTRY OF CHRIST

1. The Paroled Man...Matt. 9:2
2. Penitent Woman...Luke 7:48
3. Zacchaeus ..... Luke 19:9
4. Rich Young Ruler... Luke 18:22
5. Thief on Cross... Luke 23:43

DIVERSITY OF PLAN

### NEW TESTAMENT

After the death  
of the testator

#### TERMS OF PARDON THE GREAT COMMISSION

1. Hearing
2. Faith
3. Repentance
4. Baptism  
Then Pardon  
Matt. 28:19;  
Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:47

#### APOSTLES EXECUTORS OF WILL OF CHRIST

#### TERMS OF SALVATION ANNOUNCED

1. Pentecostians ... Acts 2:36-38
2. The Eunuch .... Acts 8:35-39
3. Saul of Tarsus Acts 9:6; 22:16
4. Lydia and the jailer... Acts 16
5. Corinthians ..... Acts 18:8

UNIFORMITY OF  
REQUIREMENTS

**“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).**

This they did, for about three thousand souls obeyed the Lord and were baptized on that day (Acts 2:36-41). On this occasion every condition of the *will* of Christ was performed. Acts 2:38 clearly teaches that baptism to a believing penitent is essential to salvation from past sins.

The Samaritans believed Philip’s preaching concerning Christ and were baptized. Simon believed also, and was baptized (Acts 8:12, 13).

The Ethiopian eunuch heard the gospel, believed it, confessed his faith in Christ, and was baptized (Acts 8:35-39). (Cf. Matthew 10:32, 33; Romans 10:10.)

Saul of Tarsus believed on the Lord, repented of his sins, and prayed for three days; yet Ananias told him to “arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). It is true that the blood of Christ washes away sins, but Saul had to be baptized into the death of Christ in order to reach the shed blood (Revelation 1:5; Romans 6:3; John 19:34). Saul’s sins were not remitted before baptism.

Paul preached to Lydia and her household and “she was baptized, and her household” (Acts 16:14, 15).

Likewise, Paul preached the gospel to the Philippian jailer and his household, and he “was baptized, he and all his, straightway” (Acts 16:33).

The apostle Paul went to the great city of Corinth and preached “Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”



“And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).

Thus during the personal ministry of Christ, there was *diversity of plan*; but since Christ’s death there is *uniformity of requirements and conformity to the new law*. All were saved on exactly the same terms—the Lord’s law of pardon as stated in the great commission, and to this law there is not a single exception.

One of the chief objections against baptism as a condition for the remission of sins is: “What about the Thief on the Cross? He was not baptized; yet the Lord saved him. Since this is true, then people today can be saved without it.”

As already observed, this statement shows that a fundamental principle regarding the proper division of God’s Word is being overlooked (2 Timothy 2:15).

Often people make the statement that the thief was *never* baptized. Can this be proved? If so, would it make a difference today?

John the Baptist immersed many people; and Christ, through his apostles, in his personal ministry baptized more than did John (Matthew 3:1-6; Mark 1:4, 5; John 4:1, 2). It is possible that the thief also was baptized, but no one knows.

Grant, for the sake of this discussion, that the thief was never baptized, that the Lord forgave him and took him to Paradise. Does this affect today’s salvation? No, for the New Testament in force now, was not then in effect, and it did not go into force until *over fifty days thereafter*. Whether the thief was baptized or not has *nothing* to do with the need for baptism under the New Testament plan of salvation.

## VII. *There Is No "Ex Post Facto" Law*

A court cannot condemn a person for not obeying a certain law not at that time in existence. The American Constitution says, "No . . . *ex post facto* law shall be passed" (Article I, Section 9). A law cannot be retro-active.

Suppose that a man who has a large income goes to a lawyer and says, "I am *not* going to pay income tax and I will tell you why. George Washington and Abraham Lincoln did not pay this tax. If they could be good, law-abiding citizens in their day and not pay income tax, why cannot I?" Now, any lawyer can explain the fallacy of this kind of reasoning by showing that *Washington and Lincoln lived many years before the income-tax law was enacted and, therefore, were never under it.* That man's argument would be considered ridiculous by any court in the land. Yet, many use *the same type of reasoning* when they say, "The Thief on the Cross was not commanded to be baptized, and the Lord forgave him; so people today do not have to be baptized to be saved." By this reasoning they think that they have refuted Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21, and other Scriptures which teach baptism for the remission of sins. Anyone doing this should realize that he is arguing against God.

The error of this kind of teaching is evident. Certainly the Thief on the Cross and others mentioned above were not baptized under the *will* of Christ. Neither was Moses, nor Abraham, nor David. NO! Neither did my grandfather have a Social Security card nor a driver's license; but many people today have them because they are now re-

quired. In like manner, David and other Old Testament characters, who are often referred to as "righteous people" who were not baptized, lived and died *before* the law under which man is now living went into effect. These were never commanded to be immersed in the name of Christ for the remission of sins, for baptism was not then instituted. Since they never lived under the New Testament of Christ, which requires baptism, they cannot be condemned for not having obeyed it. However, they had to respect what God told them to do in the law under which they lived.

### ***VIII. The Will Cannot Be Broken***

After a legal *will* has been properly probated, there is no appeal from its terms.

Suppose that a man who has made his will meets a person who asks for help. Out of the kindness of his heart he gives this person aid; for while he is *yet living* he can give whatever he wishes to whomsoever he wills.

Later the man dies. The individual who received money from the man personally cannot now receive anything from the man's estate, unless he fulfills the *conditions* set forth in the *will*.

Suppose he should go to the executor and say, "I demand something from my friend's estate."

"But," the man would reply, "you do not meet the conditions for receiving anything from the estate."

"He gave me something while he was living," says the man.

"Perhaps he did," answers the executor, "but we have his *will* now, and it is in effect."

"But if he were living, I know he would help me," answers the man.

"Conditions have changed," answers the executor. "We must now abide by the terms of his will."

Likewise Christ's *will* is now in effect, and all men must proclaim the *terms* of pardon as required in it. All who *obey* the terms of this *will* will receive forgiveness. Those who will not comply with the conditions as announced in the New Testament have no promise of pardon.

### IX. *The Will Is Plain*

This *will* is plain and intelligible to all. If one is to obtain forgiveness of sins, he must, likewise, *obey all the conditions of Christ's will*. This *will* tells penitent believers to confess faith in Christ and be baptized for ("unto," "in order to obtain") the remission of sins. However, some have tried to *change the Lord's will* to read, "Believe on the Lord and *pray* and you will be saved." Many who preach over the radio tell sinners to get down by their radios, accept Christ as their personal Savior and pray that the Lord will save them immediately. *There is no Bible authority for this teaching*. Philip did not tell the eunuch to *pray for pardon*. Neither did Christ forgive Saul when he cried out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). The thief made a request of Jesus, and it is claimed that the Lord forgave him. But, when Saul made his cry unto Christ, the *will* of our Lord had already been sealed and *could not be broken*. Therefore, Saul had to submit to the terms of the New Testament.

The Savior taught his *disciples* to pray; but the point that so many people fail to see is that prayer is a privilege of the children of God (Matthew

6:9; 1 John 2:1; Hebrews 4:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 18; Philippians 4:6, 7). On the contrary, alien sinners were never told to pray for anything. Saul had not been saved by his praying; he was told to "arise, and be *baptized*" that he might be saved. Under the New Testament, no alien sinner was ever commanded to pray for pardon and no Christian was ever told to be baptized.

Jesus did not say, "He that believeth and holds up his hand shall be saved." Many have taken "be baptized" out of the *Lord's will* and substituted "raise your hand and bow your head."

Why, then, do not people *obey* the Lord's terms of pardon and receive forgiveness? Surely all can understand what Jesus said. For example, suppose that a very wealthy man died and left a strange *will* which stated, "He that believeth in me, and is baptized in water, shall receive from my estate \$10,000." Do you think any one would misunderstand *that will*? The people could not be immersed fast enough. No one would even quibble over the "mode." They would not risk losing that much money. Parallel this with Christ's *very plain* statement, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). *If Christ did not mean that a man must believe and be baptized to be saved, then language has no meaning.*

Christ has promised far more than \$10,000. Upon simple and easy terms, he has promised the *forgiveness of sins*; and in the *end*, if one remains faithful, *eternal life* (Mark 10:30; Revelation 2:10). *Obey him* that these blessings may be received.

"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto *all* them that *obey him*" (Hebrews 5:9).

**“Blessed are they that *do his commandments*, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Revelation 22:14).**

Through obedience to the Lord who died for all, He becomes a Savior to each person (Heb. 2:9; Rev. 22:14).

### **X. *What Is the Truth About “Death-Bed Conversions”?***

The story of the Thief on the Cross is often used to teach “death-bed conversions.” There is not one example under the *will of Christ* where one knew the truth, rejected it, waited until the last moment of life, and then was saved. Yet, from the thief’s case, many teach that even though one has lived in sin and open rebellion to God for many years, if he will only *ask* the Lord for forgiveness *in his dying moments*, God will pardon him and all will be well; and that as soon as the spirit leaves the body he will be carried into the peaceful presence of God, there forever to dwell. This is certainly dangerous teaching. It tends to strengthen “the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life” (Ezekiel 13:22). Many become exceedingly *sorry* for their sins and desire to be saved when they see death staring them in the face. Often such sorrow is caused mostly by *fear*, and little love for God! Too, many ask, upon seeing people approach death in this condition, “Will not God save such, even though they cannot now be baptized?” But they need to consider these questions: First, have these people ever refused opportunities to be baptized? Secondly, was there a time when they *could* have obeyed and did not? Finally, by whose fault are they now

in this condition? Surely it is not the Lord's! The rich man expressed a desire to change his condition—*after it was too late* (Luke 16:23-26). It is no wonder then that God warns, “. . . behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2); “. . . today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts . . .” (Hebrews 3:15)! The Lord does not promise to save people who have wilfully refused to obey him, time and time again, and who, in their dying moments, become physically unable to obey the terms of pardon but cry out, “Lord, have mercy.” If the Lord chooses to pardon him, that will be his prerogative, not man's. What the Lord has said in his Word must be preached, and people warned of the danger of delay. The Lord has not promised to save any man who merely “makes a profession of religion” on his death-bed.

Some say:

“While the lamp holds out to burn,  
The vilest sinner may return.”

But Christians must say:

“While the lamp holds out to burn,  
O, *hasten*, sinner, to return,”

for death may come and find you unprepared.

On the cross Christ shed his blood for man's sins. This sin offering is to be appropriated by obedient faith. “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood . . .” (Rom. 3:24, 25; cf. Gal. 5:6; Rom. 6:3, 4; Gal. 3:26, 27; Eph. 2:8).

The last chance to obey the gospel and be saved will come some day. When will that time be? No one knows. *Obey today.*

# *The Evidence Of Pardon*

**T**HE QUESTION of how one may know that he is a child of God is of vital concern to everyone; it has to do with a person's happiness, both here and in eternity.

Surely the Lord does not want a person to be in doubt about his salvation. Yet many go through life worrying about this important matter and are never entirely satisfied.

## ***I. Are Feelings the Evidence of Salvation?***

Many rest the evidence of their pardon on the basis of fleshly feelings. If they are happy, they are forgiven; if they are unhappy, then they are unforgiven. But it is certain that feelings cannot be relied upon as evidence of one's pardon and acceptability of God.

### **A. ONE MAY BE HONESTLY MISTAKEN**

Among those of every religion there are some who *feel* right. This was true of Saul of Tarsus before his conversion, even while persecuting Christians; for he later declared:

“Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1).



Again,

“I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9).

Although Paul had a clear conscience and was very religious, he was wrong in his fight against the church (cf. Galatians 1:13; 1 Timothy 1:12-16). Sincerity is no evidence of acceptability. Moral judgment is the result of education. Conscience is that monitor that approves or disapproves an act already committed. One's conscience *approves* when one does what he *believes* to be right; it *disapproves* when one does what he *believes* to be wrong. But the conscience does not determine right and wrong. The conscience is a safe guide only when God is the guide of the moral judgment. A man may be honestly mistaken; he may have a misinformed judgment. It is not the function of conscience to tell man what is truth. Thus, if one's conscience does approve his actions, it does not necessarily mean that God is pleased. The Bible declares:

“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25; cf. 12:15).

It had never occurred to Saul that he could be wrong. But this man was wrong. He was wrong even though he thought he was right. *Sincerity alone is not enough*. People often ask, “Does it really matter what one believes?” In Paul's case it did. Although it was not an easy thing to do, *Paul made a change*. And why did he change? He learned he was wrong. When a man who is honestly mistaken hears the truth, one of two things will

happen: either he will give up his error, or he will cease to be honest. If he obeys the truth, he is no longer mistaken; if he does not accept the truth, then he is no longer honest. When the truth is presented, honesty and error must part. No man can be honestly mistaken after he has heard the truth. So Paul gave up his error and remained honest. (Cf. Luke 8:15.)

### **B. FEELINGS ARE BASED UPON TESTIMONY**

Feelings are the result of testimony believed but are not evidence of the truthfulness of that testimony. If one believes he is pardoned, he will feel so, whether it be true or not. The feelings of joy or sorrow will be just as intense when produced by error (if the testimony be believed), as when produced by truth.

For example, the touching story of Jacob mourning over his beloved son, Joseph, whom he thought to be dead, well illustrates how one may be honestly deceived. Although Jacob grieved, believing his son was dead, *Joseph was not dead*. Twenty-two years later Jacob saw him in Egypt. Jacob's feelings were real, but they were not proof of his son's death. The testimony was false. (For an account of this narrative read Genesis 37:28-36; 42:29-38; 45:25-28; 46:1-7, 29, 30.)

Why did Jacob firmly believe that Joseph was dead? Was it not the effects of the false words of the elder sons and the blood-stained coat? Of course, it was what Jacob saw and heard that caused him to believe that Joseph was dead. Believing this false testimony produced grief, which was accompanied by a feeling of despondency. One's feelings are determined by what one believes.

As long as Jacob honestly believed that Joseph was dead, he was filled with sorrow, just as much as if it had been the truth.

A few years ago the author was asked to conduct the funeral for a certain young man who had been accidentally killed. The funeral was conducted over the dead body of a young man. But later, to the happy surprise of all, that boy returned to his home—alive! All of us had been honestly mistaken; I believed I was preaching this boy's funeral, the mother honestly believed she was burying her son, and she and the other members of the family mourned at the service. But, believing and feeling that the son was dead did not make it true. We were all *deceived*. Therefore, the nature and intensity of man's feelings are determined by the degree of his faith in the information, whether it be true or false.

Man cannot rely upon his feelings in matters of this life. Hence, he should be able to understand that he cannot do so in the realm of spiritual things, which have to do with his soul's salvation. Feelings are based on faith, and faith is founded on testimony. Saul was deceived while persecuting Christians, although he thought he was doing right. Jacob's believing Joseph to be dead did not make it true, nor the mother's believing her son was dead make it so.

Believing a falsehood does not make it the truth. Yet there are those who think that if people are honest in what they believe and practice in religion, whether it is according to the teaching of the Bible or not, they will be eternally saved. Yet Jesus said:

“. . . ye shall know the truth, and the *truth* shall make you free” (John 8:32).

If the religious teaching a person accepts is wrong, although the feelings produced are strong, his faith and practice will be wrong. One cannot know that he is pardoned and worshiping God acceptably simply because he feels good. Feelings are the result of faith, not the cause. Therefore, since one's feelings are not a cause but an effect, one's feelings cannot be the evidence of sins forgiven.

If one accepts feelings as an evidence of salvation and correct worship, *he can* prove heathenism to be true just as easily as Christianity. Who is ready to admit this?

Furthermore, if feelings are an evidence of pardon, how must one feel when he is saved? Too, who is authorized to interpret any state of feeling as an evidence of sins forgiven? God has nowhere described feelings as an evidence of pardon. Since this is true, one's feelings cannot be an evidence of salvation. A man cannot know he is pardoned by the way he feels, but when pardoned by the Lord, he has cause to rejoice.

## ***II. What, Then, Is the Evidence of Pardon?***

In answering this very important question, people should remember that *forgiveness of sins occurs in the mind of God, and not within the heart of the sinner* (Nehemiah 9:17). The sinner does not feel pardon in himself; it is not in him, but done in heaven for him. Remission of sins is not a change that takes place within people. Pardon is an act of God. If sinners are ever pardoned, God must do it.

Many have supposed that pardon is an inward change of the heart; but this change takes place in repentance and *precedes* the remission of sins (cf. Acts 2:36-38; 3:19). The change in the heart of the sinner is not pardon, nor an evidence of pardon.

A person can know that he is pardoned only by a statement from God who has the power to pardon. Hence, an individual knows that God has pardoned him just like the person in the penitentiary knows that he is pardoned; he is pardoned by a statement from the one who has the power to pardon, not by the way he feels nor by any visions or dreams. Since pardon is an executive act of God, and takes place in heaven, people can know that they are forgiven only by a statement from him to this effect.

#### A. THE LORD HAS CONDITIONS FOR PARDON

People should realize that when God promises to forgive sins, it is his right to determine the *basis* upon which it is to be done.

The Lord has set forth certain conditions in the Bible and promised that when people comply with these terms he will forgive their sins. Inasmuch as one cannot know what the Lord has done for him except by His word, he can have no assurance of the remission of sins except through the teaching of the Bible. In order to have the knowledge of his salvation, he must *learn* what the Lord's terms of forgiveness are and *obey* them. What, then, are the terms?

The New Testament teaches that the *conditions* for pardon are (1) faith, (2) repentance, (3) con-

fession, and (4) baptism. Please note these Scriptures:

“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15, 16).

“I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:10).

“And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37).

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

This, then, is how one may *know*, beyond any doubt, that God has pardoned his sins: God has said over and over again in his word, in the plainest language possible, what people are to do to be forgiven. And he has pledged his word that when people do these things, he will forgive their sins. This is the only true evidence that can be offered to anyone that his sins are forgiven.

Thus, here is the infallible guide in all religious matters: *Whatever the Bible teaches about man's salvation is right, regardless of any preconceived ideas. God has a law of pardon, and the alien sinner is forgiven when he complies with that law.*

## **B. OBEDIENCE TO THE GOSPEL IS NECESSARY IN ORDER TO BE MADE FREE FROM SIN**

The process of conversion, by which one obtains the remission of sins, is sometimes referred to as "obeying the gospel" (cf. Romans 10:16). People are lost because they are in sin, and they must obey the gospel to be saved from sin. Yet so many people do not have a Bible knowledge of Christ's terms of pardon; they know nothing of when and how one becomes a Christian and a member of the Lord's church. However, God's Word makes the plan of salvation very plain. (Use the Bible and study carefully the diagram on the next pages.)

### **I. OBEDIENCE TO THE GOSPEL IS EMPHASIZED:**

- A. It is dangerous not to obey the gospel. Peter asks, ". . . what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17).
- B. In 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, Paul gives the answer to Peter's question. ". . . the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Note: there will be rest for some (verse 7), punishment for others. The punishment is not annihilation but everlasting, conscious suffering. What a terrible thought!
- C. Peter says people have their souls purified in *obeying* the truth. "Seeing you have

purified your souls in obeying the truth. . .” (1 Peter 1:22). One is cleansed by the blood of Christ, but one must obey the word. (Cf. 1 John 1:7; Revelation 1:5; Acts 22:16.) Christ died for all (Hebrews 2:9). Will all be saved? No, only those who *obey* (Hebrews 5:8, 9; Revelation 22:14).

D. The Roman Christians were made free from sin when they obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine. “. . . ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (Romans 6:17, 18). The facts of the gospel are the *death, burial and resurrection* of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). On becoming Christians, sinners die to sin, are buried in and raised from the grave of baptism to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3, 4). People do not obey the facts but the form, or mold. So when the Romans *obeyed*, they were *then* made free from sin, and not before. They arose from baptism to walk in a new life. This is what obedience to the gospel means.

## II. WHAT MUST ONE DO? (Notice the way of salvation, item by item, step by step.)

A. One must *hear* and *believe* the gospel (Acts 3:22, 23; 28:28; Romans 10:17). That is, one must have faith in Christ as God’s Son (Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 16:31).



## OBEYING THE GOSPEL

### The Question

1 Peter 4:17; Rom. 10:16

### The Answer

2 Thess. 1:7-9

### Obey, Soul Purified

1 Peter 1:22

### Obey Form of Doctrine

Romans 6:16-18

### DEATH, BURIAL, RESURRECTION

1 Cor. 15:1-4

### BAPTISM

Romans 6:3, 4

### What Must Be Done?

1. Believe—John 6:29
2. Repent—Luke 13:3, 5
3. Confess—Matthew 10:32
4. Be Baptized—Matt. 28:19

### How Is It Done?

Believe—Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9, 17  
 Repent—2 Cor. 7:10; Jonah 3:10  
 Confess—Rom. 10:10; Acts 8:37  
 Baptized—Romans 6:4; Col. 2:12

### Why Is It Done?

Believe—John 8:21, 24; Mark 16:16  
 Repent—Acts 17:30, 31  
 Confess—Romans 10:10  
 Baptized—Acts 2:38; 22:16

### What Does God Do?

1. FORGIVES SINS  
Acts 2:38
2. ADDS TO THE CHURCH  
Acts 2:47
3. GIVES NAME CHRISTIAN  
Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16
4. GIVES WORSHIP OF the "churches of Christ"  
Romans 16:16; Acts 2:42
5. PROMISES ETERNAL LIFE  
1 John 2:25; Romans 6:22, 23  
Conditional  
Revelation 2:10

- B. One must *repent of all his sins* (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38; 17:30).
- C. One must *confess* Christ as Lord (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37; 1 Timothy 6:12).
- D. One must be *baptized* (Mark 16:16; Matthew 28:18-20). All these are for, or in order to, the remission of sins.

### III. HOW IS IT DONE?

- A. How does one hear, and how and what does one believe?
  - 1. One hears with the ear (Revelation 2:7).
  - 2. One believes in Christ with his heart (Acts 8:37).
  - 3. The heart is the intellect, the emotions, and the will—the mind (Matthew 9:4; Romans 10:10).
- B. How does one repent?
  - 1. The Ninevites repented (Luke 11:32). When they believed Jonah's preaching they *turned* from their evil way (Jonah 3:10).
  - 2. The Prodigal Son repented (Luke 15:17-20). He said, "I will arise and go to my father. . ." "And he arose, and came to his father."
  - 3. Repentance is not sorrow; godly sorrow precedes repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). Repentance is not a changed life; reformation of life follows repentance (Luke 3:8). It is a resolution to stop doing wrong and a turning to do right.
- C. How does one confess?
 

The confession is made with the mouth (Romans 10:9, 10). One does not confess

his dreams, sins, or feelings, but confesses Christ as God's Son (Acts 8:37; 1 Timothy 6:12, 13).

D. How is one baptized?

One is buried in water and raised up therefrom (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12).

IV. WHY IS IT DONE?

A. Why should one believe? (John 8:21, 24; Mark 16:16). To avoid damnation.

B. Why must one repent? (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30, 31; 2 Peter 3:9). Repent or perish.

C. Why must one confess with the mouth Christ as Lord? (Romans 10:9, 10; Matthew 10:32, 33; Mark 8:38). Confess unto salvation.

D. Why must one be baptized? (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21). Be baptized unto the remission of sins.

V. WHAT DOES GOD DO?

A. When one obeys the gospel, God forgives his sins (Acts 2:38; Luke 24:47; Mark 16:16).

B. He adds the saved to the church—his church (Acts 2:47). Of course, this is the *right* church since it is the Lord's, and he does the adding.

1. The conditions of salvation are the conditions of church membership. There is no such thing as one's being saved and not being a member of the church.

2. Obedience to the gospel does not put one into some denomination. The apostles never taught "get saved, join the church of your choice." All who obeyed the

gospel obeyed the same terms and were added to the one body, the church.

- C. Members of the church—the saved—wear the family name, Christian, with nothing before or after the name (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). The group of baptized believers in any community constitutes the Lord's church in that place. Such congregations are called "the churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16) and worship by his directions (Acts 2:42; 20:7; I Cor. 16:2; Eph. 5:19).
- D. God promises eternal life to those who obey the gospel (1 John 2:25; Romans 6:22, 23). This is a conditional promise; they must remain faithful (Revelation 2:10).

#### C. SINNERS MAY BE DECEIVED

Although God has set forth his own terms of pardon, many have offered terms of forgiveness which God never proposed. These terms are the mere inventions of men.

Often sinners are told: "The very moment you accept Christ as your personal Savior you are saved." This statement is made by uninspired men, not by the Lord. Those who tell this to sinners fail to tell them *how* they must "accept Christ" or what the Savior requires sinners to do to be saved. They usually teach that conversion is altogether a mental act; that is, that salvation comes when sinners only believe in their hearts that Christ is their Savior. (Note the contrast between this statement and God's Word, which sets forth several specific commands and promises salvation only when sinners *obey* them.) Nevertheless, those who merely "accept Christ" *feel* like they are saved because they are told that they are now converted,

and that they are the children of God. There is no doubt that they feel exactly as they say. However, this is not proof that they are forgiven. As already observed, if a person is convinced that he is pardoned, he is just as happy as if he were. It is regrettable that there are so many honest, sincere people in this very condition. They think that they have already been pardoned; but in reality they are lost, for the Bible does not teach salvation by "faith only" (James 2:24).

If one's feelings about his salvation should contradict the Bible, it would be evident that his feelings were produced by his belief of falsehood. For example: if one should think that he was pardoned before and without baptism, he would be wrong; for Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," and the apostle Peter told inquiring believers to "repent and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins" (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Surely none would suppose that a person's *feelings* are better evidence of pardon than the testimony of Christ and his inspired apostles. Thus, if one thinks that he has been forgiven without fulfilling the Lord's requirements for pardon, his feelings are deceiving him.

### ***III. The Witness of the Spirits Assures Evidence of Pardon***

The evidence of pardon depends upon *two spirits*: God's and man's. Man must learn the conditions upon which God has promised to pardon, and he must know in his own mind that he has complied with these conditions.

The Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul said:

"The Spirit himself beareth witness with our

his dreams, sins, or feelings, but confesses Christ as God's Son (Acts 8:37; 1 Timothy 6:12, 13).

D. How is one baptized?

One is buried in water and raised up therefrom (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12).

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2. Obedience to the gospel does not put one into some denomination. The apostles never taught "get saved, join the church of your choice." All who obeyed the

One's own mind or spirit is the only witness that can so testify (Romans 9:1).

When a sinner obeys the commands of the Lord as set forth in the gospel, then the Spirit beareth witness with his spirit that he is a child of God. The Spirit bears this testimony, not in feelings or visions, but in the promises of God. Hence, the Holy Spirit testifies by revealing the mind of God in reference to the conditions of pardon, and the human spirit testifies that it has, or has not, obeyed this law of salvation. It is clearly seen, therefore, that there are *two* witnesses (and not one) and that these two testify jointly, the Holy Spirit pointing out the terms of pardon and man's spirit assuring the individual he has obeyed them. When these two witnesses agree in their testimony, the question of pardon is settled. Therefore, for one to be cleansed from sin by the blood of Christ, he must obey the "law of the Spirit" (Romans 8:2) —that is, the terms of pardon revealed by the Spirit in the New Testament.

For an illustration of the meaning of Romans 8:16, take the example of a qualified voter. How may one know that he is eligible to vote? By his feelings? No. The state declares it. But how? By its laws and statutes. In some states the law says that for one to be a legal voter, he must (1) be a citizen of the United States; (2) he must be twenty-one years of age; (3) he must have been a resident of the state for one year; (4) he must have lived in the county for six months; and (5) he must have resided in the precinct for the past thirty days.

Now, if one knows in his own mind that he has fulfilled all of the necessary conditions to be eligible to vote, then he knows that he is a qualified voter.

Likewise, the Spirit declares in plain words the conditions essential to make one a child of God. Each person, therefore, should examine himself and see if he has obeyed those commands (2 Corinthians 13:5), for only by the witness of both spirits does one know that he is a Christian.

When a person decides from the testimony of his own spirit that he has complied with the conditions which the Spirit of God requires of each one to become a Christian, then for him to doubt that he has been saved from sin is to doubt either the words of the Holy Spirit or his own convictions.

The Spirit of God testifies also in the Bible what kind of character a man must possess in order to continue in the Father's house as a faithful child. (See 2 Peter 1:5-11; Acts 2:44, 20:7; Titus 2:12; Revelation 2:10.) When that testimony agrees with what one's own spirit knows to be the facts regarding his own life, then he knows he is living as a Christian should. The Spirit bears witness with his spirit.

Thus, again, it becomes evident that *people can have no promise of the remission of their sins except as the Bible declares*. For this reason if a person should do a hundred things that men teach for salvation, and not do the things the Spirit reveals, he would have no promise from the Lord that he is forgiven. But, after one has learned and obeyed all that the Spirit sets forth in order to be forgiven of his sins he may then say, "I know, as sure as the word of God is true, I am pardoned of all my past sins and am now a child of God and a member of the Lord's church." By relying upon the Holy Scriptures this one has something *infallibly safe*; there is no room for doubts about his pardon.



#### ***IV. The Knowledge of Pardon Causes Joy***

By examining the Scriptures, obedience to the gospel was the assurance of pardon that the early Christians had, and this assurance brought to them much happiness.

For example, what caused the Ethiopian nobleman to go on his way "rejoicing"? (See Acts 8:35-39.) Was it not because Philip had "preached unto him Jesus" and told him the Savior's terms of salvation, so that when he had been baptized after a confession of his faith in Christ, he knew he was saved and for this reason rejoiced? His assurance of salvation, therefore, was not based upon some "feeling" that he had been saved; he knew he had obeyed the Lord and that God had kept his promise (cf. Mark 16:16; Acts 2:47). Hence, his happiness was the result of the knowledge of pardon. This assurance of pardon is evident in every conversion recorded in the New Testament. The immutable word of God alone was sufficient evidence of their salvation. Nowhere does one read in the Bible that the apostles taught people to believe they were saved and then take the resultant feeling as evidence of it. Nevertheless, people today often reason in a circle; that is, they say they know they are saved because they feel happy, and then say they feel happy because they know they are saved. But when the early converts to Christianity rejoiced because they knew they were saved, their evidence was the *promise* of God, not their feelings. So it should be with people today. Pardon is not something that one *feels*, although one feels good when he is made to believe that he is pardoned. The good feelings come as a necessary result of the knowledge of pardon based

upon the commands of God. Consequently, for anyone to ask for *more* evidence of salvation than the Word of God supplies would reveal a lack of faith in the Lord. Believing the Spirit's witness to be true, the obedient person rejoices because he knows that God has forgiven his sins.

### ***V. Conclusion***

How, then, can a person know beyond any doubt that God has forgiven his sins?

The Lord has given the law of pardon in his Word, and everyone who has learned and obeyed this law knows that he is saved. Only through the Word of God does the sinner receive assurance of salvation. Visions and dreams, therefore, are not assurances of pardon. Surely a person will rejoice who has this assurance of forgiveness from God (cf. Romans 15:13; 1 Peter 1:8; John 15:11).

Have you complied with the conditions upon which the Lord has promised salvation? Does the Spirit bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God? Are you sure that you have been Scripturally converted? There is only one way to settle the question: Compare what you did to be saved with the acts of those who stand as examples of conversion as recorded in the Book of Acts of the Apostles. These examples occurred under inspired teaching, and no mistakes were made. If you have done exactly the same things to be saved that they did, you are forgiven.

The Lord has stipulated his own terms of pardon, and every man must submit to and comply with them if he wishes to be saved.



THE RIVER JORDAN

THEN cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matthew 3:13-17).

# BIBLE BAPTISM

**T**O EVERY STUDENT of the Bible, baptism is a familiar subject. Yet perhaps among men there has never been a subject of greater disagreement and contention. The problem is not in understanding but in faith. Surely an honest investigation of the Scriptures will dispell all difficulties of the subject. What is Bible baptism?

Baptism is first introduced in the New Testament in connection with the preaching of John, the fore-runner of Christ. Here the study begins.

## *1. The Work of John the Baptist*

John the Baptist was sent of God to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. For some time his clarion voice had been echoing in the wilderness along the banks of the Jordan, calling the Jewish people back from their wanderings to a change of life (Matthew 3:1-2).

At his birth this great man was simply named "John" (Luke 1:13, 57-63). After he began to preach and "baptize," he was called "John the Baptist" because he was directed to baptize. The kingdom of heaven was at hand, and John, in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, was preparing a people for the Lord (Matthew 3:3; Isaiah 40:3-4). Multitudes thronged about him to hear his message, presented with fiery zeal, concerning the reformation of life and the approach of the kingdom of Christ.

"And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins" (Mark 1:5).

One day, when Jesus was about thirty years of age, he journeyed from his home in Nazareth of Galilee to the Jordan, some 70 miles away, where he sought John and asked for baptism at his hands. What a beautiful scene! Here, standing on the banks of the Jordan, was John the Immerser, "his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins" (Matthew 3:4). Standing by his side was the pure, spotless, humble Galilean, at whose birth the angels sang, the wise men worshipped, and the earth rejoiced. He had laid aside his carpenter's tools, and bade his loved ones and friends good-by. He was now ready to enter his public ministry and to take upon himself the work of human redemption.

The great preacher John was humbled in his presence, and would have refused to baptize him, saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" (Matthew 3:14). The answer contains the second recorded utterance of Jesus: "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Why did John not want to baptize Jesus? Surely it was because he was preaching "the baptism of repentance"—the baptism preceded by and growing out of repentance—"for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). Jesus had nothing of which to repent—he had no sins to be remitted (I Peter 2:22; Hebrews 4:15). John's idea was this: "I am baptizing for the remission of sins, so why comest thou to me? I should, rather, be baptized of thee." It was because of Jesus' sinlessness, therefore, that "John would have hindered him." He did not consider Jesus a proper subject of his baptism. But John was divinely commissioned to

baptize in water, and it was the Father's will for Christ to submit to the command of baptism.

The baptism administered by John had remission of sins as its object: "And he came into all the region round about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins" (Luke 3:3, A.S.V.). Those whom John baptized came "confessing their sins"—not their salvation or their faith in Christ (Mark 1:5; Acts 19:4). John demanded that people repent of their sins before he would baptize them; he refused to baptize those who did not repent (Matthew 3:7-10). Jesus knew the design of John's baptism and approved it. He knew it was impossible for him to receive John's baptism for the same purpose that the Jews did, hence, he asked that an exception be made. He said, "Suffer [i.e., permit] it to be so now." One does not *allow* the rule, but the exception. "Suffer it to be so *now* [this *one* exception]: for thus it becometh us to fulfil *all* righteousness." All of God's commandments are righteousness (Psalms 119:172).

What John was doing was according to the command of God. Christ was anxious to do his Father's will in every respect, to fulfill every requirement. Hence, Jesus said to John, "I want you to baptize me; permit this one exception for *me*." Then John consented. But Jesus was the one and only exception to John's baptism.

#### A. A SACRED SCENE DIVINELY APPROVED

The story of the baptism of Jesus, as told by the three evangelists, is one of the most impressive scenes recorded in the Bible (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:4-11; Luke 3:21, 22).

In his obedience to the Father's holy commandment, led by the hand of John, Jesus de-

scended into the water and was baptized. When he *came up out of the water*, he was *praying*, "and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16, 17).

God was delighted in his Son who was desirous of fulfilling *all* righteousness. This was the first time the voice of the eternal God had broken the silence of the heavens since that memorable day at Mt. Sinai, 1500 years before, when the law of Moses was given (Exodus 20). The baptism of Jesus was in the same river at the place where Joshua and the children of Israel crossed and the scene wherein the waters opened for the crossing of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. There in the shadow of Mt. Nebo, where Moses died, the heavens opened, and Jehovah made a public declaration to the world that Jesus was the Messiah, his only begotten Son. This was the first public acknowledgment of Christ's divine Sonship. (This same voice from the eternal God was heard again on the mount of transfiguration, testifying to the divinity of Christ, Matthew 17:5; Luke 9:28-36). The three persons of the Godhead—God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit (into whose name people are now baptized)—united in approving the baptism of Jesus.

## **B. WHY JESUS WAS BAPTIZED**

Since Jesus did not receive John's baptism in the same sense as others did, the question is frequently asked, "Why, then, was Christ baptized?" In reply, consider the following:

1. Jesus was not baptized in order to obtain the remission of sins. Neither was he baptized because of the remission of sins. Whether baptism now is *for* or *because of* remission, it presupposes *sin*, which Christ never had. Hence, Christ's baptism was different.

2. Jesus was not baptized to conduct him into his priestly office. It has been urged by some that the baptism of Jesus consecrated him as a priest, but this cannot be true for several reasons. (a) Christ did not belong to the Aaronic order of priests, being of the tribe of Judah (Hebrew 7:14). (b) The baptism in Jordan did not fulfill the Jewish law concerning the consecration of priests to the Levitical priesthood (See Exodus 29; Leviticus 8). (c) Christ could not be a priest while on earth (Hebrews 8:4). (d) In heaven, Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:17).

3. The reason Jesus gave John for asking baptism at his hands was, "Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." There were then two classes of people: (a) those who accepted the counsel of God and (b) those who rejected it. John's baptism marked that dividing line between those who obeyed God and those who did not. Although Christ had no sins of which to repent or to be forgiven, he desired identification with those who obeyed God in being baptized. Christ did not desire to stand with those Jews who rejected for themselves the counsel of God, being not baptized of John (Luke 7:30). How fitting it was that he should submit to God's will in the minutest respect. Jesus came to this world, not to please himself, but to do his Father's will in *all things*. He said, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own



will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38; cf. 4:34; 5:30; Luke 22:42; Hebrews 5:8, 9; 10:9). As baptism was a part of that will, he voluntarily submitted to it. In his life on earth, Jesus taught obedience by both precept and example. He not only commanded people to obey the Father in heaven, but was himself "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). Although the Bible does not specifically say that Christ was baptized for an example, it is still true that in his submission to his Father's will through this beautiful act he gave to the world a moving example of obedience. Excepting repentance, Christ has set the example of obedience to God in all things in which people today are to obey the Lord. Truly he left man an example that he should follow in his steps (I Peter 2:21). He, therefore, says, "Follow me."

4. After Jesus was baptized, he was publicly acknowledged by God the Father as "the Son of God." One purpose of John's baptism was that he might bear witness to this fact (John 1:31-34). John was assured of Christ's divinity by the descent of the Holy Spirit at his baptism; in turn, he testified that Jesus was the Messiah, God's Lamb to take away man's sins—yea, that he was the Son of God (John 1:29). John's baptism served a two-fold purpose: remission of sins to those of the world and to point out to Israel Jesus as the Messiah.

Thus it was the plan of God that Christ should be baptized to reveal his true identity. Christ wanted to be baptized that God might have the opportunity to confess him as his Son before the people. It is impossible for one to be baptized for the same reason that Jesus was. No man can now

be baptized in order to have it made known that he is God's only begotten Son.

### *Baptism Commanded Today*

Jesus said to the apostles:

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:15,16).

As baptism was a part of God's plan then, so baptism is a part of God's plan for the sinner now, if he would enjoy the blessings of salvation. Jesus, man's Saviour, commands baptism (Matthew 28:19). But, according to Scripture, what are the act, the subject and the design of baptism? **Let us see.**

### **II. The Action of Bible Baptism**

How was Christ baptized? Jesus was immersed. The clear statement of the Bible is that Jesus “was baptized of John in the Jordan” (Mark 1:9), and that after his baptism he “went up straightway out of the water” (Matthew 3:16). John baptized Christ in the waters of the Jordan. In baptism Christ was dipped in water.

Sometimes in an effort to discredit immersion, one is shown a picture of Christ standing on land at the edge of the Jordan while from a trickling stream John fills a ram's horn with water and sprinkles or pours a few drops on his head. This is contrary to all the known facts. No one took a picture of John baptizing Christ. The picture shown is nothing more than an imaginative painting found perhaps in some old church building and drawn by some fallible man several hundred years after the event. Is there any reason why one should not accept the description the Holy Scriptures have given concerning the manner of Christ's baptism?

The Bible unquestionably teaches that baptism is an act of immersion—a burial and a resurrection:

“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

“Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12).

Corroborating evidence can be found for immersion by studying the recorded cases of baptism in the New Testament but never for sprinkling or pouring. To learn what was practiced in apostolic days, take for example the baptism of the Ethiopian nobleman:

“And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:36-39).

Philip and the eunuch came to the water, both went down into the water, the eunuch was baptized (immersed), and both came out of the water.

The word “baptize” means “to dip,” “to sub-

merge," "to bury." The literal meaning of the Greek word "*baptizo*," according to all standard Greek lexicons, means immersion.<sup>1</sup> If words have any meaning (and they must), this is what took place when Christ was baptized by John in the river Jordan. Mark records the fact that Jesus came up out of the water (Mark 1:10). Evidently he had gone down into it. If he went down into the water to be baptized, there is no room to doubt that he was immersed. Hence, Christ came *to* the water; he went down *into* the water; he was *buried* in it (for the Bible declares baptism to be a burial), and was *raised up* from it. John did not sprinkle a few drops of water on Christ and call it baptism. The Holy Scriptures do not record that water alone was ever sprinkled by the Lord's authority, on any one, for any purpose, in any age of the Bible.

According to history, the first recorded case of baptism by affusion was that administered to Novation in A.D. 251, and that was because he was sick. After this, sprinkling and pouring of water on individuals continued to be practiced at times through the years and was called "sick" or "clinical" baptism because it was administered to those who were sick. But in A.D. 1311, the Council of Ravenna, in Italy, made sprinkling *legal* as baptism to any one, whether sick or not. (See *Johnson's Universal Cyclopaedia*, Vol. 1, page 488; *Edinburg Encyclopedia*, Article "baptism.") Hence,

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<sup>1</sup> The word was not *translated*, but merely *transliterated*—that is, brought over and anglicized. The literal meaning of the word in Greek suggests only the act of *immersion*. This is the way the word is translated by Hugh J. Schonfield, a Jewish scholar, in *The Authentic New Testament*. It is also translated this way in *Living Oracles* and in the *Bible Union* translation. The word does not mean either *sprinkle* or *pour*.

sprinkling and pouring for baptism were introduced much later than the apostolic era. Some claim that their church has the authority to alter God's law and substitute sprinkling of water on a person for immersion, but the Bible does not teach it. (Cf. Daniel 7:25; Revelation 22:18, 19; 2 John 9.)

Scriptural baptism, therefore, requires (1) water (Acts 8:36); (2) much water (John 3:23); (3) a going unto the water (Acts 8:36); (4) that both the baptizer and the one to be baptized go down into the water (Acts 8:38, 39); (5) a burial and a resurrection (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12); (6) the handling of the subject (Matthew 28:19); and (7) a coming up out of the water (Acts 8:39). Sprinkling and pouring do not require such circumstances. On the contrary, they are substitutes for what the Bible requires. The verb "baptize" expresses *one* specific action and not three; it cannot mean "sprinkle," "pour," or "immerse." These are not synonymous actions or modes.\* Hence, only

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\* Of course, the word "sprinkle" is found many times in the Bible, but it is *never* used with reference to New Testament baptism. For instance, the prophecy of Ezekiel 36:25 was fulfilled in the return of the Jews from Babylonian Captivity. This was practiced under the law of Moses, and Numbers 19:1-10 describes how this water of cleansing was made. It was composed of blood, ashes, and water. For "sprinkle" (Isa. 52:15) the word "startle" is given in the margin of the American Standard Version and in the body of the text in the Revised Standard Version. This is in harmony with the context. In Hebrews 10:22, reference is made to *hearts* being purified by the blood of Christ (cf. 9:14; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 1:5) when *bodies* are washed with pure water, that is, when people are immersed into Christ. Hence, all Christians have been washed by the purifying or cleansing water of baptism (Acts 22:16). Since baptism is immersion, to say "baptism by immersion" is redundant. It is as logical to say that one was immersed by sprinkling as to say that one was baptized by sprinkling. The Bible never speaks of "modes of baptism."

the act of immersion fits all the requirements of the Scriptures for baptism; baptism is not sprinkling or pouring water on a person.

### **III. The Proper Subjects of Bible Baptism**

Having learned that the act of baptism is immersion, note now the proper subjects of baptism.

Jesus, in giving the command to his apostles to baptize, said:

“Go ye therefore, and *teach* all nations, baptizing them [*i.e.*, those you teach] in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19).

“He that *believeth* and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16).

The apostle Peter said:

“*Repent*, and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

Hence, baptism, in order to be valid, must be preceded by teaching, faith, and repentance. Genuine faith *must* precede baptism, for baptism is an act of faith (cf. Gal. 3:26, 27; Eph. 2:8, 9; Heb. 11:30; 8:8-12; John 6:45).

Likewise, a confession of faith in Christ must precede Scriptural baptism. The Ethiopian treasurer, as previously noted, confessed that he believed with all his heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Acts 8:37). The apostle Paul said:

“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:10).

In some religious bodies there is a ceremony for infants called “baptism,” but the Bible does not authorize this practice. It is wrong.

Infants cannot be taught the gospel; they cannot believe in Jesus; they cannot repent, or confess with

the mouth Christ as Lord. Therefore, infants are not proper subjects of baptism. Infants are excluded from the command. Besides, the Bible teaches that they are *safe* . . . they have no sins to be remitted. Jesus said of them, “. . . for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14; cf. Matthew 18:3). The New Testament gives neither a command for, nor an example of, infant baptism. If infants were baptized, then *who* baptized them? *whose* babies were they? *when* was it done? *why* was it done?

It is said of the people of Samaria that “. . . when they *believed* Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were *baptized*, both *men* and *women*” (Acts 8:12). Concerning those in Corinth who were baptized the Bible says, “. . . and many of the Corinthians *hearing believed*, and were *baptized*” (Acts 18:8). Therefore, those who baptize infants have completely reversed the Lord’s order because *teaching, hearing, faith, repentance, and confession* must precede baptism for it to be Scriptural. *Only penitent believers can be Scripturally baptized.*

Being contrary to the Bible, infant baptism is based upon two false assumptions: (1) that infants are born in sin (the doctrine of original sin); (2) that there is a certain magical power in the water of baptism to cleanse the soul of this sin. Only physical death passes to all men, including infants, because of Adam’s sin (Romans 5:12-14).

#### ***IV. The Design of Bible Baptism***

The Scriptures teach that baptism precedes forgiveness of sins, that its purpose is for or unto the remission of sins.

**After his resurrection and prior to his ascension,**

Christ gave to the apostles the Great Commission, in which he said:

**“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16: 15, 16).**

Note carefully what Jesus said in stating the terms of salvation: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” He did not say, “He that believeth is saved and may be baptized later if he desires”; nor, “He that believeth not and is baptized shall be saved”; nor, “He that is saved ought to believe and be baptized.” Some try to make the language read, “He that is baptized shall be saved—without faith”; while others say, “He that believeth shall be saved—without baptism.” Both arrangements are false. Since Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” would anyone dare change his language to read, “He that believeth and will not be baptized shall be saved”? Jesus did not say, “He that is baptized shall be saved”; but, “He that believeth (step 1) and is baptized (step 2) shall be saved (result).” Here the Bible teaches that baptism is a condition of pardon. The sinner, to obtain salvation, must believe and be baptized.

Since Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” to say one is saved before baptism is to say he is saved before the Lord promised to save him.

Baptism is also connected with repentance as a condition of remission of sins.

**“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name**



of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38; cf. Luke 24:27; Matt. 26:28).

Since the inspired apostle said, "Repent and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins," to say one is saved prior to his being baptized is to say he is saved prior to the remission of his sins as promised.

When Ananias came to Saul and found him a believing penitent, he said to him:

"And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

So baptism stands between the sinner and the washing away of his sins by the blood of Christ (cf. Rev. 1:5; Rom. 6:3-5; John 19:34; Col. 2:12, 13).

The apostle Peter, writing about the salvation of Noah and his family in the ark, said:

"Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (I Peter 3:21, R.S.V.).

This verse states what baptism does—it saves us. Paul said:

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26, 27).

Since the Bible says, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ," if one is saved before baptism, he is saved before he gets into Christ. Salvation is in Christ (2 Timothy 2:10; cf. Eph. 1:3).

Hence, baptism is connected with faith as a condition of salvation and as a means of entrance into Christ. It is never referred to as a "Christian duty," but rather it is a command to be obeyed to *become* a Christian. Jesus said, "Except a man be born of *water* and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). The water part of the new birth is baptism.

Furthermore, the Bible teaches that in order to be saved one must obey the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9); and baptism is one of the commands of the gospel. Baptism is a condition of salvation, but not a meritorious cause. Christ is the Saviour, but he saves only those who *obey* him (Heb. 5:9; Rev. 22:14; Eph. 1:7; cf. 2 Kings 5:1-14; John 9:1-7).

#### ***V. The Essentiality of Baptism Today***

Since it is the Lord's will that penitent believers be baptized in order to obtain the forgiveness of their sins, it is essential now that people submit to all of God's commandments. In the light of Christ's example and teaching, it is hard to understand why so many religionists today belittle baptism and try to persuade their hearers that it is of no value. It causes one to wonder about the attitude of these and of others who say, "I do not think it is necessary to be baptized." This is unlike him who, as man's example, walked or rode at least 70 miles to be baptized. *The Lord by this act, placed emphasis on the importance of doing the Father's will.* Some would not now walk around the block to obey the Lord in this act. Some ignore it completely. Baptism is a direct command of God. When man complies therewith, God promises to save him. No one can follow in the steps of Jesus who hesitates in the doing of God's will. God has

not promised to acknowledge any one as his child in the Christian era until he, as a penitent believer, arises from the waters of baptism. He who rejects the Lord's command rejects the Lord (Luke 10:16; Acts 10:48; 2:41).

Some have gone so far as to divide the commands of God into "essentials and nonessentials." Behind such an attitude are two grave presumptions: First, that God has issued nonessential commands; and second, that man can distinguish between what is essential and what is nonessential. Not one of the commands of the Almighty is "optional." Nothing that God commands is unimportant or nonessential.

One striking fact concerning the conversions recorded in the New Testament is that sinners who resolved to obey Christ in baptism never ate, slept, or drank before they were baptized. Illustrative of this is the case of the Philippian jailer of whom it is said, "And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway" (Acts 16:33). The only reason to attend to baptism "the same hour of the night" is its urgency and necessity. If baptism were optional, submission to it could be deferred indefinitely without danger to the soul. Since it was not deferred even overnight in the first century, it should not be now. If one loves God, he will keep his commandments (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-5).

### **VI. Conclusion**

Summarizing this study of Bible baptism: (1) the *act* of baptism is *immersion in water*, the element; the Greek word *baptizo*, whence comes our word "baptize," means to dip or immerse; (2) the *subjects* of baptism are *penitent believers*; (3) the *design* of baptism is *in order to obtain the remission of sins*. *Scriptural baptism is an immersion in*

*water of a proper subject (a believing penitent) for the forgiveness of sins.* This is the "one baptism" of the New Testament dispensation (Eph. 4:4,5). For baptism, therefore, to be in harmony with the Bible *all* these conditions must be met.

If Jesus, who had no sin, could not fulfill all righteousness without being baptized, how can poor, sinful man expect to do so now? Therefore, let no one quibble over this plain command of God, but let him promptly obey God, as Christ did.

### **VII. Appendix: The River Jordan**

Since the Jordan is the important river of Palestine and the best known of the Bible, it is well to recall here some interesting events and facts about it. Besides the preaching of John and the baptism of Jesus, a few Old Testament happenings may be noted here: (1) Lot selected this fertile valley and pitched his tent toward Sodom and Gomorrah (probably located at what is now the lower end of the Dead Sea), which were later destroyed because of their immorality (Genesis 13:10-13; 19:23-28). (2) The Israelites crossed the Jordan in this valley under the leadership of Joshua and settled at Gilgal (Joshua 3, 4).<sup>\*</sup> (3) The fleeing Midianites, pursued by Gideon and his men, crossed at the fords near the Jabbock, known later as the fords of Bethbarah.

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<sup>\*</sup>Numbering possibly over three million persons, a miracle was required for so large a group to cross during the harvest season when the stream was overflowing its banks.

It seems that John at first baptized at the lower fords opposite Jericho, and later moved to the upper fords, 50 miles north of the Jericho ford and 10 miles south of the Sea of Galilee. (Cf. John 1:28; 3:23). Undoubtedly Jacob crossed the Jordan at the upper fords when enroute to Padanaram—the first recorded passage of the river in the Bible (Genesis 32:10).

Here also the men of Gilead slew the Ephraimites (Judges 7:24; 8:4-5; 12:6). (4) When fleeing from Absalom and on his return to Jerusalem, David twice crossed this river, and he also "passed over Jordan" to fight the Syrians (2 Samuel 10:17; 17:22). (5) Amidst the wonderful scenes at the close of his life Elijah crossed the Jordan at Jericho with Elisha, his successor (2 Kings 2:4-8, 13-15). (6) Elisha made an iron wedge to float on the Jordan (2 Kings 6:1-7). (7) Here Naaman, the Syrian captain, as directed by the prophet of God, dipped himself seven times and was cured of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:14).

The word "Jordan," which means "descender" or "flowing downward," applies to this river in a unique way. Originating in northern Palestine, it courses through Lake Huleh, thence into the Sea of Galilee, from whence it winds its way at last into the Dead Sea. Here it terminates approximately 1400 feet lower than its origin. To measure its remarkable length, if one travels in a straight line, the distance is only about 135 miles; yet if one follows its serpentine trail as it rushes down from the heights, its total distance is over 200 miles.

The Jordan proper begins near Mount Hermon at the junction of three small streams which rise from three springs: (1) the eastern source at Banias, the ancient Caesarea Philippi; (2) the central and largest source at Tel el-Kadi, the ancient city of Dan, where flows a large spring, 20 feet wide and 20 inches deep; and (3) the northwestern source at Hasbeiya. These all merge above Lake Huleh, "the waters of Merom" (Joshua 11:5-7), and flow into it. Proceeding from this small lake, only 3 miles wide and 4 miles long, the Jordan rapidly makes its way 10 miles further to the Sea of Galilee,

descending about 689 feet.

Here in the beautiful blue, clear, fresh waters of Galilee, where it reaches a maximum depth of 165 feet, the Jordan rests momentarily. The length of the lake is about 12 miles and varies from 3 to 6 miles in width. As in the time of the Savior's life on earth, its waters abound with fish. Majestic hills tower 1200 to 1500 feet above the surface of the lake, bordering it on almost every side. At times the chill currents of air rushing down these hills produce sudden storms. (See Luke 8:22-25). This sea is intimately connected with many wonderful and interesting events of the Lord's earthly life.

The Jordan hurries on southward from Lake Galilee. As it pursues its tortuous course, it forms a series of rapids. It then passes 65 miles through the hot, deep valley of Arabah. It drops 613 more feet in depth in the final 200 miles of its journey, coming to its final resting place in the Dead Sea. Having no escape except by evaporation, here the historic Jordan dies in the lowest lake on the earth.

The greater part of the river's journey is *below* sea level. From the time the Jordan leaves Caesarea Philippi, 100 feet above the level of the sea, until it reaches Lake Huleh, a distance of 12 miles, it has fallen to within 7 feet of sea level. At the Sea of Galilee, it is 682 feet below the level of the Mediterranean. When it reaches the Dead Sea, it is 1295 feet below. With such a fall the river would be a torrent were it not for its many short bends. One who has seen the Jordan will always remember its winding descent.

The Jordan is not, as some have thought, a small shallow stream. While the Jordan averages about 100 feet in width, it varies from 45 to 180 feet. Its normal depth is from 3 to 5 feet. However, in the

early spring the melting snows from lofty Mount Hermon and the torrential rains on the uplands cause the lower plains to overflow widely into the surrounding area. In ancient times the river was fordable except in the flooding season. In modern times a few of the more venturesome have gone by boat from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, but these trips have always been very hazardous. No cities were ever built along the Jordan. In the olden days its banks were a dense thicket of trees and shrubs wherein lions and other wild animals roamed.

That portion of the valley between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea is the Jordan Valley of the Scriptures. Hemmed in on either side by steep, rugged mountains of 3000 to 5000 feet in height, the six-mile width of the upper valley more than doubles as it stretches toward the south. Just to the north of the Dead Sea is the plain of Jericho, measuring over 8 miles from north to south and more than 14 miles across. *This is the lowest valley on the earth.* Due to its depression, the climate is hot and humid. In the summer the thermometer seldom falls below 100° F., even at night. The days are very warm even during the winter months.

When our party of eight toured the lands of the Bible in 1953, on Thursday afternoon, June 19, we came to the historic Jordan. Crossing the river on Allenby Bridge, about five miles north of the Dead Sea, opposite the city of Jericho, we trod the hallowed area of John's preaching. When we reached the Jericho ford, our thoughts turned naturally to the familiar story of the baptism of Jesus. At that spot, tradition says, our Savior submitted to the will of his Father and was buried in the waters of Jordan by his forerunner, John.

# NEW TESTAMENT BAPTISM

THE ACT	THE SUBJECT	THE DESIGN
Element, water Mark 1:5; Acts 8:36  Much water John 3:23  Going to, into the water Acts 8:38  A burial and resurrection Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12  Coming out of water Acts 8:39; Mark 1:10  Subject handled Matt. 28:19	The taught Matt. 28:19; Acts 18:8  Those who believe Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12  Those who repent Acts 2:38  Those who confess Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:10  No infants—Who? Whose? When? Why? Acts 8:12  A.D. 251, A.D. 1311 Ravenna, Italy	Christ commanded it Matt. 28:19; Heb. 5:9  For salvation, remission of sins Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38  To wash away sins Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5  To get into Christ II Tim. 2:10; Gal. 3:27  Into name of Father, Son, & Holy Spirit—Matt. 28:19  Must obey gospel II Thess. 1:7-9



## *“Upon This Rock”*

**C**AESAREA PHILIPPI was a city literally founded upon a rock. It was in that vicinity that Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” (Matthew 16:13). Various answers were given. Some were saying that he was John the Baptist, risen from the dead; others thought of him as Elijah; and still others said he was Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Then the Lord put the question directly to the disciples. “But who say ye that I am?” (Matthew 16:15). Then Peter made a most noble confession of his faith: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Many things led Peter to this conclusion. He had seen the miracles of our Lord, thrilled to his matchless discourses, and beheld his perfect life. Peter must have spoken the sentiments of all the other apostles, for none contradicted him.

Following Peter’s confession of faith in him as God’s Son, Jesus said:

“Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:17-19, American Standard Version).

This is a most significant passage of Scripture; note some clearly suggested truths about it.

### ***I. The Church Was Founded by Christ***

The first truth studied is that the church of the New Testament was built by Jesus Christ himself. To the apostles, Christ promised, "I will build my church." The church founded by Christ is a *divine organism* and is in faith, doctrine, organization, worship, unity, and terms of membership just what the Lord would have it be. In this respect the church is perfect and cannot be improved. Thus, in establishing his church, the original and true church, he showed that no one ever had divine authority to originate a church.

When Christ spoke of building the church, he used a possessive term, "my church." The church is, therefore, *Christ's church*, or the church of Christ, because he built it. Again, the church belongs to Christ because he purchased it with his own blood (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25-27). When Paul spoke of various congregations of the Lord's church he once said, "The churches of Christ . . ." (Romans 16:16).

Grammatically, the expression, *the church of Christ*, is not a title; it is simply a descriptive term indicating the fact that the church is the possession of Christ—that is, a prepositional phrase denoting ownership of the church. It is the same, therefore, as saying *Christ's church*.

### ***II. The Church Was Not Built upon Peter***

Secondly, *the church was not to be built upon Peter*, but rather upon Peter's confession—namely,

“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

When Jesus said, “Upon this rock,” he did not refer directly or personally to either himself or Peter. Then what is the rock? Undoubtedly it is the truth which Peter expressed. On that truth the church was built, and upon that truth it stands today. This fact is the bed-rock of Christianity. Jesus as the Son of God (not just a good man as the Modernists teach) is the truth that *must be believed* and confessed by every person in becoming a member of the church (Acts 8:37; Romans, 10:9, 10).

There are three Greek words in Matthew 16:18 that need to be carefully noted:

1. *Petros*—translated “Peter”—a noun, masculine gender, meaning a rock, a piece of rock or a stone.
2. *Petra*—translated “rock”—a noun, feminine gender, meaning the bed-rock, a massive rock or a great ledge. (A different word from *petros*.)
3. *Ekklesia*—translated “church”—a noun, feminine gender, meaning an assembly called together, or congregation. (cf. Acts 19:32, 39, 41.) Here the word means the assembly of the Lord’s people called out in a spiritual sense from the world.

Those who believe that the church was built upon Peter think that Christ said here: “Peter, you are a rock, and upon you I will build my church.” From this they infer the primacy of Peter over the other apostles and even over the whole church. But this is not what Jesus said.

Christ’s language precludes the supposition that Peter was the foundation of the church. Note: (1) Christ is the *builder* of his church; (2) the rock, which is the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is the *foundation*; and (3) Peter is at the

gate, holding the *keys*. It is a rule of language that a person cannot occupy two different positions in the same illustration at the same time. Therefore, Peter is where Jesus placed him—namely, the gate-keeper with the keys.

Hundreds of years before Christ was born, Isaiah prophesied:

“Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste” (Isaiah 28:16).

The apostle Peter applied this prophecy to Christ, declaring him to be the living stone upon whom Christians are built, *the chief corner stone, elect, precious*, which has been laid in Zion (Jerusalem). Christians are likewise *living stones, built up a spiritual house*, the church. This was Peter’s understanding of the language of Christ when he said, “Upon this *rock* I will build my church.” (1 Peter 2:3-8; cf. Acts 4:11-12; Ephesians 2:18-22.)

That the church is built upon Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and not upon Simon Peter, is further confirmed by the words of Paul to the church in Corinth:

“For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11. (Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:4.)

Paul laid this foundation in that city when he preached that Jesus was Christ (Acts 18:1-5).

So Christ said: “Thou art Peter [*petros*] and upon this rock [*petra*] I will build my church.” Christ definitely declared he would not build his

church upon "*Petros*," or Peter, but upon "*petra*." Being familiar with the old rock city of Petra, hewn in the high cliffs of Edom, the apostles correctly understood the words of Jesus, "Upon this *petra* I will build my *ekklesia*," to mean he would build his church upon the great truth Simon Peter had confessed—that is, upon his divinity, and *not* upon Peter. Hence, the church of our Lord is built upon that massive *rock*, the *fact* of the Messiahship and Sonship of Jesus. *It has no other foundation.*

If infidels could disprove Peter's confession that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," the whole church would fall into ruins immediately. By a figure of speech, this truth is the mighty rock on which Jesus built his church.

### **III. *The Building of the Church Was Future***

The third lesson to be learned from the text is that *the church had not been built at the time of that conversation.* "Will build" is future tense and implies building up from the foundation. Neither Abraham, Moses, nor John the Baptist built the Lord's church. They had all been dead for some time when Christ said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." John the Baptist was never a member of the church (Matthew 11:11).

The church was established in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection (A. D. 30). Every time something is said about the church or kingdom of Christ *before* that Pentecost it is always future; but every time one reads about the church *after* that day, it is always spoken of as something in existence. (cf. Matthew 3:1, 2; 6:9, 10; Mark 9:1; Acts 1:6, 8; 2:1-4; Colossians 1:13, 14; Revelation 1:9). The Lord prophesied that the church would

have its origin in the city of Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Zechariah 1:16; Luke 24:47; Acts 2; 11:15).

So man learns *when*, *where*, and *by whom* the church was established. The church was built on Pentecost, in Jerusalem, by Christ through the inspired apostles.

#### **IV. Christ Promised To Build but One Church**

Furthermore, Christ spoke of the church in the *singular* number. In the sense of religious organizations differing one from another in name, doctrine and practice, Christ established only one. It is "church" (singular), and not "churches" (plural). "Upon this rock I will build my church." Although the New Testament speaks of many congregations, Jesus built but one church; and the Bible repeatedly emphasizes the *oneness* of the church. (Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12, 20, 27; 8:5, 6; Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:4-6). There is one body. That body is the church. There is but one body, as there is but one Lord.

Hence, the expression, *the churches of Christ*, means the local congregations belonging to Christ, which are all of the same faith and practice. The only unit of organization in the Lord's church is the local congregation, independent in its government, directed by elders who serve under the supreme oversight of Christ. (cf. Acts 14:23.)

#### **V. The Church Is the Saved**

When Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church," just what did he have in mind to establish? The Bible, in answering this question, uses several designations in speaking of the institution or organism known as the Lord's church. For example:

1. If the institution is viewed from the standpoint of its *relationship to the world*, it is called the "church"; this means the "called out," or those who are *distinct from the world*, having been called by the gospel (John 15:19; 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14).
2. If the organism is viewed from the standpoint of its *government*, it is properly called the "kingdom," with Christ the absolute king and all departments of government (legislative, judicial and executive) vested in him (Matthew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 15:24, 25). "Church" and "kingdom" are used by Christ in Matthew 16:18, 19 in reference to the same institution. (Cf. Luke 22: 29, 30; 1 Corinthians 11:20; Hebrews 12:23, 28.) To be in the church of Christ is to be in the kingdom of Christ.
3. If the church is spoken of from the standpoint of its *organization*, it is called the "body," with Christ as the head and all Christians members of this one body (Romans 12:4, 5).
4. If this institution is viewed from the standpoint of a *family* it is called the "house of God," or the family of the Lord, with all of God's children being members of this family, the church (1 Timothy 3:15; Romans 8:14-17).
5. If the church is described from the standpoint of its *worship*, it is properly called the "temple of God," for God dwells in this building and is worshiped there (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:5). The church is not a material building, or the meeting house (Acts 7:48; 17:24); it is a *spiritual* temple. *In the New Testament the word*

*"church" never refers to a material building.*

6. If the organism is viewed in reference to its *relationship to Christ*, it is the *bride* of Christ, and individual members wear his name (Eph. 5:23-32; Acts 11:26; 26:28; I Pet. 4:16).

One can understand why the same institution is referred to by several designations, for a man can be a *brother*, a *husband*, a *lawyer*, an *American*, a *Christian*, and a *father*. He is *one* man yet considered from six different relationships.

The law of admission into the church of God is well defined in the Scriptures. It consists of *faith* in Christ as God's Son, which comes by hearing the word; *repentance* of all past sin; *confession* of faith in Christ; and *baptism* in water unto the remission of sins. (Cf. Mark 15:15, 16; Romans 10:17; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 8:36-38; Romans 6:3, 4.) When any one thus obeys the will of God, the Lord simultaneously saves and adds him to the church (Acts 2:47). So, an individual becomes a member of the church at the same time and by the same process he becomes a Christian or a child of God.

Many think it is one thing to be saved but something different to be a member of the church. The popular idea regarding the church is that one church (that is, denomination) is as good as another, and that if one wants to become a member of any one of them, he will have to join it. All of these ideas are the result of thinking in terms of denominationalism, without Bible knowledge.

The church that Jesus built, as described in the New Testament, is never referred to in the Bible as a denomination; and there is no record of anyone having joined it in the popular sense of the word.



The word *church* is used in two basic senses in the Bible: (1) In the *universal* sense, including all the saved (as in Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:23); (2) in the *local* congregational sense, applying to a particular group of Christians meeting and working together in a certain locality (as in 1 Corinthians 1:1, 2; Romans 16:16; Revelation 1:11). There is just *one* church—body of saved people—built by and belonging to Christ. No denomination can qualify for *the church* in either of the two senses in which the word is used in the New Testament. Some one has aptly said: “A Denomination is a religious body with extra-Biblical peculiarities distinguishing it from the church or religious body revealed in the Bible. It is utterly impossible for any denomination to exist without believing something, doing something, being something, saying something, or having something that is not in the Word of God. All denominations teach more or less of what is in the Bible; but the things they teach that are in the Bible do not make them denominations.”

Summarizing, the Bible teaches that the church is that saved body of people which has obeyed the gospel. Christ rules as head, and in His church His Spirit dwells. The church and the saved are the same—*the saved are the church*. In the church all Christians (saved people) are found. To obtain salvation, then, a person must become a member of that church. No one can become a Christian without becoming a member of this church any more than one can become a child without becoming a member of a family. Moreover, salvation is to be obtained only in Christ's kingdom, his church, which is the Lord's family (Colossians 1:13, 14; 1 Timothy 3:15).

### A. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IS ONE UNDIVIDED BODY OF CHRISTIANS

Since Christ's church is *one* body, it is not divided into different bodies, each having its own special name, organization, and beliefs. In the days of the apostles the Christians were not divided into a number of different organizations (churches), but they were members of the same church, the body of Christ. All of the early Christians were in the Lord's church, but none of them were members of any denomination. Division among Christians was condemned (1 Corinthians 1:10). Christ prayed that his disciples all be one (John 17:20, 21). People today should be simply Christians, members of the Lord's church, without becoming members of any denomination. One can be in the Lord's church and not be in a denomination of any kind.

Since Jesus established just one church, men have no right to establish other churches and claim that they are the Lord's. Neither do they have any divine right to divide Christ's church into denominations.

Possibly one denomination is as good as another, but this does not prove that any of them is on an equality with the Lord's church. Denominations are merely human institutions. They were founded far too late to be the church which Jesus built. Had men sought to *restore* the New Testament church instead of *reforming* into "Protestant" denominations, men would not know denominationalism today. Protestant denominations had their beginning in the sixteenth century, A. D.—some fifteen hundred years after Christ established his church. Christ's church is revealed in the New Testament, but human denominations are not once mentioned there.

## **B. CHRIST'S CHURCH CAN BE REPRODUCED TODAY IN ANY NATION**

Christians are made wherever Christ is preached, people believe in him, repent, confess him as the Son of God, and are baptized (immersed) into him. Hence, the instrument by which people are born anew, and by which the church is perpetuated, is the Word of God (Jas. 1:18).

Jesus explained that the seed of the kingdom is the word of God (Luke 8:11). If the same seed be planted in the twentieth century, it will produce the same results that it produced in the beginning. Man need not concern himself with an attempt to trace the church all the way back to the apostles in order to be certain that it is the same church. Plant the same seed, and the same results will follow. The gospel produced Christians or members of Christ's church in the first century. When that same simple message is preached today, it will make Christians, members of the body of Christ. The true church in any community is the same as the church read about in the Bible. Any body of people that conforms to the New Testament pattern today, in name, doctrine, worship, and practice, is in fact the church of Christ. The true church of Christ now is the same in name, faith, worship, and doctrine as it was in the days of the apostles. Since every seed produces after its kind, it is possible, by preaching the original gospel, to have within any community *in any age* a congregation of disciples, identical in every respect with those of the first century.

An identical reproduction of the church of the Lord, as it is described in the New Testament, would automatically destroy denominationalism. For, if all people were to practice and teach only

what is authorized by the Scriptures, there would be no denominations. Since such can be accomplished, may God speed the day when all will be together in the *one* church built by Christ!

### **VI. *The Gates of Hades Could Not Prevail against It***

In the sixth place, Jesus said: "Upon this rock I will build my church; *and the gates of Hades* [the King James Version has "hell"] *shall not prevail against it*" (Matthew 16:18). *Hades* is the fixed abode of the departed spirits between death and the resurrection. Although the Scriptures teach that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against the *perpetuity* of the church (that is, it shall never die or become extinct), the context of this passage limits our understanding to the *establishment* of the Lord's church. The gates of Hades shall not prevail against the *building* of the church; that is, the powers of the Hadean (unseen) world could not prevent Jesus from arising from the dead and building his church. Christ *determined* to build his church and the gates of *Hades*, the unseen world, could not prevent it.

It is true that neither death, nor any other power, has ever completely destroyed the church—nor shall they ever. The kingdom "shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44); it "cannot be moved" (Hebrews 12:28). Although many members of the church did apostatize in the centuries following the days of the apostles, just as the Lord had predicted, yet the Word of God, which is the seed of the kingdom, still lives because it is incorruptible. (cf. 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10; 1 Peter 1:23.) If there were no congregations to be found on this earth in any age since its origin, the potential was

there, for the seed remained, and this seed is eternal (Mark 13:31). Proof of the theory of church succession is both historically impossible and wholly unnecessary. But the assurance of the establishment and perpetuation of the church is far from a promise to make the church always infallible in all of her teachings.

### **VII. *Peter Was Given the Keys of the Kingdom***

The seventh lesson suggested by the passage in Matthew 16 is that *Christ gave to Peter the keys of the kingdom*. Keys denote power or authority. By the "kingdom of heaven" Christ did not mean the eternal kingdom of heaven after this life; He meant the church here upon this earth, the kingdom or body of Christ which is the family of God. Peter was promised the authority to tell people how to enter the church. The terms of pardon would be the same as the terms of induction into the kingdom. The Lord later promised this same power to *all* the apostles (Matthew 18:18). Peter was not given any authority that was not likewise given to them. Yet, honor was bestowed upon him since he was the first to preach the gospel to the Israelites on Pentecost and the first to open the door of the church to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. (Cf. Acts 2 and Acts 10; 11:1-18.) With the *keys* he opened the doors of the church to both alike.

Literally translated the promise of Christ to Peter is, "Whatever you bind will have already been bound in heaven . . ." That means the apostles announced to the world what had already been bound or loosed in heaven. Therefore, whatever Peter and the other apostles bound or loosed on earth was also bound, or loosed, or ratified in heaven—namely, the terms of salvation and all matters pertaining to

the church. In their preaching the apostles were guided into *all* truth by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13), and consequently, their teaching recorded in the New Testament constitutes today the only rule of faith binding on Christians. This system of teaching is the "creed" of the Lord's church.

#### A. WAS PETER A POPE?

It is true that Peter often obtained a personal prominence over the other apostles. His name appears first in all the lists of the apostles (Matthew 10:2-4). However, the question so often raised today is not, "Was Peter prominent?" but, "Was Peter the head of the church, and are the bishops of Rome his successors?" Some think that Peter was the first pope, and upon him the church of our Lord was built, and to him and his successors all religious authority has been given.

That our Lord did not give to Peter any ecclesiastical primacy (as claimed by some religionists) is evident from the following Scriptural reasons:

1. Matthew 16:18 does not teach that Peter is the foundation of the church. It is not "*petros*," a fragment, but "*petra*," an unshakable mountain of rock—the *truth* of Peter's confession—upon which the church is built.
2. The other apostles had the baptism of the Spirit directly from Christ and were equally inspired to *bind* and *loose*. (Matthew 18:18; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4.)

The *only* preeminence, then, Peter had was the honor of *first* opening the doors of the gospel to the world.\*

3. The other apostles had no idea that Christ intended to set Peter over them as their

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\*Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*, vol. I; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949, p. 110.

- head, or as the head of the church. At a date later than the conversation at Caesarea Philippi, Salome and her two sons came to Christ and requested that they should obtain the high places in the kingdom (Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45). Even at the Last Supper there was a contention among the Twelve as to who *should be accounted the greatest* (Luke 22:24-30). It seems strange that if Christ had already given this place to Peter, they did not know of it. Christ told the disciples, however, that "all ye are brethren" and true greatness is attained through humble service; that no man among them should exercise authority over the others (Matthew 18:1-4).
4. Peter called himself *an apostle*—one among several (1 Peter 1:1), *a servant* of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1), and *a fellow elder* (1 Peter 5:1). But he never spoke of himself as the head of the church on earth nor exercised any authority over the other apostles. He also said that Christians were *living stones*, not built upon himself as Pope but on Christ (1 Peter 2:3-8).
  5. Peter was a married man; he had a wife and a mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14). He still had a wife several years after the church had been established (1 Corinthians 9:5). This is contrary to the practice of those who claim to be the successors of Peter. But if Peter were the first pope or bishop, as some affirm, then he must have been married, for the Bible says that *a bishop must be the husband of one wife* (1 Timothy 3:2-5; Titus

- 1:6). Either way it would refute the present day claims of the papacy.
6. Contrary to the spirit of popery, which today delights in human worship, Peter would not accept worship from man; neither was his personal life without error, for Paul withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed, a thing that could not have happened had Peter been infallible. (See Acts 10:25, 26; Galatians 2:11.)
  7. Since Paul stated that he was not in the least inferior to the chiefest of the apostles, was Paul head of the church too? (See 2 Corinthians 11:5; 12:11.) He was not. However, if any were to be the head over the church composed primarily of Gentiles, it would be Paul, for he was the one chosen by the Lord to be the apostle to the Gentile nations.

The fact is, *the ecclesiastical supremacy of Peter is nowhere affirmed by Christ, claimed by Peter, or acknowledged by the rest of the apostles.* Peter was not the head of the church in *any* sense.

After the church was established and the apostles guided into all truth by the Holy Spirit, they never referred to Peter as their head or the head of the church. They did teach, however, that Christ is "the head of the body, the church . . . that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:18).

Suppose all that is sometimes alleged to be taught in Matthew 16:18 concerning the primacy of Peter were granted. There is still a lack of evidence to show that Peter was ever the bishop of Rome. But even if he had been, there is no evidence that he



could transmit such primacy to any one else. The apostles were appointed directly by the Lord and had no successors. The Bible nowhere states that Peter should have infallible successors who would be the vicegerents of Christ and the head of the church. The fact has never been established that Peter was ever in the city of Rome. It is only a *tradition*. Yet that is the basic assumption underlying all the claims to the primacy and infallibility of the popes of Rome.

As further evidence that Simon Peter was not the first bishop of Rome and the head of the church, note these facts: (1) Peter was in Jerusalem in A.D. 44 at the very time it is claimed he was pope in Rome (Acts 12). (2) Peter was not in Rome in A.D. 58 when Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans from Corinth. There is no mention in that letter of his being there. Surely Paul did not overlook the Pope after saluting twenty-seven other Christians! (3) Paul, a few years later, went to Rome as a prisoner and resided there two years, during which time he wrote letters to the Colossians, to Philemon, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians. While a number of persons are mentioned in each of these epistles, *no mention is made of Peter*. If Peter were the Pope, was he again ignored by Paul? (4) Later Paul wrote a second letter to Timothy from Rome, and yet no mention is made of Peter's presence in the city. Paul said that all had forsaken him; only Luke was with him (2 Timothy 4:11). Where was Peter? Was the Pope afraid to visit him in the hour of death? (5) In the two letters written by Peter, no mention is made of his stay in Rome; he was in Babylon, a city located far to the East (1 Peter 5:13). (6) No inspired man ever mentioned Peter in

connection with Rome. However, should later archaeological discoveries prove that Peter did die in Rome, the claim that he ruled there as the head of the church, that the bishops of Rome are his successors and the heads of the church, and that people must submit to the Roman Pontiff as a condition of their salvation, would still be without Scriptural foundation.

Christ is the *only universal head of the church*, who has all authority, and he lives forever in heaven; the headquarters of the church is in heaven. Christ's church has no earthly headquarters. (Cf. Philippians 3:20, RSV.)

After his resurrection, Christ said he himself had *all authority* both in heaven and on *earth* (Matthew 28:18). The church does not have a head on earth and a head in heaven. To speak of the church as "visible" and "invisible," with a "visible" and "invisible" head, is to use expressions unknown to the Bible. No individual on earth has ever been granted the privilege of exercising authority over Christ's church. Neither has God given to any man or any set of men the right to make laws for his church. The Bible declares that the church is subject to *Christ* (Ephesians 5:24). Hence, no mere, fallible man serves as head of the Lord's church.

#### **B. WHEN WAS THE FIRST POPE?**

The word "pope" means "father." Jesus said: "And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9; cf. Psalms 111:9).

The Lord condemned all honorary titles of an official nature, as well as all kinds of religious garb. The "big I and little you" idea is the thing that led to popery. But popery did not come about until

*centuries* after the death of the apostles. According to history the title of "Pope" (as it is used today) came about in the following way: In A.D. 533, Justinian bestowed upon the bishop of Rome the title, "Lord of the Church." John the Faster, bishop of Constantinople, about A.D. 588, took upon himself the title of "universal Bishop of the church." For that act he received severe rebuke from Gregory the Great, the bishop of Rome. But after a few years had passed the Roman emperor Phocas, a very blood-thirsty ruler, took the title and bestowed it upon Boniface III, the bishop of Rome, in A.D. 606. And from that day until this the successive bishops of Rome have retained it. Examine the proceedings of all the councils of the first six centuries and one will not find in any of them a single vestige of the existence of a pope or universal head of the church down to the time of Gregory the Great, or John the Faster. John was the first to assume the title of universal head of the church, and the bishop of Rome at that time opposed it as anti-Scriptural, anti-Christian, and diabolical.

A close study of church history shows that the system of government of the Roman Church is much more like the system of the old Roman Empire than it is of the church of the New Testament, and that it came about as a result of a gradual apostasy from the truth. (cf. II Thessalonians 2.)

The papacy rests upon *three assumptions*: (1) That Peter had supreme authority in the church; (2) that Peter was the first bishop (or Pope) of Rome; and (3) that the peculiar powers of Peter passed at his death from his person to his successor in the office he vacated, and, in turn, to his successors. They are all false. Consequently, the claim

to *church authority* rests entirely upon a fallacious foundation, easily exposed by the simplicity of the Bible's teaching.

### VIII. *Conclusion*

The foundation of any building is the secret of its strength and durability. The finest structure, if erected on a weak foundation, cannot stand. The Lord's church, the grandest and most glorious institution that has ever appeared on this earth, is built upon a *divine foundation*, Christ—a bed-rock that cannot be moved. That Gibraltar of truth, embraced in Peter's sublime confession, is the rock upon which Christ's church stands. That is the vital difference between the church that Jesus built and the institutions of men which are built upon the faulty foundations of human creeds, philosophies, and speculations. They will fall with the passing of time, for the Psalmist declared:

"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psalms 127:1).

And Jesus said,

"Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (Matthew 15:13; cf. Matthew 7:21-27).

Many and severe have been the storms which have beat against the church of God from its establishment. But against them all it has stood serene and unmoved, and that divine institution shall continue to stand. All men are urged to be members of the church of Christ because only by enjoying this relationship can one be saved and acceptably work for the Lord (Ephesians 5:23; Matthew 20:1-16).

Some build their hopes on the ever-drifting sand;  
Some on their fame or their treasure or their land;  
Mine's on the Rock that forever shall stand,  
Jesus the "Rock of Ages."

—S. S. Journal

## MUST ONE BE

# *A Member of the Church*

## TO BE SAVED?

COMMON EXPRESSIONS heard today are: "One does not have to be a member of the church to be saved; the church doesn't save anyone; one can be a Christian and not be a member of any church." Many are also of the opinion that being a good citizen is the equivalent of being a Christian. What must be done is to inquire whether these beliefs are true. If the Bible teaches them as truth, then all must accept and teach them as God's divine will; however, if the Bible teaches against such ideas, all must with equal vigor oppose them. The question now to be answered is, "Does the Bible teach these popular doctrines?" To secure the answer, investigation of the Scriptures is necessary. Then one can see what they teach concerning salvation and church membership.

### *I. Where Does the Lord Save?*

It is a truth accepted by all that the Bible teaches that the Lord saves. Can an expression be found in the Bible that states that "*good people* can be saved out of the church" or "anywhere"? The question is: "*Where* does the Lord save—in the church or out of it?" Or "Can one be a Christian outside the church?" Or, "Can one be saved outside the Lord's church?" The Bible will answer the question, for it not only teaches who the Savior is, but also *when* and *where* he saves. The Savior is the one who states the conditions of pardon for man

and also tells him by what means and in what place he must be to receive salvation. All will acknowledge that Christ has the right to say both *when* and *where* he will save. The Lord desires the salvation of all; but if man is to obtain it, then he must enter into that realm where God has placed it.

“For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9, RSV; cf. II Peter 3:9; I Timothy 2:4; Titus 2:11).

#### A. GOD “WALLS IN” HIS BLESSINGS

For some reason God has always seen fit to place certain restrictions or requirements that exclude all from salvation who will not comply with them. To illustrate: In the days of Noah, God offered men salvation from the destruction of the flood, but the offer was only to those who were willing to enter into the ark at the time of the flood. Concerning that salvation, Peter wrote:

“. . . by which [Spirit] also he [Christ] went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, *wherein few*, that is, eight souls were saved by water” (1 Peter 3: 19-20).

This passage plainly states that this salvation was *in the ark*. All who stayed out of the ark were lost. There was no other place to be saved from the deluge; therefore, unless people entered into the ark they were lost. The end of the story shows that only eight people were saved from the flood. These entered into the ark . . . and safety. However, the rest of mankind failed to meet the divine requirements by failing to enter within the “walls” that

surrounded salvation; hence, they were destroyed.

Since God's requirements in the days of Noah placed salvation from the flood *in the ark*, the question follows, "*Where has God placed salvation from sin today?*" God has definitely located salvation and has stated certain requirements of all responsible beings, if they wish to be saved. People cannot obtain that salvation in any place nor in any way different from these requirements.

### B. SALVATION IS IN CHRIST

The Bible very plainly states that salvation is *in Christ*, that God saves only through Christ. Paul declares:

"Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also *obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus* with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:10).

Furthermore, the Apostle Peter says, concerning Christ:

"This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. *Neither is there salvation in any other*: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:11-12).

Since Paul says that salvation is to be obtained "in Christ," the question might be asked, "Cannot people obtain salvation in some other place?" Peter definitely and plainly declares, "Neither is there salvation in any other." The Bible then emphatically states that salvation is *in Christ* and *in no other*. Hence, inspired men locate salvation from sin in a definite place as surely as Peter located salvation from the flood in a definite place.

One was "in the ark"; the other is "in Christ." Salvation today cannot be obtained just anywhere;

it can only be obtained "in Christ Jesus." Hence, men are mistaken when they think there are many ways to be saved. *There are not a thousand ways to heaven, nor two.* Jesus is *the way*, not merely a way.

Christ declares:

"I am *the way*, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, *but by me*" (John 14:6).

Therefore, people cannot obtain salvation in any other place; for it cannot be found anywhere except "in Christ."<sup>1</sup> Hence, *in him* is the sphere in which salvation is found.

## ***II. What Blessings Are in Christ?***

### **A. ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS ARE IN CHRIST**

Paul affirms:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

Notice some of the many blessings which are found "in Christ" and what it means to be "in him."

#### **1. *Redemption Is in Christ:***

". . . being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24).

*Redemption* is but another word for salvation or forgiveness. Christ died to redeem man from sin, but one must come within those boundaries where redemption is located in order to be purchased with the price of his blood (1 Peter 1:18-19;

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<sup>1</sup>With the aid of a diagram this lesson from the Bible can be made very plain. The circle encloses things "in Christ." All the Scriptures inside it emphasize the importance of one's being in this realm.



Ephesians 2:13). Thus redemption is conditional.

**2. Forgiveness Is in Christ:**

“. . . in whom [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14).

Since the “forgiveness of sins” is “in Christ,” then one must be there to have his sins forgiven (cf. Ephesians 1:7).

**3. One Is a New Creature in Christ:**

“Therefore if any man be *in Christ*, he is a *new creature*: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

A “new creature,” or a *new creation*, is one who has been born anew (John 3:5), or who has become a Christian. But one cannot be a new creature *outside of Christ*.

**4. Life Is in Christ:**

“In him [Christ] was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and *this life is in his Son*. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:11-12).

One cannot enjoy spiritual life and at the same time be outside that realm where it is found. To illustrate again: In the beginning of time God provided a sphere of life for all creation. He ordained that fish live in water (Genesis 1). Can a fish live *out* of water? No, fish must live in that realm wherein God located their physical life. Now, notice the application: Where did God place spiritual life? Certainly it was not outside of Christ, but rather “in him.” Eternal life is in Christ, and every-

one who has the Son has also the life that is in the Son. Thus the sphere for man's spiritual life is "in Christ."

**5. *One Is Reconciled in Christ:***

"But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation . . . we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:18-20, American Standard Version).

Reconciliation is another word which indicates pardon, forgiveness of sins, or salvation. When God and man are reconciled, man's sins are forgiven and he is re-united with God. God and man meet *in Christ*; hence, to be in Christ is to be reconciled to God.

**6. *One Is Reconciled in the One Body:***

". . . and that he [Christ] might reconcile both unto God *in one body* by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Ephesians 2:16).

Therefore, one must be in that one body to be reconciled to God; and to be in the one body is to be in Christ.

**B. TO BE "IN CHRIST" IS TO BE IN THE CHURCH**

The Bible explains that the "one body" is the church:

". . . and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him [Christ] to be the head over all things to *the church*, which is *his body*, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23). "And he [Christ] is the head of the *body, the church* . . ." (Colossians 1:18).

“ . . . for his body’s sake, which is *the church*”  
(Colossians 1:24).

*Thus to be in Christ is to be in his church.*

Since being reconciled unto God means being forgiven of sins, people are saved, pardoned, or reconciled *in the church*.

Up to this point it has been established from the Scriptures that:

(1) People are reconciled in one body (Ephesians 2:16). (2) The body is the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18, 24). (3) Therefore, people are saved, or reconciled, only in the church, the one body.

Again the Bible declares that Christ is the Savior of the body, which is the church:

“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body” (Ephesians 5:23).

Since the church is the body of Christ, and Christ is the savior of the body, how then can a person be saved and *not* be a member of the church? One must be a member of that which Christ is the savior in order to be saved.

One often hears it said: “The church cannot save anyone.” This is true, and yet this does not prove that anybody can be saved outside the Lord’s church. It is true that the church does not save anyone; but Christ saves the church. Hence, salvation is promised only to those who are in the body of Christ. *The church is not the savior; it is the saved. All who are saved are in the church; or the saved make up the church.* The Bible says:

“And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

This verse teaches that the Lord saved the people and that *he added them to the church* in the same process. They were not first saved and then added, nor added and later saved; but they were saved in being added, and added in being saved.

Now, note another deduction:

- (1) To be saved is to be in Christ, for salvation is in Christ (2 Timothy 2:10).
- (2) To be saved equals being in the church, for the Lord adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47).
- (3) Therefore, to be in Christ is to be in his church.

The conclusion from these Scriptures is evident: One cannot be "in Christ" and outside of his church, for the church is the body of Christ. It is necessary for one to get into Christ to be saved, and it is necessary to be in the church. Salvation is in the church of the Lord, his spiritual body. There are no saved people outside the church of the New Testament because the Lord adds all the saved to the church.

### C. ALL CHRISTIANS ARE IN THE CHURCH

A person cannot be a Christian without being a member of the church because the process that makes one a Christian is the process by which one is saved and added to the church. All Christians are members of the church and only members of the church are Christians. Hence, no one can be saved and be a Christian who is not a member of the church, the body of saved people.

If people can be saved outside of the Lord's church, then they can be saved in the world (cf. Colossians 1:13-14). The word *church* simply means

"the called out." There are two spiritual kingdoms: namely, the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of Christ. All those who have been saved are translated into the kingdom of Christ, which is the church (Matthew 16:18, 19). Again, the church is the house (family) of God (I Timothy 3:15). Now, if one can be saved out of the church, he can be saved out of that which the church is. If one can be saved out of the church, he can be saved out of the body of Christ, out of the kingdom of God, out of the family of God. Too, if one can be saved out of the church, he can be saved without that which God has placed *in* the church. All "spiritual blessings" are "in Christ." These spiritual blessings are to be enjoyed only *in Christ*, and to be in Christ is to be in his body, which is the church.

Again, if responsible people can be saved outside that divine body, then Christ died to establish a worthless institution (cf. Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25-27). Since the blood of Christ was used to purchase the church, those who are not members of the church cannot enjoy the blessings of the blood. If one person can be saved outside the church, then so can *two*; and if two, then so can the whole world. But the Bible plainly says that Christ saves only those in the church (Ephesians 5:23; 1:22-23). Therefore, those who are outside this realm are in a lost condition.

Thus, the Scriptures teach that Jesus does the saving, but they also affirm that he saves men *in* the church, his body, and not out of it. Being in Christ and being in his church are simply synonymous expressions to describe exactly the same relationship to God. The same process by which Christ saves the sinner also makes him a Christian, a member of the Lord's church.

# MUST ONE BE A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH TO BE SAVED?

OR

## OBTAINING SALVATION

Salvation from the flood  
I Pet. 3:20—"wherein."  
In the ark..

How does one get into Christ?  
"Baptized into Christ"—  
Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27



All spiritual blessings—Eph. 1:3  
Redemption—Rom. 3:24  
Forgiveness—Col. 1:14  
New creature—2 Cor. 5:17  
Spiritual life—I John 5:11, 12  
Reconciliation—2 Cor. 5:18; Eph. 2:11-15

2 Tim. 2:10 **"IN CHRIST"** Acts 4:12

Reconciled in one body—Eph. 2:16  
The body is the church—Eph. 1:22, 23  
Christ Head—Church—Body—Col. 1:18, 24  
Christ savior of body—Eph. 5:23  
Saved added to church—Acts 2:47  
Complete in Christ—Col. 2:9, 10



Where does the Lord Save?  
I Thess. 5:9

"Baptized into one body"  
I Cor. 12:13

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord"  
Rev. 14:13

When people understand the Bible definition of the Lord's church, then they will see the necessity of being a member of it. *The church of Christ is the saved*—all the saved, and none but the saved.

*The church of Christ is the entire body of the redeemed*, and Christ is the head. It is the kingdom of heaven, or kingdom of God, here on earth. Since the church is the body, and the body is the church, then the body of Christ is the church of Christ; and the various local congregations are "churches of Christ" (Ephesians 1:22-23; 1 Corinthians 12:27; Romans 16:16). Christ's church, or the church of Christ—and these expressions represent precisely the same thought—is the church that Christ built. It is not a denomination.

Salvation is to be obtained only in the kingdom of Christ, the church. Nevertheless, due to a misunderstanding of the nature of the New Testament church, many hold to the notion that one can be saved out of the church as well as he can be saved in it. For this reason people think that it is one thing to be saved but something entirely different to be a member of the church. The popular idea regarding the church is that one church (i.e., denomination) is as good as another, and that if one wants to become a member of one of them, he will have to join it. All of these ideas are the result of thinking in terms of denominationalism.

The church that Jesus built (i.e., the church described in the New Testament) is never referred to as a denomination, and there is no record of anyone's having joined it in the popular sense of the word. One does not *join* the church in the sense that men join human institutions. But, upon his obedience to the gospel one is *added* to it by the Lord (Acts 2:47).

People often ask, "Do you not think that there are good people in *all* churches?" Certainly, *from a moral standpoint*. Does this prove, however, that morality is equal to salvation? Does it mean that one denomination is as good as another or that all churches are right? If this is true, since there are good people that do not belong to any church, it follows by the same reasoning that no church is right. Observe this argument placed in its logical form:

1. To have good morals is all that is necessary to be a Christian.
2. There are good moral people in all churches.
3. Therefore, there are Christians in all churches.

But,

1. To have high morals is all that is necessary to be a Christian.
2. There are good moral people who do not belong to any church.
3. Therefore, there are Christians who do not belong to any church; or, it is unnecessary to belong to any church to be a Christian; or, it is unnecessary to belong to any church to be saved.

But it must be remembered that the Bible teaches that one cannot be saved outside of the New Testament church. Too, the Bible does not teach that one church is as good as another; neither that membership in a denomination is equivalent to membership in the body of Christ. What is wrong then with these arguments? They are based upon the false premise that morality alone makes one a Christian. However, the Scriptures teach that one cannot be saved and be a Christian outside of the body of Christ any more than one can be a child



of God outside of God's family. When one is re-born spiritually he enters the family of God which is the church (John 3:3-5).

#### **D. ONE CAN BE A CHRISTIAN AND NOT BE IN ANY DENOMINATION**

Some ask, "Are there not Christians in *all denominations?*" This one thing is sure: there were no "Christians in all denominations" in the first century of Christianity, for there were no denominations. There were Christians—thousands of them—but they were all in *the one body*, the Lord's church (Acts 4:32; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27). They were just Christians—undenominational. No Christian mentioned in the New Testament was a member of any of the current modern-day denominations, cults, or isms. It should be that way now for all the professed followers of Christ, and it will be that way when all obey the directions of the Bible.

A denomination is a sect, party, or class separated by a peculiar name, creed, and/or central headquarters. Protestant denominations had their beginning in the sixteenth century, A. D.—some fifteen hundred years after Christ established his church. There is not a single denomination mentioned in the New Testament.

The Lord's church is not a denomination, nor is it all the denominations combined. It is not a part or faction of anything. Denominationalism is contrary to the New Testament. There is no Scripture that even intimates that God will save one because he is in a denomination.

Denominationalists say that one does not have to be a member of some denomination to be saved. That is true. But the Bible teaches that one does have to be a member of Christ's body, the church,

to be saved. Inspired men never told anyone to join some denomination, but they did stress the importance of one's being *in Christ* to be saved. They explained that to be in Christ was to be in his church. Hence, one cannot be saved outside the church Christ established.

Indeed, one can be saved and be a Christian without being a member of any *denomination*. *There is no necessity to join a denomination*. A denomination has nothing to do with saving people, for people freely admit that a person can be saved without belonging to any of them. When individuals organize or belong to a denomination, they do something that Christians in the days of the apostles did not do. If people will just follow the New Testament, they will be Christians only and belong to nothing but the church, which is the body of Christ. Furthermore, it is not necessary to trace an unbroken succession of the Lord's church through all the ages since her beginning in order to have the true church now. The word—the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11)—guarantees the identity of the church today.

#### **E. CHRIST ESTABLISHED ONLY ONE CHURCH**

The Bible teaches there is but *one body*:

“But now are they many members, yet but one body” (1 Corinthians 12:20).

“There is one body . . .” (Ephesians 4:4).

What each one must do, then, is to obey the gospel, let the Lord save and add the individual to the church. Then one will be “complete in him.”

“For in him [Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him [Christ], which is the head of all principality and power” (Colossians 2:9-10; cf. 1:9, 19).

Since one is *complete* in Christ, nothing is gained by becoming a member of a human religious organization. *All spiritual blessings are in Christ.* No one can believe and practice what the Lord teaches in the New Testament and be anything else but a simple Christian, a member of the Lord's church. People should be content to be Christians only, members of the body of Christ, and stay *out* of *all* denominations (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; John 17:20-21; Ephesians 4:1-6). Today, though, when one says he is a Christian the usual question is, "Of which church are you a member?" Or, "With which denomination are you affiliated?" This proves that departures have been made from the teaching of the broad, undenominational church of the Bible, because obedience to the gospel saves and adds only to the church of our Lord.

Summarizing, the Bible teaches that the church is that body of people which has been called out of the world by the gospel, over which Christ rules as head, and in which his Spirit dwells. *The church and the saved are one and the same. The saved are the church.* And to be a Christian a person must be *in the body of Christ.*

Thus the answer to the question asked, "Must one be a member of the church to be saved?" depends upon whether one means "a church," referring to one of the denominations, or "the church," which is the body of Christ, the family of God. It has been established by the Holy Scriptures that to be saved outside of the church which Christ built, which is his body, one would have to be saved out of Christ. Since the Bible teaches that this is not possible (Acts 4:12; 2 Timothy 2:10), one then cannot be saved without being a member of the Lord's church.

### **III. Will Many Be Lost?**

When this plain teaching of the New Testament is presented, many remark, "Well, this means that a great many people are going to be lost." Certainly that is true (Matthew 7:13-14). Nevertheless, the same objection could have been urged against Noah's preaching that one had to be *in* the ark to be saved from the flood. And many people did not think it essential to enter into the ark to be saved, for only *eight* souls escaped destruction. Some might have said to Noah, "Don't you think God can save a man outside of the ark if he wants to?" Grant that the Lord could; it was not a question, however, of what God could do, but of what he had promised to do. A similar condition prevails now regarding salvation from sin. The Lord has placed salvation in Zion, the church, the body of Christ (Isaiah 46:13; Hebrews 12:22-23). Those who are *out* of Christ are lost in sin (Ephesians 2:12). Both Saul of Tarsus, the chief of sinners, and Cornelius, a good man, had to come into Christ or the church to enjoy salvation (Acts 9:1-22; I Tim. 1:15; Acts 10; 11:1-18). Anyone between these extremes must be saved *in* Christ or his church, his body.

### **IV. How Does One Get Into Christ?**

Realizing the importance of being *in Christ*, does the Bible explain how people enter *into* him? Yes, there is a definite entrance into Christ that is marked by a definite event. One must appropriate God's salvation by entering into Christ. The Bible affirms that baptism is God's appointed way of bringing men *into* Christ:

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were *bap-*

*tized into Jesus Christ* were baptized into his death?" (Romans 6:3).

"For as many of you as have been *baptized into Christ have put on Christ*" (Galatians 3:27).

The Bible twice declares that people are "baptized *into Christ*." This, then, is *how* one enters *into Christ*.

Moreover, the Bible also says that baptism is the means of entrance *into* the body, *the church*:

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body . . ." (1 Corinthians 12:13).

By following the teaching of the one Spirit, as given in the Scriptures, all people are baptized into the same body, or church. The church of the Lord is the entire body of baptized believers, and a person is not in Christ, or the church, until he has been baptized. Therefore, the act of baptism which puts one into Christ or into his body, the church, is an act of obedience which saves the individual. Since one is *baptized into Christ* and salvation is *in Christ*, then one is not saved until he has been baptized. In other words, one *must* be baptized in order to be saved (as taught in Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21). Only penitent believers who are baptized into Christ are members of Christ's church. Now, note this deduction:

1. Redemption is in Christ (Ephesians 1:7).
2. A person is baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27).
3. Therefore, one must be baptized to be redeemed.

However, one must first come *unto* Christ before he can enter *into* him. So the Bible teaches that

faith, repentance, and the confession bring one "unto" Christ (Hebrews 11:6; Romans 10:10; Acts 11:18; 1 Timothy 6:12-13). There is a difference in meaning between *unto* and *into*. To illustrate: A man comes to, or *unto* a house; then later he enters *into* the house. Then he is *in* the house. Before one can be *in* the house, he must first enter *into* it. *Into* means "from without, to within"; it is a word that denotes transition, and usually follows verbs of action. "Baptize" is a verb of action. *Unto* means "to, toward, in the direction of." Hence, the Bible does not say that one is baptized *unto* Christ, nor baptized *in Christ*: it declares that one is baptized INTO Christ, and this means "from without" to "within" Christ.

One is either *in Christ* or *out of Christ* (Romans 16:7). The person who has not been baptized is outside of Christ and is not entitled to a single blessing in Christ; but the person who has been immersed into Christ is in him and entitled to all the spiritual blessings in the Lord. Consequently, only when a man enters into Christ by baptism does he obtain salvation, and is added to the church, the body of Christ.

#### ***V. Which Dead Are Blessed?***

After an individual has been pardoned and becomes a member of the church, he must live a faithful, obedient life "in Christ," or in the church, to be saved eternally in heaven (cf. 1 Peter 1:9; Revelation 2:10). The Bible speaks concerning the righteous who have died as follows:

"Blessed are the dead which die *in the Lord* from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

One does not die *into* the Lord, but one may die *in* the Lord. A person cannot die *in* the Lord (or *in* Christ, for Christ is Lord, Acts 2:36) unless he first enters *into* Christ by being baptized into him. The eternal blessings of God are pronounced only upon "the dead who die *in* the Lord," not upon those who die *out* of the Lord. There is no hope extended to any one who lives and dies out of Christ.

### **VI. Conclusion**

It is impossible for one to be saved, pardoned, forgiven, or reconciled unto God, outside of Christ. One cannot be saved without being *in* the church, for salvation is *in*, and not *out*, of Christ's body, the church. If one is saved, he is in the church; if he is in the church, he has been saved from his past sins. For this reason the conditions of church membership and the conditions of pardon are one and the same. Since the church is the body of saved people, one must be a member of the church to be saved. If one can be saved out of Christ's church, which is the body of Christ, he can be saved out of Christ; but the Bible teaches that this is impossible, for salvation is *in* Christ. Hence, one cannot be saved and be a Christian outside the Lord's church.

Recognizing that all spiritual blessings are in Christ (which includes forgiveness of sins), all men now out of Christ should desire to be "baptized into Christ." Then live faithfully "in Christ" and "die in the Lord." How terrible it would be for one to receive a portion of the Bible and reject the remainder, believing himself to be safe; how terrible to die out of Christ and be eternally lost.

# *The Vine and The Branches*

Teaching by figures of speech was one of the Lord's favorite methods. By these narratives true to natural life he made his lessons understandable, and because they were plain "the common people heard him gladly" (Mark 12:37). On the eve of his betrayal one such teaching, which was about the vine and its branches, was given to teach spiritual truth:

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:1-8).*



This beautiful imagery of Jesus sets forth in an allegory the intimate, divine relationship between himself and his disciples. Notice some of the lessons taught by Christ in this analogy.

### ***I. God Is the Owner of the Vine***

First, *God is the owner of the vine*. Christ said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman." God planted Christ in the world as the source of life and made him the only stem by which branches can be vitally united to God and through which they draw their life. Jesus is the *true* Vine because he is the Messiah, the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Hence, the only approach to God is through Christ, who is ordained by the Husbandman as the only true and living Vine.

The husbandman is the vinedresser or the one who owns, cultivates, prunes, and tends the vine. As the proprietor and cultivator, God wills that the branches bring forth fruit abundantly. He cuts off the unfruitful branch and purges, or cleanses, the fruitful branch in order that it may bear more fruit. The pruning is done by means of the Word (v.3).

### ***II. There Is an Individual Relationship between Christ and His Disciples***

Second, *the relationship between the vine and the branches is the same as that between Christ and each disciple*. What the vine is to the branches in the natural world, Christ is to his disciples in the spiritual realm. The vine supplies food to the branches. Jesus, who is one with the Father, is the source of all life. He enables his disciples to bear the fruit of holiness. In their relationship to each

other, the vine and the branches are a vital unity; they are one. The branches are one with the vine because they draw their life from the vine and bear the same kind of fruit as the vine. Likewise, Christians are one with Christ—not physically, but spiritually. (Cf. Galatians 2:20.) They draw their life from God, through Jesus Christ, and are united with the Father.

Fruit never grows on the vine itself, but on the branches; neither do the branches produce fruit independently of the vine. The vine cannot bear fruit without the branches; the branches cannot live without the vine. The same mutual relationship exists between Christ and his followers. So Christ said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches."

*Christ is the vine and individual Christians are the branches. Christians are related to Christ in a manner comparable to the relationship between a vine and its branches.*

### **III. The Disciples—Not Denominations— Are the Branches**

Third, *the various denominations are not the branches of the church.* Yet some people have the idea that the many churches existing in the world today are the branches of the vine and that all of them together constitute the true church. But Jesus did not say, "I am the vine, all the denominations are the branches." He said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches." The branches cannot refer to the different religious bodies for at least three reasons.

First, when Jesus said, "I am the vine," not one of the present religious denominations was in ex-

istence. Denominationalism did not exist until several hundred years *after* Christ. A vine cannot maintain its life and bear fruit without branches. Hence, if religious organizations were indeed the branches, as some contend, it would follow that the church was a branchless, fruitless, lifeless organization until denominations were formed several centuries later. Evidently, Christ did not mean denominations when he spoke of branches.

In the second place, it is contrary to nature that a single vine can produce two hundred fifty different kinds of branches, each bearing a different kind of fruit. In America alone there are more than two hundred fifty religious bodies. Does one branch of a vine bear pumpkins, another watermelons, and still another grapes? Such a vine would be an anomaly indeed. In nature every branch on the same vine bears exactly the same kind of fruit. Nevertheless, people who refuse to believe that one vine can produce a variety of branches and fruits readily accept the unreasonable analogy that each branch in the true vine, which is Christ, is a religious denomination. Of course, no one can find authority in the Bible to justify denominationalism. Division is wrong as God views it. The early church was *one* united body of believers. (Read carefully these passages of Scripture: John 17:20-23; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:3-6.) In the apostolic age Christians did not belong to any of the present-day denominations. They were simply members of the Lord's church. No apostle, therefore, ever addressed a certain *branch* of the church.

Third, Christ did not refer to the different denominations as the branches because He used

the personal pronoun "ye." "I am the vine, *ye* (Peter, James, John, etc.) are the branches. . . . If a *man* abide not in me, *he* is cast forth as a *branch*." So an individual disciple is a branch. Jesus spoke of his disciples as being all branches of the same vine. As disciples of Christ, then, people are not members of any branch of the church; *people are branches*.

Some have said, "I am a member of a certain *branch* of the church." Christ says, "Abide in *me*." If people could be members of Christ's church without joining denominations in the first century, and if such were proper and right then, why cannot the same be done now? Why would it not be just as proper and right? The New Testament today, when believed and obeyed, will make only Christians, members of the body of Christ. With the New Testament then as the only safe, non-denominational guide, let man determine that he will be a Christian only and only a Christian. He can believe all truth and obey every commandment of God without belonging to any denomination. He can be saved and go to heaven without ever being a member of any denomination.

#### ***IV. One Must Be in Christ To Bear Fruit***

Fourth, *in order for one to produce fruit there must be a vital connection with Christ*. The fruitfulness of each branch depends upon its living union with the vine. Therefore, Christ said, "Every branch *in me* that beareth not fruit, he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." He then added, ". . . for without *me*, ye can do nothing." In the text being studied Christ used the expression "in me"

six times. This repetition certainly is important, for it teaches that men can produce fruit for God only when they are *in Christ*. A branch connected to the vine draws its life from the vine and can live only by means of the life which it draws from the vine. Likewise, man can live spiritually only through union with Christ. It follows, therefore, that one cannot depend upon his morality alone to save him. Regardless of the excellence of one's own morality, salvation cannot be obtained apart from Christ.

Cornelius was morally good before being united to Christ, but he was unsaved (Acts 10:1-3; 11:14). There is no spiritual life out of Christ, since salvation is *in Christ* (2 Timothy 2:10). Peter said: "Neither is there salvation in any other . . ." (Acts 4:12). Life is in the Son (I John 5:11,12). Christ said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Too, the language of Jesus suggests that human organizations, such as lodges, religious councils, and synods, contain no salvation. People often boast of their membership in particular institutions founded by men as if such could save them from sin. Neither the principle for which an organization stands, the amount of good it does, nor its number of members is important. Jesus said one must be *in him* to bear fruit. "*As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself*, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." The best man in the world, without this vital connection with Christ, cannot bear fruit which will bring him any blessings in eternity. Many good people need to learn this lesson. One may be a splendid citizen with good morals yet not be a branch in the true vine. Those who are not Christians are deceived

if they think they are secure out of Christ. The branch cannot produce fruit independently of the vine. Therefore, only those who maintain a positive connection with Christ can expect to have his final approval.

Now, the necessity of this relationship causes this question to be raised: "How does one enter into Christ?" Paul gives the answer:

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were *baptized into Jesus Christ* were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4).

**Again:**

"For as many of you as have been *baptized into Christ* have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

Since one is baptized into Christ, and since one cannot bear fruit unless he is *in* Christ, it follows that no one can bear acceptable fruit until he is baptized. One is either *in* Christ or *out* of Christ. Baptism is God's appointed way of bringing men *into* Christ.

The first essential is to get into Christ. Entering into Christ is equivalent to being converted, entering into the church, obeying the gospel. To do so, an individual believes in Christ with all his heart, repents of all his sins, confesses Christ before men, and is baptized (immersed in water) in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (Cf. Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 2:36-41, 47; Romans 10:10; Acts 8:35-39; Romans 6:3, 4.)

Furthermore, the Bible teaches that to be in Christ is to be in his church. Paul says that Christ is the head of the body, the church (Colossians 1:18); again he says the church is the body (Ephesians 1:23). Hence, to be *in Christ* is to be in the one body—the church (Colossians 1:24). Since Christ's body is his church, a person in Christ is in the Lord's church. When one is baptized into Christ, he is then saved from his past sins and added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47). But the fact that a man is in Christ and in the church does not imply that he is in some denomination. The church of our Lord is neither one denomination nor all denominations together. *It is the family of God, the saved.*

Nevertheless, since being in Christ is equivalent to being in his church, and since one must be in Christ to bear fruit, it follows that one who is not in the church cannot bear fruit to the glory of God. (Cf. Ephesians 3:21.)

#### ***V. One Must Abide in Christ To Continue To Bear Fruit***

Fifth, *the disciple must abide in Christ to maintain life and be productive.* Jesus said, "Abide in me, and I in you." It literally means the branch cannot *continue* to bear fruit unless it continues to abide in the vine; neither can man bear spiritual fruit except he continues to abide in Christ. It is necessary not only to get *into Christ* but also to *abide* in him; the connection must be maintained. The results of continuing to abide in Christ are his indwelling and the fruitfulness of the disciple: "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." But the consequences of failure

to abide in Christ are fruitlessness and removal: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away."

This Scripture certainly teaches that it is possible for one to *cease* to abide in Christ. Some have said, however, that once a person is in Christ, he is forever safe and cannot cease to remain in Christ after he has entered into fellowship with him.

No matter how productive a branch may have been, it cannot continue to bear fruit if it is severed from the vine. Now, what does the Bible say is the consequence of one's failing to abide in Christ? Jesus declared, "Every branch *in me* that beareth not fruit he taketh *it away*" (American Standard Version). Note that the Lord said, "Every branch in me. . ." "In me," that is, in Christ. "Every branch" where? "Every branch *in me*"—not a branch superficially attached but one actually in Christ, as the branch is in the vine. "Every branch *in me* that beareth not fruit, he taketh it away." The branch was actually in the vine and illustrates that man is actually in Christ.

The purpose of the branch is to bear fruit. The branch that does not bear fruit is cut off. Since the same relationship exists between Christ and the Christian that exists between the vine and the branch, it follows that if a person who is in Christ does not bear fruit, he will be taken away. Jesus said, "If a *man* abide not in me, *he* is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and they gather *them*, and cast *them* into the fire, and *they* are burned" (ASV). So the branch is *in the vine* and represents the person who is *in Christ*. But the fruitless branch is cut off from the vine; the fruitless individual is cut off from Christ. After the branch is



cut off, it is cast forth, and is withered. Of course, only the branch that has first been alive can become withered.

As the dead branches which have ceased to bear fruit are cut off, gathered up, and burned, so shall those men be who are cut off from Christ. Hence, the man in Christ who does not abide in him, or ceases to bear fruit, will be cut off finally and cast into hell. At the end of time Christ "shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:41, 42).

This means, of course, that one who has been converted and is a child of God may be eternally lost. Those who think that a man cannot be finally and eternally lost after he has once become a Christian must maintain that he was never really in the vine. If this be true, Jesus, therefore, made the ridiculous statement that a branch which was never really in the vine shall be cut off from the vine and cast away. But this does not agree with the Bible.

Christ did not say, "Every branch which *seems* to be in me (though it really is not) . . . he taketh it away." But rather, he affirmed that the unfruitful branch "in me" is taken away. It is evident that Jesus knew whether the branch was in him or not: "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Timothy 2:19). *A branch which has never been united with the vine cannot be cut off.* Thus the Savior clearly states what will happen to all who apostatize or cease to bear fruit. They will be cut off, gathered, cast into the furnace, and burned. The doctrine of "once in grace, always in grace" or

“once saved, always saved,” contradicts the language of Jesus. The person cut off from Christ is finally and eternally lost.

The vine itself is not responsible for the casting forth of the branch, for other branches in the vine continue to flourish and bear fruit. The cause is failure to abide in Christ. God does not force one to become a branch in the vine; neither does he force one, after becoming a branch, to continue to bear fruit. Therefore, a man who has once been in Christ can cease to abide in him. The Lord’s language is plain and cannot be misunderstood.

Likewise, Paul used the fate of God’s ancient people, the Israelites, to teach Christians a very solemn lesson about their abiding in Christ:

“For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Romans 11:21, 22).

Furthermore, many other passages of Scripture teach that a Christian may fall away and be finally and eternally lost. Notice a few of them.

The Apostle Paul spoke of Christians who had severed themselves from Christ and who had fallen away from grace:

“Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace” (Galatians 5:4 ASV).

Speaking of himself, the same apostle said that he had to be careful or he would be a castaway:

“. . . I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

The spirit of man is responsible for the deeds of his body since the spirit of man controls the body. (Cf. Matthew 15:18-20; Romans 6:13, 19.)

Not only did Paul realize that he could be lost, he also warned Christians of the danger of their falling:

“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Why this warning if one cannot fall?

Are Christians more secure than the angels? The Apostle Peter said that angels sinned:

“. . . God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell . . .” (2 Peter 2:4).

To the lukewarm church members at Laodicea, Christ said that he would reject them:

“So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:16).

Again, the Lord through John said to Christians who overcame sin:

“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life . . .” (Revelation 3:5).

A name could not be blotted out of the book of life if it had never been in the book of life. And one's name could not get into the book of life if he was not once saved from past sins. Surely an unsaved man's name is not in the book of life. But the Lord says that some names will be blotted out

of the book of life—that is, those who fail to overcome. At the judgment what will happen to those whose names are not in the book of life? The Bible says they will be lost:

“And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).

God said to Moses, “Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book” (Exodus 32:33; cf. Philippians 4:3; Luke 10:20; Revelation 20:12; 21:27; 22:19).

There are two sides to the question of the believer’s security—God’s side and man’s side. So far as God’s side is concerned, the Christian is absolutely secure. But God’s guarantee of eternal life depends on man’s conduct. God’s promises are conditional: receiving eternal life depends upon man’s faithfulness to God. David said, “. . . the Lord preserveth the faithful” (Psalm 31:23). (Cf. John 8:51; Luke 11:28; I Timothy 4:16; Hebrews 10:38; Colossians 1:21-23; 1 Peter 1:5).

Can a person *cease* to believe? In explaining the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said that one could believe “for a while” and then cease to believe:

“They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away” (Luke 8:13).

The Scriptures also affirm that a believer can “depart from the faith” (1 Timothy 4:1); make “shipwreck” of his faith (1 Timothy 1:19); and have his faith overthrown (2 Timothy 2:18). 1 Chronicles 28:9 says, “. . . if thou forsake him, he

will cast thee off forever." Again, the Bible says to Christians:

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

The answer to several questions should make this issue clear. Can a child of God call his brother a fool? Jesus says those who do this are "in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:22). Can a child of God lie, steal, and get drunk? Can a child of God die while drunk? If so, what will happen to him? The Bible says those who do such things "shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Galatians 5:19-21); that ". . . murderers . . . and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Revelation 21:8).

Therefore, only those who are faithful and endure to the end will receive the blessings of eternal life.

". . . he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

Jesus told the disciples that those who had left all and followed him would "receive an hundred-fold now in this time . . . and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10:30). The Bible says that "eternal life" is "in the end" (Romans 6:22); that Christians in this life have this "promise" (1 John 2:25) and are "in hope of eternal life" (Titus 1:2; 3:7; Romans 8:24, 25). The Christian has eternal life *in promise* here but *in possession* hereafter. He sows here, but he reaps hereafter (Galatians 6:7, 8); but if eternal life is possessed now, then the reaping comes before the sowing.

Hence, the Scriptures teach that after one gets into Christ, he must abide in him and bear fruit or else be eternally lost (cf. James 5:19,20; Ezekiel 18:24).

## **VI. Abiding in Christ Depends upon One's Obedience**

Sixth, *no one can abide in Christ, the spiritual vine, except by continued obedience.* Jesus said, "If ye abide in me, *and my words abide in you*, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." So a person abides in Christ by retaining Christ's words in him. Remaining in Christ depends upon faithful obedience.

Jesus said:

"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10).

The Apostle John told Christians how to remain in Christ:

"Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father" (1 John 2:24).

"And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him" (1 John 3:24).

Paul admonished Christians,

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16).

If one abides in Christ, and his words abide in him, then he has the promise that his prayers will be heard. Thus, the acceptability of an individual's prayers depends upon his abiding in Christ. A person in whom the word of God dwells can expect his prayers to be answered. (Cf. James 5:16.)

“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22).

But the man who turns away from the law, even his prayer is an abomination to God.

“He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination” (Proverbs 28:9).

“Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth” (John 9:31).

“For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil” (1 Peter 3:12).

### ***VII. God Is Honored by a Fruitful Life***

Finally, *Christians glorify God by bearing fruit.* “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit,” said Christ. As the branches which bear fruit please the husbandman, so God is glorified when the disciples of Christ bear much fruit. Every owner of a vineyard is delighted when his vines produce good fruit abundantly. Likewise, God is honored when he sees his children bearing spiritual fruit. Only by bearing fruit can people be true disciples of Christ, for the Lord said, “. . . so shall ye be my disciples.”

One may ask, “What kind of fruit is to be borne?” The Apostle Paul said:

“. . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

What a beautiful cluster of fruit! How different from the list of the works of the flesh mentioned in verses 19-21. There are three groups in this cluster of nine Christian virtues—the first three in relation to God: love, joy, and peace; then three in relation to one's fellow man: long-suffering, gentleness, and goodness; and three for the individual Christian life, toward one's inner self: faith, meekness, and self-control.

Paul also admonished:

“. . . let ours also learn to maintain *good works* for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful” (Titus 3:14; cf. Colossians 1:10).

Christians should be faithful, zealous, humble, devoted, obedient, “always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). Peter wrote to the disciples of Christ and told them if they would add “the Christian graces”, they would be fruitful, but if they did not abound in these good works, their lives would be barren and unfruitful.

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if



ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:5-11).

These beautiful traits of character—*virtue* (courage, manliness), *knowledge* (of God's will), *temperance* (self-control), *patience* (steadfastness), *godliness* (piety toward God, reverence), *brotherly kindness* (love of Christians toward each other), and *charity* (love for all men)—should be found in abundance in the lives of all Christians. But too many are satisfied with being nominal followers of Christ. Christians are commanded to make all effort, or to give all diligence, to see that their lives possess these attributes. With faith as the foundation, these elements must be added if Christians become partakers of the divine nature. Then Christ-like living results in Christ-like character.

Only once while he was on earth did Christ curse any created thing; that was the barren fig tree. He came to the tree, expecting fruit, and found nothing but leaves (Mark 11:13-14, 20-21). Christ did not blight this tree because it bore poisonous fruit but because it had *no fruit*—nothing but leaves. The fig tree was cursed solely because of its failure to produce fruit.

In the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:15-30), the one-talent man was condemned by his master for not using his talent. He was not accused of some overt sin; yet he was charged with being "a wicked and slothful servant." Why? Because he simply neglected to use his talent in the service of his master. Hence, to refrain from committing overt acts of evil is not enough; the Christian must live a life of positive righteousness. That the branch should be free from evil fruit is not enough; it

should be filled with good fruit. In the final analysis, therefore, Christ's disciples are not reckoned as being fruitful solely because of what they refrain from doing, but because of what they *do*.

Today Christ seeks *fruit* from each disciple—that is, character and conduct like his, a good and righteous life, and redeemed souls won to the Lord (Romans 1:13). All else is leafage. But often, instead of finding fruit, he finds “nothing but leaves.” The disciple whose religion is mere profession is useless to the world.

John the Baptist used the same figure of speech and said that “every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 3:10).

In view of this fact, each member of the church should ask himself, “What fruit am I bearing for Christ?” He can say with assurance, “If I abide in Christ and his word abides in me, I will bear much fruit, and my relationship with the Lord as his disciple will continue.”

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

The Apostle Peter admonished Christians in these words:

“For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil-doer, or as a meddler in other men's matters: but if a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name” (1 Peter 4:15-16, ASV).

It seems impossible that man, weak and unworthy, can do anything to glorify God, his Creator

and Preserver. Yet, by faithfully living the Christian life, he can glorify him. By abiding in Christ and bringing forth abundant fruit, one can glorify his holy name.

### *Summary*

The beautiful imagery of John 15:1-8 describes the intimate, divine relationship between Christ and his disciples. Seven lessons have been noted:

1. God is the owner of the vine.
2. The relationship between the vine and the branches is the same as that between Christ and each disciple.
3. The various denominations are not the branches of the church.
4. In order for one to produce fruit there must be a vital connection with Christ.
5. The disciple must abide in Christ to maintain life and be productive.
6. No one can abide in Christ, the spiritual vine, except by continued obedience.
7. Christians glorify God by bearing fruit.

There is no happier, fuller, more useful life than that of being a faithful Christian.

*"I am the vine and ye are the branches:"  
Bear precious fruit for Jesus today;  
Branches in Him no fruit ever bearing,  
Jesus hath said, "He taketh away."*

—KNOWLES SHAW

## **“The Unpardonable Sin”**

A PERPLEXING SUBJECT in the study of the Holy Scriptures is the one often called “the unpardonable sin.” Although this expression is not in the Bible, many ask for an explanation of it. Nearly every preacher has, at some time, talked with someone who was afraid of having committed “the unpardonable sin,” or “the sin against the Holy Spirit.” Since the statements of God’s Word on this subject have caused grave concern to many honest people, one needs to study them carefully. The question is: “Does the Bible teach that it is possible for one to be out of reach of God’s mercy?” “Is any sin unpardonable?”

The Bible clearly teaches that ample provision has been made for all men to be forgiven. “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Tit. 2:11). “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:15, 16). “And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). The Lord does not want anyone to be lost (Ez. 33:11); He wills to “have all men to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4).

But the question rises, “Did not Christ say that there is a sin which cannot be pardoned? If so, what is that sin?” Jesus said that “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.” What does this statement mean? Study the

statement in its context. Jesus had cast a demon out of a man who was blind and dumb. "And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David [*i.e.*, the Messiah]?" Christ's enemies could not deny that a great miracle had been performed. But how could they remove the deep impression it had made on the minds of the amazed spectators? Angry and hardened by the miracle, they said, "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils." *They accused Jesus of performing his miracles by the power of Satan.*

When the Pharisees spoke against the work of Christ, attributing it to the spirit of Beelzebub, Jesus answered their slander by saying that a kingdom divided against itself could not stand; if he were casting out Satan by the power of Satan, then Satan would be working against himself. This the devil certainly would not have done. Then Jesus said: "Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost [*Holy Spirit* in the American Standard Version] shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt. 12:31,32). According to Mark's record Jesus said: "Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation" (Mark 3:28,29; cf. Luke 12:10). "He said this because they had declared that he was possessed by an unclean spirit" (vs. 30 NEB).

## ***1. What Jesus Did Not Mean by Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit***

Perhaps it will help to understand that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit actually does not mean certain things:

1. *Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not murder.* Those who killed Christ were forgiven when they complied with the Spirit's terms of pardon (Acts 2:36-41). While he was on the cross, Christ prayed for his murderers (Luke 23:34). He did not mean, however, that they would or could be forgiven without obedience to the law of pardon. The apostle Paul, before his conversion, aided in the killing of Christians; but he was forgiven (Acts 7:58-8:3; 9:1-18; 26:10; 22:16). He wrote that he once was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a destroyer of the church; yet he obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly and in unbelief (I Tim. 1:13-15). So forgiveness was possible for the "chief of sinners" (I Cor. 15:8,9).

2. *Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not suicide.* Some think that suicide is the sin which Jesus had in mind. They assert that since murder is wrong and that a person who dies by his own hands has no chance of repentance after this act, the individual must go into eternity guilty of this sin. God knows whether or not one is in his right mind when the act of suicide is committed; but if he is accountable and is lost, this fact does not necessarily prove that suicide is "the unpardonable sin." Although the Bible teaches that any sin unrepented of and unforgiven at the time of death will keep a person out of heaven, any or every sin unrepented of at the time of death is not necessarily the sin referred to by Christ in the passage under study. It shall be shown in this writing that one can continue to live in this world *after* having committed "the unpardonable sin."

3. *Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not profanity.* If profanity were the sin Jesus had in mind, the apostle Peter could not have been forgiven. Although he cursed and swore, Peter repented and was forgiven (Matt. 26:69-75; John 21).

4. *Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not immorality.* Jesus said to the woman taken in the act of adultery, "Go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). Many of the saints at Corinth had been guilty of licentiousness before their conversion, but they were forgiven (I Cor. 6:9-11; cf. Acts 18:8; Mark 16:15, 16). Even a Christian, guilty of immorality, can receive forgiveness (I Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2:6-8; 7:9-12; I John 1:7-9).

5. *Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not backsliding.* Some have thought that only Christians can commit this sin, inasmuch as Christians are the only persons who possess the Spirit; they have concluded, therefore, that "the unpardonable sin" is backsliding. Christ was not talking to his disciples when he spoke of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but he was speaking to wicked scribes and Pharisees. The Bible teaches that a child of God can backslide, that he can sin and be eternally lost (Ez. 18:24, 26; John 15:1-6; 1 Tim. 4:1; II Pet. 1:5-11). But the Lord has a law of restoration for his erring child. Any backslider who commits pardonable sins may return and be forgiven (Acts 8:22).

6. *Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not delay in obeying the gospel until death.* Although obedience to the gospel is impossible after death, anyone who has not committed "the unpardonable sin" may obey the gospel and be saved at any time prior to his death. The person whom Christ had in mind, however, is the one who, after blaspheming the Spirit, has no hope of forgiveness. Hence, "the unpardonable sin" is not mere neglect of duty.

## II. What Jesus Did Mean by Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit

### A. BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT IS INJURIOUS AND MALICIOUS SPEECH AGAINST HIM

According to all standard Greek lexicons, to blaspheme is to "speak evil of" or "rail upon," or "to offer intentional indignity to God or sacred things." The Holy Spirit is a *person* of the Godhead and not merely an influence (Matt. 28:19; Acts 17:29). Therefore, to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is to speak evil of, or rail upon, or insult the Spirit intentionally. Blasphemy is a definite, positive *act*. The idea of *evil speaking* is always inherent in the word *blasphemy*. Under Moses' law, blasphemy was punishable by death (Lev. 24:16).

*The real sin lies in the condition of the heart of the one who speaks blasphemous words against God's Spirit.* Similarly, men think of murder as a heinous sin; yet the Lord went behind the overt act and said that murder originates in the heart. The root is in what is thought of as lesser sins, such as envy, hatred, and malice. These sins can lead to the act of murder. Hatred in the heart is murder in the heart (1 John 3:15). So, in regard to those Pharisees "Jesus knew their thoughts" (Matt. 12:25), and the words revealed the true nature of the heart within. On a former occasion, it is said that Jesus was "grieved at the hardening of their heart" (Mark 3:5 ASV). The language of the blasphemers against the Holy Spirit, as described above, springs from wicked hearts and indicates a corrupt condition. Although *blasphemy* and *hardness of heart* are not synonymous, the blasphemy that Jesus had in mind results from *complete hardness of heart*. This explains why Christ said there could be no forgiveness. So, in Matthew 12:32, Jesus was speaking of a particular



*kind* of blasphemy. He issued a fearful *warning* to the Pharisees *because* they had said of *him*: "He hath an unclean spirit." Because their hearts were in such a state of wilful, determined opposition to the teaching of God, they were in immediate danger. Their hearts could become hopelessly hardened, and utterly impervious to Christ's teachings; fenced about with an impenetrable barrier of malicious prejudice.

## **B. THE HOLY SPIRIT GAVE THE GOSPEL FOR MAN'S SALVATION**

John the Baptist had been sent from God to make ready a people for the Lord (John 1:6; Luke 1:17). "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him" (Luke 7:29, 30). Following the ministry of John, came the personal ministry of Christ. But many also rejected Jesus . . . even those same Pharisees! Then after the personal ministry of Christ came the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, working through inspired men.

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to the apostles to guide them into all truth; the Spirit was to testify of Christ and declare the conditions of pardon (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-13; Luke 24:46-49). The Holy Spirit came to the apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). On that occasion, the Spirit offered full pardon to all who had rejected Christ, even to those who had murdered Him (Acts 2:36-38). But that offer conditioned on their acceptance of Christ as the Son of God was their only hope of pardon.

Those who lived during Christ's personal ministry could have sinned against him and later have been saved under the dispensation of the Spirit (many of them were). But if the Pharisees

did reject this final offer of mercy by blaspheming the Holy Spirit, there was no other way for them to be saved; they could never obtain forgiveness. So during his personal ministry Jesus said to the Pharisees that men may speak "a word against the Son of man" and "it shall be forgiven him: *but* whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come." Christ's words surely meant: "You may reject the counsel of God, and yet upon repentance be forgiven; you may reject me and speak evil of my present works, and be pardoned; but if you blaspheme and reject the message of the Holy Spirit when He comes and speaks through my apostles there can be no forgiveness—neither in this world, nor in the world to come. The Spirit's message will be heaven's *last* offer of pardon to you. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven."

The following illustration makes clear why rejection of John's preaching and blasphemy against Christ could be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit could not: Suppose that a man is floating down a river in a boat. Down stream are dangerous rapids which will destroy him if he gets into them. Some distance up the stream there is a man, whom we shall call "A," who sees this man headed for certain danger. "A" shouts a warning and offers assistance, but the warning is refused. The man drifts farther down the river. Later a second man, designated "B," calls out. His warning is also rejected. The man continues down stream, offended by those who tried to help him. Just before reaching the brink of the falls, a third man, "C," shouts to the man to turn back before it is forever too late. But this *final* offer is also refused, and the man plunges to his death. Three offers of assistance were made; acceptance of any of them would have saved the man from his fate. The

doomed man might have rejected the warning of both "A" and "B," then heeded "C's" warning and have been saved. But refusal of the final offer sealed his fate. In a similar manner, the Spirit's message was the final offer of pardon. When the Holy Spirit performed His work to teach and save men, God's means of providing mercy were consummated. Hence, for those Pharisees, to reject the last chance of pardon would be fatal—there would never be forgiveness. (Jesus did not mean, however, that certain sins may be forgiven in the next world. No sin unforgiven at death will be forgiven in the hereafter; there is no forgiveness after death. The Bible does not teach a "second chance." In Matthew 12:32, "in this world" means the age which will terminate at the judgment, and "the world to come" is eternity, the period following the judgment. The Christian age will extend to the day of judgment; beyond that, there is no forgiveness, neither for sin that was pardonable, but not pardoned, nor for sin that was unpardonable. Cf. Mark 10:29, 30; Matt. 25:46; I Tim. 4:8; Eph. 1:21; Heb. 9:26).

### **C. THE TEACHING OF THE SPIRIT MUST BE OBEYED**

If a person rejects the Spirit in this dispensation there is no means for his salvation, for the Holy Spirit was the last member of the Godhead sent to convict men of sin. There will never be another plan of salvation offered to the world. That was the last.

For the alien sinner to be saved, he must obey the Spirit's law of pardon—the law that was preached by the apostles and obeyed by those whose conversions are recorded in the Book of Acts of the Apostles: that is, he must *hear* the gospel, *believe*, *repent*, *confess* his faith in Christ, and be

*baptized* (immersed in water unto the remission of sins) (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:36-38; 22: 16; 8:35-39; Rom. 10:10). Therefore, all sins may, upon gospel obedience, be forgiven through the blood of Christ (I John 1:7; 2:2; Heb. 2:9; 5:8,9; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5). If a child of God backslides, he must *repent, confess* his sins, and *pray* (Acts 8:13-24; Jas. 5:16; I John 1:9). All sins, without exception, will be forgiven when people repent and obey the Lord. Jehovah is "ready to pardon" (Neh. 9:17). However, the Holy Spirit has made known the only conditions on which He will pardon. God has always been willing to forgive any one of his sins, *if he will repent and do His will*; but God will not forgive those who do not repent. He "commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9). Yet, all who do not obey the gospel will be lost (II Thess. 1:7-10).

So when Jesus said that "all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men," except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, *He did not mean that such sins would be forgiven without man's complying with certain conditions that are stipulated*. One so depraved, of course, as to *blaspheme* the Holy Spirit can never meet the conditions upon which the blood cleanses from sin. God will not forgive sin where there is no repentance. If a person is so hardened in sin that he cannot repent, there can be no forgiveness. Definitely, repentance is one of the conditions of salvation (Luke 13:3; Acts 3:19).

What, then, is "the sin against the Holy Ghost?" *It is a disposition of heart which leads one to blaspheme, or slander, the Holy Spirit. The "one who is so desperately wicked as to be guilty of this sin, is already beyond the reach of redemption"* (J. W.

McGarvey, *Commentary on Matthew and Mark*, p. 110). Such an individual is unable to repent. His pardon is an impossibility. Jesus meant that when a person *completely repudiates the Spirit*, and *blasphemes Him*, he has committed "the unpardonable sin."

The sin is eternal because it can never be forgiven, and it can never be forgiven because the person can never repent; where there is no possibility of repentance, there is no possibility of forgiveness.

H. Leo Boles made the following comments on this subject:

Many misunderstood Jesus, his teachings, and his kingdom while he was on earth, and even denied him as being the Messiah, who afterwards repented and were pardoned, and became Christians. (Acts 2:37-38; Acts 9:1,17.) Many could and did reject Jesus while he was on earth, but when the Holy Spirit came and testified of him, they accepted Christ. But when the Holy Spirit came and gave the complete will of God, if men rejected this, there was no other evidence to be furnished, no other divine agency to be given, and if they finally rejected the Holy Spirit, there was no forgiveness for them. (*A Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 270.)

Again from Boles:

Some who heard Christ could and did blaspheme him; they spoke evil to him and of him; they even attributed the power that he used in casting out demons to Beelzebub; this was speaking evil against the Son of Man . . . If one finally rejects the Holy Spirit and the teaching that he gave in the New Testament, there is no hope for that one . . . there is no chance for forgiveness because no other agency from heaven will be given. (*A Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke*, p. 250.)

### **III. Can People Commit "The Unpardonable Sin" Today?**

With these thoughts in mind, consider the answer to the important question, "Can people commit

'the unpardonable sin' today?" or, "Can people today sin to such an extent that they will become unpardonable?" This is a grim subject, but facts must be faced.

#### **A. ONE MAY RESIST THE SPIRIT TODAY**

The Holy Spirit speaks to people today through the Bible, the inspired word. Every person who rejects the truth resists the Spirit. Stephen charged his persecutors with resisting the Spirit in their refusal to hear (Acts 7:51; cf. Neh. 9:30). In resisting the words spoken by inspired men, the people to whom they were preaching were resisting the Spirit, for the Spirit was speaking to them through these teachers. So, today, when a sinner refuses to obey the gospel, or when an erring child of God refuses to return from his wanderings, he is *resisting* the Spirit of God in rejecting the Spirit's message to him. Man is free; he can resist. Furthermore, every time a person refuses to obey the Lord, he hardens his heart, and obedience becomes more difficult. Such continual rejections may finally render one incapable of obedience. This incapacity is caused by deliberately and wilfully rejecting the Spirit's teaching. *The Bible clearly teaches that one may so harden his heart as to become immune to any possibility of obeying the Lord and being saved.* Although this immunity to the gospel is not *blasphemy* against the Holy Spirit, the results are the same—namely, no forgiveness. This state of heart is the same as that condition of heart Jesus had in mind when He spoke the words of Matthew 12:31, 32, and for that kind of blasphemy Christ said there could be no forgiveness. *That one may persistently resist the teaching of the Holy Spirit and become so hardened that he cannot be reached, thereby becoming unpardonable, is abundantly proved in the Scriptures.*

1. Jesus said that some people of his day "could not believe" (John 12:37-40). Christ did not say they *would not*; He said they *could not*. Some of the Jews at first *would not* believe; later, because of the hardened condition of their hearts, they *could not* believe (cf. Matt. 13:14, 15). Those who could not believe had refused so long to believe the teaching of God's word and the evidences of Christ's divinity that their ability to do so had been destroyed. "This is a *moral* impotency, like that of one that is accustomed to do evil, Jer. 13:23" (Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 5, p. 1084). So, those who have repeatedly refused may finally reach the condition that they cannot. Their power to believe and repent is gone. Stephen's murderers had surely reached that point.

In one of his famous Tabernacle sermons, N. B. Hardeman said:

Every soul who rejects the gospel call once becomes harder to reach the next time. You may hear the gospel and possibly be convicted of the righteousness of the cause presented; but if you are studying business interests, worldly affairs, things material rather than things that are sacred, holy and high, the result will be that your hearts will become hardened, and the chances might come to pass that you will reach that point where the gospel has lost its power upon you and you are doomed to destruction and damnation at the great day. ("The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," *The Bible Searchlight and the Holy Land*, p. 226.)

2. Jehovah has always given people up who have repeatedly spurned His offer of mercy. To the antediluvians God said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man" (Gen. 6:3). After the days of grace were over, Jehovah sent the flood upon those whose hearts were continually thinking evil. Three times God instructed Jeremiah not to pray for certain individuals because there was no hope for them (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). Concerning Ephraim it was said, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone" (Hos. 4:17). Paul spoke of some

whom God had given up (Rom. 1:26). Those who give up the Lord are finally given up by Him (I Chron. 28:9; II Chron. 15:2; 24:20; Prov. 1:24-30; 29:1; Isa. 45:9).

3. Describing those who would depart from the faith, the apostle Paul used these words: “. . . having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (I Tim. 4:2). He also spoke of those who were “past feeling” (Eph. 4:19). When cattle are branded, all feeling is gone from the part that is seared. Likewise, people may “sear” their consciences and become immune to the gospel. Their senses may become so deadened that they cannot be aroused, and the gospel no longer penetrates their hearts. This is a sad condition . . . “branded in their conscience as with a hot iron.” Appropriate to this thought are words of Charles Spurgeon:

There are some . . . who are given over to a seared conscience, concerning whom it may be said that repentance and salvation are impossible” (*Memorial Library*, vol. 3, p. 365).

In *Paul the Missionary*, Wm. Taylor said:

. . . if men stubbornly shut their hearts against God's truth, their consciences will become seared, their spirits will be hardened with insensibility, and the light that is in them will become darkness (p. 103.)

Hence, the Scriptures teach that “the unpardonable sin” is a malignant state of heart and disposition of mind which renders a person unwilling and unable to do the Lord's will because his conscience is as senseless as the scars on branded cattle. One asks, “Is this total depravity?” Perhaps, but one is not *born* totally depraved (Isa. 59:1,2; Matt. 19:14).

4. The writer of the Book of Hebrews, speaking of apostate Christians, said: “For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the



powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is *impossible* to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:4-6 ASV). These verses describe a condition into which some members of the church had fallen; in such a condition it was impossible to renew them to repentance. They teach the possibility and results of abandoning Christ. Return is then impossible.

The language in this passage should be observed carefully. The wording is not "if they fall away" (future tense), but "and then fell away," or "having fallen away" (past tense).

The word *if* is not in the original Greek text of Hebrew 6:6; the word in our English Bible in the King James Version is in italics and was added by Theodore Beza (1519-1605), a French Protestant theologian and a Calvinist. Compare the reading of the Authorized Version (*"if they fall away"*), with the American Standard Version ("and then fell away"). The writer simply said, "those who have fallen away." These were instances of real apostasy, not imaginary (hypothetical).

The people whom the writer described were once in covenant relation with God and enjoyed all the blessings of God's children. Observe: (a) They had been "enlightened"—they had understood the truth concerning Christianity. (b) They had "tasted the heavenly gift"—they had experienced the new life in Christ. (c) They had partaken "of the Holy Spirit"—they had enjoyed the indwelling of the Spirit, which all Christians now enjoy (cf. Eph. 3:17; I Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 5:18, 19; Col. 3:16). (d) They had "tasted the good word of God"—they had enjoyed the food for the soul. (e) They had tasted "the powers of the age to come"—they had witnessed demon-

strations of the Holy Spirit for revealing and confirming the truth; and, by faith, saw the eternal blessedness and joys of the world to come. (Possibly some of those people had worked miracles, for miracles were not uncommon during the apostolic age.) After experiencing all of these blessings, those Christians *fell away*, and *repentance* for them was *impossible*.

There is a difference in *falling* and *falling away*. The word *away* indicates a severed connection. For instance, a person aboard ship may *fall* and not be drowned, but if he *falls away*, he is lost. Likewise, one who has fallen *away* from the Lord has *totally severed* himself from Christ. *Apostasy* means "abandonment of what one has voluntarily professed; total desertion of principles or faith." A person can fall away. One may have been enlightened and later apostatize, or fall away, beyond recovery. Paul said to some who had gone back to Judaism: "Ye are *severed* from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are *fallen away* from grace" (Gal. 5:4 ASV). In explaining the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said: "They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which *for a while believe*, and in time of temptation *fall away*" (Luke 8:13; cf. Ps. 37:23, 24). The backslider falls, yet he may continue to have faith in God and be able to return. But this one who has *fallen away*, unlike the backslider, cannot return. For example, when one is ill, there is always the possibility of recovery, but after death, all hope is gone. Likewise, a Christian may fall and be restored, but when he falls away or apostatizes from Christ, all hope of restoration is gone. The hardened apostate no longer has any trust in the Lord; he has cut himself loose and is without hope. Such a sinner is too *hardened* to be restored. For when a person goes away from

the Lord, when his conscience becomes seared, when all sensibility to spiritual things is dead, then God's divine truth can no longer make any impression upon him. He cannot be renewed to repentance; he has fallen away; he has severed his connection with God; his case is hopeless.

Various attempts have been made to get around the obvious meaning of Hebrews 6:4-6. Some say that it refers to those who were never truly converted. But if the people had never been converted, then how could the writer say, "It is impossible to *renew* them"? If they had never believed or had not been made new, why did he say, "*Renew again*"? Would he give this solemn warning about an event which never occurred nor even could occur? The inspired writer plainly says they were "once enlightened . . . and then fell away," and "it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance." Since the passage clearly states that repentance by one who has fallen away is impossible, pardon is therefore also impossible. Forgiveness depends upon repentance. Hence, there is no pardon for the one who sins to the degree that he is unable to abandon evil and do right. It is not that God does not desire his pardon nor is unwilling to forgive, but he has gone so far he cannot be brought to repentance. Thus the impossible act is not God's forgiveness but the individual's repentance. The important question to keep in mind as one studies this subject is not whether *God* will always forgive but whether *man* can always repent. As long as repentance is possible, pardon is also possible. *But is repentance always possible?* No! "It is *impossible* to renew unto repentance . . . those who were once enlightened . . . and then *fell away*." So Hebrews 6:4-6 teaches there were some who had actually done what many say cannot be done; that is, *they had sinned to such a degree that they were beyond God's forgiveness*. It could

be said of them that their sin was *unpardonable*. Since here is an example of some who had already completely fallen away from the Lord and were lost beyond redemption, "the unpardonable sin" is not limited to alien sinners. Erring children of God can sin to that degree that repentance is impossible because of the hardness of their hearts, and forgiveness, therefore, is also impossible. The hardened apostate cannot be reclaimed for Christ.

In an excellent sermon on "Sins the Lord Will Not Forgive," Guy N. Woods said:

. . . any final and irrevocable repudiation of the Spirit would, in principle, constitute such a sin. (*The Second Coming and Other Sermons*, p. 55.)

5. In another place the author of the Book of Hebrews declares: "For if we sin wilfully (or, "if we deliberately persist in sinning"—*Authentic New Testament*) after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10:26, 27 ASV). In this passage the word *wilfully* does not mean mere knowledge of one's sin but to sin deliberately. It is to persistently spurn God's law with open contempt. Such deliberate sinning will finally lead one to *apostatize* from Christ. As already observed, there is no pardon to them who wilfully apostatize from the gospel since there can be no repentance. But for those whose hearts are not hardened and there is repentance, there will be forgiveness.

There is a distinction in the guilt and heinousness of sins (John 19:11). In the Old Testament Moses mentioned *two* types of sin: (1) sins of ignorance and (2) sins of presumption. Note: ". . . if any soul sin through ignorance . . . it shall be forgiven him . . . But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously . . . that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him" (Num. 15:27-

36). On the one hand the sin was ignorance, and on the other hand it was contempt for divine authority. For sins of weakness, or ignorance, a way for pardon was provided; but under the law of Moses there was no expiation for the apostate, the person who sinned with a high hand; his punishment was physical death (Deut. 17:2-7). This distinction of sins is carried over into the New Testament with greater emphasis. Under the gospel of Christ the punishment for the apostate is eternal death (Rev. 20:14,15; 21:8; Luke 12:47,48). Note further the writer's language: "A man that hath set at nought Moses' law dieth without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses: of how much sorer [graver] punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (Heb. 10:28,29 ASV). Certainly, then the Bible teaches that there is a vast difference in wilful sins and sins committed through ignorance or weakness of the flesh. Paul says, "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1 ASV). When one sins through weakness of the flesh, or in ignorance, and thus unintentionally disobeys God, he may repent and obtain pardon. Not so with the brother who pursues sin and hardens his heart by deliberately continuing therein. The door of mercy is closed to the apostate; he has before him only the prospect of damnation, from which there is no escape. A man forfeits his last chance of pardon when he does *despite* to the Spirit of grace, or wilfully insults, or contemns the Spirit of God. "To insult this Spirit, then, as does the apostate, is manifestly the height of all wickedness, maliciousness, and

impiety. And hence, . . . for those who do so there is no forgiveness" (Robert Milligan, *Commentary on Hebrews*, p. 287). What a solemn warning against the consequences of sinning to the extent that one becomes unpardonable!

Therefore, one should take all caution that he sin not in direct rebellion against God, despising His commands with full knowledge, lest he, in time, should come to that unpardonable state. Such sins, which indicate a more hardened heart than sins of ignorance or weakness, will, if persisted in, soon result in a disposition of mind which makes repentance impossible. Wilful sins harden one's heart to the extent that he will no longer have any desire to repent. David feared this peril, and prayed: "Keep back thy servant also from *presumptuous sins*; let them not have *dominion over me*: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from *the great transgression*" (Ps. 19:13). The same conditions prevail today. Wilful sins are presumptuous and if persisted in, will result in apostasy. Christ is God's *final sacrifice*. If, after having accepted the only sacrifice that can atone for his sins, one later repudiates that sacrifice, for him there will be no further Savior nor further forgiveness, but only everlasting torment . . . the utter destruction in the lake of fire that awaits all obstinate apostates at the judgment.

Alfred Plummer said:

Constant and consummate opposition to the influence of the Holy Spirit, because of a deliberate preference of darkness to light, renders repentance, and therefore forgiveness, morally impossible. Grace, like bodily food, may be rejected until the power to receive it perishes. (*International Critical Commentary*, Vol. on Luke, p. 321.)

6. The apostle Peter, in writing about apostates, spoke of those who "cannot cease from sin" (II Pet. 2:14). If one *cannot cease from sin* and has

not the will-power to repent, how can he be forgiven? God requires all people to repent and cease from sin in order to be forgiven. (Cf. II Pet. 2:9, 17,20-22.)

7. John wrote: "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death" (I John 5:16,17). Thus, there is "a sin [or, sin] unto death, and another "not unto death." The *life* and *death* referred to in this passage are spiritual, not bodily. While physical death is the result of sin (I Cor. 15:21,22), it is not necessarily the result of the sins of the particular individual. The sin of Hebrews 6:4-6 is a "sin unto death," while the sin of Galatians 6:1 is a "sin not unto death."

When the apostle said, "If any man see his brother sin a sin. . .," he was referring to children of God only, not alien sinners. Earlier in the Epistle the writer set forth the conditions whereby erring children might obtain forgiveness: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. . . . If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:7,9). The Lord will forgive all sins that a brother will confess. There is a sin the Lord will not forgive. It follows, therefore, that the sin for which a brother will not be forgiven is the sin—any sin of which a brother cannot repent and confess. John expressly says, "There is a sin unto death," and advises Christians not to pray for one who has committed such a sin; that is, not to pray for him insofar as pardon is concerned, for to ask God to forgive such a one would be to pray for Him to pardon an impeni-

tent sinner. When a brother cannot repent because he has seared his conscience and has become impervious to the gospel (a disposition which can be *seen*), there is no need to pray for his forgiveness. A soul hardened, like steel, by sin, is a soul that has "sinned unto death."

From the passages studied, therefore, it can be seen that a person may sin to such a *degree that he will be beyond the reach of Divine mercy*. "The unpardonable sin" is not so much any particular act or sin, such as lying or stealing, but a condition of heart, a state of bitter rejection of the Holy Spirit. Most people who have been troubled about "the unpardonable sin" have thought of it as one particular transgression. But there is no sin which is beyond the cleansing power of the blood of Christ *if* the Lord's law of pardon is obeyed.

Now consider the following statement of another preacher: "Thank God, no one is ever too far gone, too hardened in his transgression to repent." The verses read are meaningless if this be true. We must agree, on the other hand, with the preacher who said, "No man ever goes so far away from God, no man ever lives in sin so long but that if he will return to God, God will receive him and will give him abundant pardon." For one to say that a person cannot possibly reach the state that he cannot repent, or return to God, is not taught in the Bible. The Bible clearly teaches that this state can be reached; one can commit the "eternal sin," or else Jesus would not have warned against it.

In giving an answer to the question of study, Isaac Errett said:

The sin against the Holy Spirit, whatever form it may take on, is essentially a willful and deliberate sin against light and knowledge. . . . Such rejections of truth leave no space for repentance, for they so wrench and pervert the moral powers as to render one in-



capable of repentance. That is the reason why this sin hath no forgiveness. . . . Salvation is not bestowed on the unbelieving and impenitent. Any one who will believe and repent gives evidence in so doing that he has not committed the sin against the Holy Spirit. (*The Querists' Drawer*, pp. 180, 181.)

There are three kinds of sinners spoken of in the Scriptures: (1) sinners that are pardoned or forgiven; (2) sinners that are pardonable but unforgiven because the conditions of forgiveness have not yet been met; (3) sinners that are unpardonable. All sins are unpardoned as long as the sinner refuses to repent. Any sin, unrepented of and, therefore, unforgiven, will cause the sinner to be lost in the judgment (John 8:21; Rev. 21:27). *Any unpardonable sin is an unforgiven sin, but not all unforgiven sins are unpardonable.* There is a difference between sin unpardoned and sin unpardonable. There is a difference between a state or condition of heart in which one has not repented but can repent, and in which one *cannot* repent. So there are those who have not been pardoned because they have not repented, for continuance in any sin precludes forgiveness. Others are unpardonable because they have hardened their hearts so much through persistent rejection that they cannot repent.

Fundamentally, therefore, "the unpardonable sin" is the deliberate and final rejection of Christ, whether by a Christian or by one outside the body of Christ. One's *final* and *complete rejection* of the teaching of the Holy Spirit, or God's Word, means doom. Both saint and sinner are capable of sinning today in such a way that they may be beyond the reach of pardon because of hardened hearts. Any person, whether sinner or erring child of God, who allows himself to drift beyond the power of the gospel, the Spirit's message to the world, sins unpardonably. When anyone has so hardened his heart against the only power God

has to save him, that person is beyond redemption. Thus, the man who persists in sin, hardens his own heart and seals his own doom. If the rejection is *final*, the case is *fatal*.

## B. ILLUSTRATIONS MAKE THIS LESSON PLAIN

Some illustrations are listed. Suppose that a man is tied in a chair by a small string. He can break the string and arise easily. But suppose that the string is wrapped many times around the man and the chair. When he is tied in that manner the man cannot break the strings, and arise. The effects of sin are similar. Sin is a cord that binds one more and more each time he sins, until finally he is completely bound. Solomon says: "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be *holden* with the cords of his sins" (Prov. 5:22). One may ask, "Cannot Christ set one free?" (Cf. John 8:31-36). No, not *if* he is so wicked and degenerate that he *cannot* repent! Therefore, one may be held fast by the cords of his sins . . . unable to repent and return to God.

Suppose, again, that one should daily place in each eye a drop of acid. Gradually his sight would fail. He may be warned by his physician that if he continues to put acid in his eyes he will eventually become totally blind. But he fails to heed the warning and finally loses his eyesight. Then as long as he may live, he shall never see again. Committing an irremedial injury against one's eyesight is similar to committing unpardonable sin against one's soul. In each case the sin is a deliberate one and irreparable damage is done.

That members of living bodies atrophy through inactivity is a well-known fact. For instance, fish in the Mammoth Cave cannot see; they have gone blind because of their living in total darkness. To lose the use of one's arm, a person does not necessarily have to sever the limb from the

body. All he has to do is to bind the arm to his body and let it remain there for several months, unused, and it will wither. Likewise with the soul; repeated and persistent rejection of the gospel eventually will harden one to such an extent that he cannot obey and obtain pardon. It is possible for one's heart to become so hard that there is no desire to repent. Horace Mann said: "Habit is a cable. We weave a thread of it every day, and at last we cannot break it."

#### **IV. "Have I Committed 'The Unpardonable Sin'?"**

As many have before, ask yourself, "Have I sinned unpardonably?" Since final repudiation of the Spirit constitutes unpardonable sin, *the one who is concerned about this subject has not sinned unpardonably*. His fear is evidence that such is not the case. The person who has committed "the unpardonable sin" is not concerned about it. If one has committed this sin, he is not interested in his soul. He is utterly devoid of penitence and the fear of God. No penitent person can be guilty of this sin, neither could he be guilty of it as long as he has a desire to repent. "The unpardonable sin," regardless of the specific acts, is essentially wilful and deliberate sin against the knowledge of God's Word; it emanates from a hardened heart and makes repentance impossible. As already learned, forgiveness is not bestowed on the impenitent. Anyone who will repent and obey the Lord shows by his obedience that he has *not* committed "the unpardonable sin." *There is hope of pardon only for those who can repent*. The mercy of God is great; He never refuses to forgive anyone, whether alien sinner or erring child of God, who will repent and do His will (cf. Ps. 103:8,11-18; Luke 15; I Cor. 5:5; Jas. 5:19,20; Acts 2:38).

#### A. "THE UNPARDONABLE SIN" IS NOT COMMITTED SUDDENLY

A person, therefore, does not reach the unpardonable state in a single day. Before he reaches that condition, he does, in Bible language, three things: (1) *grieves* the Spirit—"And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30); (2) *resists* the Spirit—" . . . ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts 7:51); (3) *quenches* the Spirit—"Quench not the Spirit" (I Thess. 5:19). *Quench* means to suppress or to stifle. When the Spirit has been quenched the eternal sin has been committed, but not until then. Hence, these words describe the effects produced by one's sinful progression toward the unpardonable state. When men grieve the Holy Spirit and resist the Holy Spirit, they are preparing the way for the ultimate tragedy, the quenching of the Holy Spirit.

Any step away from the Lord is dangerous; it is a step toward eternal and irrevocable separation from God. Repeated rejection of the gospel may eventually result in the state where obedience is impossible. The person, who persistently resists the Spirit and continually refuses to heed the Lord, may finally go too far to "return unto the Lord" (Isa. 55:7). Every invitation rejected hardens the heart. Very few old people, who have repeatedly refused to obey the gospel, ever repent. Many of them have crossed beyond the extension line of God's mercy. Of course, man does not definitely know when that point is reached in any person's life (whether this state has been reached in any individual can be determined by God Himself), yet continued and determined opposition to the Lord will harden one until he cannot be reached with the gospel, God's only power to save (Rom. 1:16).

## **B. CHRISTIANS SHOULD HOPE AND PRAY FOR THE SALVATION OF ALL (ROM. 10:1; 11:23)**

No doubt some are hopeless. They have become seared and hardened; but, since one does not positively know, do not conclude that any man has passed beyond the point of salvation. As long as a sinner lives, continue to preach repentance to him. Nor should the sinner despair of his salvation as long as he can repent. Many have not yet become unpardonable sinners. Perhaps only in rare instances is this true. One should exert all power possible to turn to God at once and in genuine repentance obey the Lord's commands.

The Bible emphasizes that any unforgiven sin will cause one to be lost; it does not have to be "the unpardonable sin." The result of unpardoned sin at death is the same as the result of "the unpardonable sin." It makes no difference if a man could have been saved, if he persistently refused to be saved. The great majority of people today are guilty of pardonable sins; they are unforgiven because they have refused to obey the gospel.

If I were in a boat on the river in the rapids, it would not be necessary, to insure my destruction, that I should enter into violent controversy with those who would urge me from the shore, to take heed and come to land: all I should have to do would be to shut my ears to their entreaty and leave myself alone; the current would do the rest. Neglect of the gospel is thus just as perilous as the open rejection of it. Indeed, half the evils of our daily life in temporal things are caused by neglect; and countless are the souls who are lost for this same cause. (Wm. Taylor, *The Parables of our Saviour*, pp. 159, '60.)

## **C. TODAY IS THE DAY OF SALVATION**

A short distance above Niagara Falls there is a sign which says, "Past-Redemption Point." The boatman drifting on the surface of the waters

knows that he must not go beyond this sign, because beyond it the river begins raging over the precipice. The boatman cannot turn back beyond this sign. Likewise, a similar condition prevails with the person who commits "the unpardonable sin," or with one who delays obedience until death comes; he has reached *Past-Redemption Point*. This is the point of no return. Since no one has a lease on life or knows what a day may bring, there is only one way for an individual to make sure that his salvation will not become impossible: *he should obey the Lord today*. "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb. 3:7,8; 4:7).

The peril of waiting too long to repent is vividly illustrated by the following story: once a man standing by Niagara saw an eagle sitting on a lamb frozen in a piece of floating ice. The eagle was feasting upon the carcass as it drifted toward the rapids. Now and then the eagle proudly lifted his head to look around, as if to say, "I'm drifting on toward danger, but I know what I am doing; I will fly away and escape before it is too late."

With great interest the man watched the piece of ice and its strange cargo drift near the awful roar of the falls. At last the eagle stopped, spread his powerful wings and leaped for flight. But alas! While he had been feasting on the carcass, his feet had frozen to the fleece. He leaped and shrieked in vain. Together the frozen lamb and the eagle went over the falls into the darkness of death.

This incident illustrates the danger of every soul feasting upon sin. Many young men intend, after a little more indulgence, to turn away from sin and be saved. But alas! When they would turn, they find themselves bound by sinful habits, poisoned

by sin, paralyzed in will, and frozen in soul by the evil upon which they have been feasting. There is no greater folly than feasting upon the world until one is corrupted by it. All should seek the Lord while they are able to escape the clutches of death; tomorrow may be forever too late (Prov. 27:1; James 4:13-17).

The poem, "The Doomed Man," gives cause for solemn reflection:

There is a time, I know not when,  
A place, I know not where,  
Which marks the destiny of men  
To glory or despair.

There is a line by us not seen,  
Which crosses every path;  
The hidden boundary between  
God's patience and His wrath.

How long may men go on in sin?  
How long will God forbear?  
Where does hope end, and where begin  
The confines of despair?

One answer from those skies is sent,  
Ye who from God depart,  
*While it is called today, repent  
And harden not your heart.*

—DR. JOSEPH ADDISON ALEXANDER

# ***The Second Coming Of Christ***

**C**HRISt will come again. More than three hundred passages in the New Testament either mention or allude to that event. Unfortunately, however, there have been so many theories concerning His second coming (and so many controversies) that many Christians have neglected to give this Scriptural theme proper attention.

## ***1. His Coming Is Certain***

Christ's second coming is an unquestionably established *promise* of the Bible. At the ascension of Jesus, the *angels* said to the apostles as they looked up toward heaven: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? *this same Jesus*, which is taken up from you into heaven, *shall so come* in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). *Jesus* himself said He would come again. Prior to His leaving the disciples, Jesus said to them: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again*, and receive you unto myself" (John 14:2,3). The *apostles* declared that Christ would come again. Paul said: "For the *Lord himself shall descend from heaven . . .*" (I Thess. 4:16). The writer of the Book of Hebrews said that He would "appear the second time" (Heb. 9:28). John said: ". . . when *he shall appear*, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:2).

Even now, as in early days, some doubt the Lord's return. "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his



coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (II Peter 3:3,4). Although skeptics doubt and mockers scoff at the idea, Christians believe in his second appearance; for they believe the Bible. As far as the fulfillment of this promise is concerned, a thousand years is no more than one day with God (II Peter 3:8). "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. *But the day of the Lord will come . . .*" (II Peter 3:9,10). The world and the present state of things will come to an end. This earth will pass out of existence. *Jesus will return.* Furthermore, Christ's second coming will be at the end of the world, when time shall have run its course, in the last day of this last age of time.

## ***II. His Coming Will Be Visible***

The *manner* of Christ's coming is personal, visible, audible, glorious, and sudden. When Jesus comes, "every eye shall see him," even the actual participants in the crucifixion of the Son of God: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him" (Rev. 1:7). No one need go to any special place in order to see the Lord when He comes. Regardless of where they may be, all nations of the earth shall witness His return: "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. . . . and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Matt. 24:27,30).

He is coming "with clouds" (Acts 1:9, 11, Rev. 1:7), "in flaming fire" (II Thess. 1:8), "with His mighty angels" (II Thess. 1:7; Matt 16:27), "with ten thousands of his saints" (Jude 14), "with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God" (I Thess. 4:16). Undoubtedly, Christ's coming will not be hidden and concealed but open and manifest. The Lord's sudden and unexpected appearance will be an awesome spectacle to unbelievers, but it will be a wonderful day for the righteous.

### **III. The Time Is Unknown**

The *time* of His coming is hidden in the mind of God, one of the secret things which belongs only to God (Deut. 29:29). God has not revealed **the date to any man. Jesus said concerning that day and hour: "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32).** His second coming may be at midnight or early morning; at any moment He may appear; it could be today. Man does not know when; but he does know that when Jesus comes, business will be going on as usual, even as it was before the flood, and that many will be unprepared. "And as were the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall be the coming of the Son of man" (Matt. 24:37-39 ASV).

Christ's coming will be sudden and without warning; He will come unexpectedly and unannounced, even as "a thief in the night" (II Peter 3:10;

I Thess. 5:2). Hence, the solemn warning: "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 24:44; cf. Mark 13:35-37).

#### A. DATE-SETTERS ARE DECEIVING

Since no one knows the time of Christ's coming, it is ridiculous to set dates for His return. Yet, this has been done, it is still being done, and honest people are being deceived by the "date-setters." For example, William Miller, the founder of the Adventist movement, predicted that Christ would come in October, 1843.<sup>1</sup> He seemed to have been a rabble-rousing preacher who converted many people to his belief. At least his followers disposed of their property, prepared for themselves white ascension robes, and joyously awaited the Lord's appearance. The date came, but Jesus did not come! Although disappointed, Miller would not be out-done, so he told his followers he had missed his calculations in prophecy one year, and that the Lord would come the next year at that time. Again the date came, but Christ did not come in 1844!

Later, Charles T. Russell, the founder of the religious group now known as Jehovah's Witnesses, wrote about Christ's return. He said the Lord *came* in October, 1874, but only certain ones (his followers) were aware of it—that to all others He was invisible.<sup>2</sup> As already noted, however, when Jesus does come "every eye shall see him" (Rev.

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<sup>1</sup>D. M. Canright, *Seventh-Day Adventism Renounced* (reprint of Fourteenth Edition), Nashville: B. C. Goodpasture, N.D., pp. 68-80.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Taze Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures, Series III, Thy Kingdom Come*, Brooklyn: Watch Tower & Bible Society, 1891, pp. 124, 127, 133.

1:7). His coming will be personal and *visible*, not only to the righteous but also to the wicked.

“Pastor” Russell, as he was often called, made many predictions about the “Golden Age” that was to commence in connection with the second coming of Christ; but all of his predictions in this respect proved him a false prophet. “When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously” (Deut. 18:22).

Following Russell’s death in 1916, “Judge” Rutherford fell heir to the “throne”; and he, too, made predictions. In 1920, Rutherford published a small book entitled *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, in which he predicted that in 1925 the righteous dead would be raised and that all the old people then living who accepted the Ransomer would return to the days of their youth and “live on the earth forever and never see death.”<sup>3</sup> This meant that elderly people with wooden legs would get new limbs, all with false teeth would get new teeth, and all bald-headed men would get a new suit of hair . . . *in 1925!* He further predicted that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David, along with other Old Testament worthies, would be living on earth, and visible, after 1925. Indeed, 1925 would be the beginning of the “Golden Age.” All of that sounded good to many people before 1925, but 1925 came and Rutherford’s predictions *failed*. Even the “Judge” himself died after 1925! He was

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<sup>3</sup>J. F. Rutherford, *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, Brooklyn: International Bible Students Association, 1920, pp. 12, 88, 89, 90, 97, 98, 100.

one of the millions living when 1925 came, but he died. He, too, was a false prophet.

One said that Christ would come in 1939. Others have suggested more recent dates. Was He seen on any of these dates? So, the date-setters continue to deceive those who are ignorant of God's Word.

Since Christ has not come on any of the set dates, it surely becomes evident that man knows absolutely nothing about that phase of the subject. In view of these facts, why is it that some will continue to set dates for Christ's return? And, stranger still, why do some still believe that these so-called prophets know what they are talking about when they tell people a time of Christ's coming? How gullible can human beings be? That date has not been revealed to any one.

#### **B. MODIFIED DATE-SETTERS ARE DECEIVING**

Some do not set any particular day for the Savior's return but stress the idea that His coming is *imminent*, that it will be during "this year" or "this generation." Although this is certainly possible, the Bible does not teach it. The Scriptures did not teach in the first century that Christ's return was very near (cf. II Thess. 2:1-3), and they do not teach that the Lord's second coming is imminent now. Perhaps now as never before in history, men are thinking of the end of the world. While some have been influenced by the sensational type of preaching and writing, others, perchance, have become indifferent, due to false prophets, to any Biblical teaching of the last things.

#### **C. MANY SIGNS OF MATTHEW 24 ARE MISAPPLIED**

Those who talk much about signs, the fulfillment of prophecy, and the imminence of Christ's coming

usually refer to the first part of Matthew 24 for proof of their interpretations of the times. This is a very important chapter and should be given careful study. Now note some things about this portion of Scripture which is often perverted.

Following Christ's last public discourse, just prior to His crucifixion, He left the temple and with His disciples went to the Mount of Olives. As they were leaving the temple grounds, the apostles pointed out to Jesus "the buildings of the temple" (v. 1). Jesus said to them, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (v. 2). Then later "as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (v. 3). Then Jesus, in answering their questions, gave to the four apostles the prophecy concerning the destruction of the temple and His second coming. Note that Christ carefully answered *two* questions, namely: (1) "*When shall these things be?*" [i.e., the overthrowing of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple which He had just predicted] and (2) "*What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*" [The apostles supposed that all these events would be simultaneous, which was a mistake.] Jesus answered their questions in the same order as they were asked.

The destruction of Jerusalem occurred in A.D. 70 under the Roman Emperor Titus, just forty years after Jesus spoke these words. A Mohammedan mosque stands today on the spot where the temple once stood. Christ's Olivet prophecy was literally

fulfilled—not one stone was left upon another of the temple building. So completely were the early disciples taught these things about the destruction of the city, and so well warned were they, that history does not record that a single Christian lost his life in this terrible catastrophe.

One should note that Jesus said (v. 34) that *all* the events previously mentioned would be fulfilled in the lifetime of that generation. Let all beware, then, of those who do not know how to rightly divide the Word of truth, for every sign mentioned in Matthew 24, except those at the very time of the second coming of Christ, has been fulfilled; that generation did not pass away “till all these things” were fulfilled. Unfortunately, some teachings now used are taken from statements which Christ made in regard to the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish state (Matt. 24:4-28) and are applied to His second coming at the end of the world. (Cf. Deut. 28:48-58).

Matthew 24 should always be studied in connection with the parallel accounts in Mark 13 and Luke 21:5-28. Luke 21:20 contains a very clear wording of the statement of Matthew 24:15 about the Roman soldiers’ encompassing Jerusalem: “And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.” (Cf. Daniel 9:24-27; Mark 13:14.)

Some quote Christ’s statement (made about A. D. 30), “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (v. 14; cf. Mark 13:10), and argue that the end of time is near. But before A. D. 70 Paul wrote that the gospel had been preached in “all the earth . . . [even] unto the ends of the world” (Rom. 10:18)

and "to every creature which is under heaven" (Col. 1:23).

So the false Christs (v. 5), the "wars and rumors of wars" (v. 6), the "false prophets" (vv. 11, 24), and the gospel being preached "to all nations" (v. 14) had reference to that period of time *before* the destruction of Jerusalem. Too, this event in which the Roman Army brought an end to the Jewish nation was a time of "great tribulation" (v. 21) according to Josephus, a Jewish historian. If God's mercy had not interposed for the sake of the followers of Christ, the whole Jewish nation that inhabited the land would have been swept away; there would have been "no flesh" saved (v. 22; cf. Dan. 12:1; I Thess. 2:16). Thus, *the great tribulation*, mentioned so often by some Bible students, is now a matter of the distant past, having been completely fulfilled.

The purpose, then, of the Lord's Olivet discourse was not to give to His disciples signs of His second coming, but to warn that generation of believers of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem and to give them a sure sign whereby they might secure their safety by fleeing from the city. When they saw the Roman army around Jerusalem (Luke 21:20; Matt. 24:15), they knew with certainty that the hour had come for them to flee Jerusalem and Judea; but Jesus clearly told His disciples that they should *not* regard such events as wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes as the signs of His second coming. It is surprising, then, that people now will persistently take these things to be signs of His coming, even though Jesus said that these very things were not to be regarded as such. "These signs," then, being fulfilled before that generation passed away, could not have referred to the advent



of Christ but must refer to His previous prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem. To make those things "signs" leading up to the second coming of Christ would contradict His positive statement that no signs would precede and give warning of His second advent (Mark 13:22).

If one will carefully examine the entire discourse, he will see that the Lord divided the future into two distinct periods: The first of these extended from the time of the discourse to the destruction of Jerusalem; the second period from that event to His second coming and the end of the world. Regarding the first period, Jesus said, "But take ye heed: behold, *I have foretold you all things*" (Mark 13:23); but concerning the second period, instead of giving a sign whereby His people might be warned of the approaching end, He spoke only in general terms and made it plain that no immediately preceding signs would be given whereby His disciples would know that His advent was near. "But of *that day and hour,*" He said, "knoweth *no man*, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matt. 24:36). God alone knows the day of Christ's second coming (Acts 17:31).

Thus, the coming of Christ was not to take place during the siege of the city nor at the time of its destruction, but *afterwards*. How long "*after that tribulation*" before the Lord's return and the end of time, Christ did not say; and nowhere does the Bible tell. The parables Jesus gave concerning His second coming stressed preparedness, not the *time* of His coming: the servant doing his master's will at all times, lest the master should return unexpectedly and find him unprepared (vv. 45-51),

and then two parables in the next chapter, the Ten Virgins and the Talents. The only point stressed in the discourse was that His disciples should always be in a state of expectancy of His second coming and always be *ready*.

The parable about the fig tree, in chapter 24, was given to illustrate the destruction of Jerusalem. In it He points out that just as the budding of the fig tree was a sure sign of the nearness of summer, so the presence of the Roman army in Judea would be a sure sign of the nearness of the destruction of Jerusalem. The opposite is declared concerning His second coming; it will not be preceded by any sign whatever. From these sayings of Christ one can surely see that it is an impossibility to calculate, from any prophecies in the Bible, the year of the Lord's return. Furthermore, he can see how contrary the idea is that the Lord will be "revealed" at the end of a supposed "great tribulation."

In spite of this clear warning which the Lord gave to His disciples, many present-day religionists are filled with admiration for the minister who speaks learnedly about "The Signs of the Times." He strives to show his audience that this or that terrible war, serious earthquake, or devastating famine, "according to prophecy," is a sure sign of Christ's imminent coming. Yet Jesus emphasized that no one knows the day or the hour, but that it will be at a time when people think not (Matt. 24:44). Although the time is uncertain, the event of Christ's coming itself is certain.

#### *IV. When Jesus Comes, the Earth Will Be Burned Up, the Dead Raised, and the World Judged*

The *events* associated with Christ's second

coming are likewise plainly set forth in the Scriptures. They are:

(1) *The end of the world when the earth shall be burned up and the works that are therein:* "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto *fire* against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. . . . the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with *fervent heat*, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (II Pet. 3:7-10). [This language was once considered ridiculously exaggerated; but now in the days of A-bombs and H-bombs, the statement does not seem too difficult to understand because all know how literal these predictions could be.]

(2) *The simultaneous resurrection of all mankind, both the good and the bad:* "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which *all* that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and *shall come forth*; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28, 29). "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall *all be made alive*. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's *at his coming*. *Then cometh the end* . . . for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (I Cor. 15:22-24, 52).

(3) *The final judgment for all men, the just and the unjust:* "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, *then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory*: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall

*separate* them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats . . ." (Matt. 25: 31-32). ". . . *Jesus Christ . . . shall judge* the quick [living, ASV] and the dead *at his appearing . . .*" (II Tim. 4:1). "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it . . . . And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; *and the books were opened*: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:11, 12).

The Scriptures clearly connect the end of the world, the general resurrection, and the final judgment with Christ's second coming. Though man is uninformed of the hour of the Lord's return, he is assured that His coming will be to raise the dead, both good and bad, and to judge all mankind.

#### **A. CHRIST WILL NOT SET UP AN EARTHLY KINGDOM**

Christ is not going to set up a material kingdom and reign over the whole world when He comes. The Bible teaches that Christ is now King (I Tim. 6:15). His kingdom on earth is the church (Matt. 16:18, 19); yet it "is not of this world" (John 18:36). The early Christians had already entered the kingdom (Col. 1:13, 14; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 1:9). By comparing Mark 9:1, Acts 1:8, and Acts 2:1-4, the fact is learned that the kingdom of Christ was established on the earth on the day of Pentecost, following the resurrection of Christ, in the city of Jerusalem. When Jesus comes again, He will cease His reign and turn the kingdom back to God the Father (I Cor. 15:24-26: cf. Acts 2:29-36; Zech. 6:12, 13; Heb. 8:1, 4). There is no passage of Scripture that speaks of Christ's reigning over an earthly

kingdom, either before or after His second coming. The so-called "millennial reign of Christ on earth" must be rejected as false. The theory is based upon a false interpretation of the symbolical and figurative language of Revelation 20:1-7. It is in direct conflict with many plain, literal passages of Scripture. The passage does not mention: (1) the second coming of Christ, (2) a bodily resurrection, (3) all righteous persons, (4) a reign on earth, (5) Christ on earth, (6) the length of Christ's reign, or (7) Jerusalem as capital and Christ as king. John says, "I saw the *souls* of them that were *beheaded* for the witness of Jesus . . . and *they lived and reigned* with Christ *a thousand years* . . . This is the first resurrection." "ON THE EARTH" is *not* in the passage. In fact, the Lord will never actually set foot on the earth again. At His coming, the earth will be burned up (II Pet. 3:10); the righteous will "meet the Lord in the air" (I Thess. 4:17). Thus, the Scriptures teach that Christ began His reign on Pentecost; He will continue this reign until the end of time, when He comes again. This renders a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on earth an impossibility. The gospel dispensation is the last age (Acts 2:17). There is no earthly age to follow the present Christian age. The "millennium" must come before the one and only second coming of Christ at the end of the world. Hence, the "first resurrection" must be spiritual, the revival of a cause.

There is no support for the view of a literal 1000-year reign of Christ on earth in the Bible. The Scriptures teach that when Jesus comes: (1) time will end; (2) all the dead will be raised at the same time; (3) the final judgment will occur; (4) eternity will commence. The language of Rev.

20:1-6 is symbolic and must be brought into harmony with the literal statements of the Bible concerning the second coming of Christ, the resurrection, and the judgment. Yet the premillennial theory contradicts so many plain passages of Scripture. It is a gross mistake to literalize the Book of Revelation. This section of the Book (Rev. 20:1-6) is a symbolic description of the revival of Christianity--the triumphs of persecuted saints. Christians are now living in the "millennium," as Christ reigns in their hearts and over the church. The "first resurrection," therefore, is spiritual. The Bible speaks of figurative (spiritual) resurrections as well as literal (bodily) ones. (See John 5:25; Rom. 6:4; Ez. 37:1-14; Mal. 4:5; Matt. 11:11-14; Mark 9:11-13; Luke 1:17.) The theory of premillennialism is *false* because Christ is now reigning.

#### **B. THE JUDGMENT WILL BE A GREAT DAY**

Following Christ's coming and the resurrection of all the dead, the Lord will then judge all mankind. This will include both those whom He has raised and those who are alive at His second coming. The Bible clearly teaches that there is a judgment day coming.

Very few sermons are preached on the second coming of Christ, the general resurrection of all men, and the last judgment, in comparison to other themes. Yet on the lips of prophets, apostles, and Christ, the end of time and the final judgment was one of the most frequent themes. It should be given serious attention by all men now.

What a solemn thought! Daniel Webster was once asked, "What is the most serious thought that ever occupied your mind?" He replied, "My individual responsibility to God." The judgment for all is sure. Life is veiled with uncertainty; no one

knows what the future holds, but one thing is definite: "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. . . . So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. . . . it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the *judgment*" (Rom. 14:10, 12; Heb. 9:27). This appointment is one that cannot be broken. What a great event!

What a spectacle that will be! All the children of men will be there: the living, the multitudinous hosts of the dead, from every place and of every age of the world from the time of Adam to that of the Lord's return. The small and the great, the good and the bad, the rich and the poor, the wise and the simple, all races and all tongues, will appear before the great white throne. For, before Christ's tribunal shall be gathered *all nations*, both the *living* and the *dead*. What a vast assembly!

Future judgment is necessary. A few criminals may escape the officers of the land and the courts of civil government, but there is a judgment day coming that none can escape. In a certain sense, men are judged in this world, but that fact does not invalidate the future judgment; it only serves to add weight to the necessity of future judgment for perfect and final justice. Obviously, justice here is not final and perfect for several reasons: (1) There are so many sins and transgressions like ingratitude, hatred, persecution, falsehood, slander, and dishonoring parents of which human laws take no cognizance. (2) The judgments of men are imperfect and inadequate. Human judges in the courts often do not know what penalty best fits the offense. In fact, sometimes right judgment is perverted and wrong triumphs. (3) The human judge is often uncertain as to the guilt or innocence of the person on trial. Surely no one would claim that

human justice is infallible. (4) Judgment is necessary to rectify the inequities of this life, for sometimes the innocent are punished while the guilty often escape arrest and punishment. (5) Not only should the guilty be punished and the righteous rewarded, but also their lives should be declared and uncovered to all. Human reason, therefore, demands that a righteous judgment must come.

### **C. GOD WILL JUDGE THE WORLD THROUGH CHRIST**

Christ will be the judge. The honor of judging the living and the dead has been conferred on Christ, and before His judgment seat all men must stand (John 5:22, 27; Acts 17:31; Matt. 25:31, 32).

Jesus Himself gave a picture of the judgment scene when He described Himself as a shepherd, dividing the people as sheep and goats: “. . . and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world . . . . Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels. . . . And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:33-46 ASV).

The world's Redeemer is qualified to be the judge at the last day of earth's history because He has perfect knowledge of both deeds and motives. Christ knows what is in man (John 2:24, 25); nothing can be hidden from His all-seeing eye (Heb. 4:13; Prov. 15:3). He has sympathy, too, since He once lived on this earth; and He will be merciful to the full extent of mercy consistent with perfect justice and perfect truth.



#### **D. EACH ONE SHALL GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE**

The basis of the judgment will be man's deeds, words, and thoughts. At the judgment the books of one's life will be opened, all his works will be made manifest, and each individual shall then give an account of the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad (II Cor. 5:10 ASV). "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and *then* he shall *reward every man according to his works*" (Matt. 16:27). Every act of life will be brought under review, even the hidden and secret things, good or bad, shall be brought to light: "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:14). Everything will be made known in the day of judgment.

Furthermore, Jesus said: ". . . every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:36, 37). Not only does God keep a record of man's deeds, but a record of his words as well (cf. Mal. 3:16; Eph. 4:29).

The Judge will take into account not only the overt acts and words, but He also "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts" (I Cor. 4:5). He will judge "the secrets of men" (Rom. 2:16). It is possible to cover up sin and iniquity in this world, as many do, but all will be uncovered in that great day, and all men will be dealt with as individuals.

#### **E. THE WORD WILL JUDGE MAN**

Men will be judged in harmony with God's law. This is learned from John's vision of the judgment

(Rev. 20:12) and from the words of Christ: “. . . the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). All will be judged in the last day, not by the creeds and dogmas of men, but by the eternal Word of God.

In reality, the ground of man's acceptance at the final day will be his faith in Jesus Christ manifested by his obedience to the Lord's will and in accordance to his ability and opportunities (cf. Heb. 5:8, 9; Matt. 7:21-27; Rev. 22:12, 14; Matt. 12:41, 42; Luke 10:12-14; 12:47, 48; Matt. 25:15, 35-45)

At the judgment, each one will hear God's final sentence upon his soul: everlasting happiness or eternal misery. Then some will pass in triumph to the company of the blessed and some in woe to the company of the condemned. At that time the good and the bad will be separated forever. The sentences there given will never be reversed. At the judgment, as it was said of Judas, every man shall go to “his own place” (Acts 1:25), the place that he himself has made certain by the choices and deeds of his life; and in this place he will continue to exist forever. Hence, *all* are to be rewarded or punished *at the same time . . . at the last day* (John 6:39, 40, 44; John 12:48; Jude 14, 15; Gal. 6:7, 8).

In the language of Jesus, recorded in Matt. 25: 31-46, there is declared (1) the *time* of the judgment—at the second coming of Christ, (2) the *judge*—Jesus Christ, (3) the *subjects*—all nations, (4) the *sentences* passed—enter into eternal life, or enter into everlasting punishment.

### **V. “Prepare To Meet Thy God”**

Sinners, a “pay day” is coming. As surely as the righteous are to be rewarded, so also the wicked are to be punished.

The saddest separation will be when one is turned away with that multitude into everlasting punish-

ment. Families will then be divided, never to meet again. God, however, does not desire that any should perish; He wants all to come to repentance, and He, by His grace, has made it possible for every man to have his sins forgiven through the shed blood of Christ (cf. Eph. 2:8, 9; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). When one applies the blood of Christ, by obedience to the gospel, his sins are pardoned, and shall not be mentioned by the Judge in the judgment. God has said: "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8:12).

However, there is danger in *delay* in obeying the gospel. (Cf. II Thess. 1:7-9.) *Now* is the day of salvation. When Paul preached before Felix and Drusilla, "he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and *judgment to come.*" The sermon was so powerful that the governor "trembled"; yet he did not obey. He said: "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25); but he was never again so stirred in his soul by the truth. He never did accept Christ, so far as is known, but died as he had lived, a slave to sin. That "convenient season" never came.

The thought of the judgment should also act as a powerful restraint from sin. Let all relate every duty, every decision, every temptation, every act, every human relationship to that final account. Let all "give diligence that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless in his sight"

Only by being a faithful Christian is one prepared always for Christ's return. Those unprepared should prepare *now* to meet God in judgment.

*Careless soul, O heed the warning,  
For your life will soon be gone;  
O how sad to face the judgment,  
Unprepared to meet thy God.*

—J. H. STANLEY

# ***After Death-- What Then?***

**P**EOPLE want to know about death and the hereafter—what is to take place. They ask, “Is there life beyond the grave, or does death end all?” As long as death stalks the land, men will ask, “*If a man die, shall he live again?*” (Job 14:14).

God has spoken on the subject. His revealed Word gives to man the meaning of death and the states that follow it. The Scriptures must be recognized as authoritative and final (II Tim. 3:16,17; I Cor. 14:37; II Pet. 1:3,21). “The doctrine of last things” is used by scholars to define Biblical teaching as to the end of this life, the interim between death and the resurrection, the second coming of Christ, final judgment, and eternal destiny.

## ***1. What Is Man?***

An integral part of any study of the destiny of man after death demands an investigation into the origin, nature, and constitution of man himself. What is man, then, and whence did he come? “What is man, that thou art mindful of him?” (Ps. 8:4). There are but two possible answers: (1) Man is a mere animal who evolved from the unknown ages past through a process of evolution, or (2) man is a spirit-being who was created by an act of God. If man evolved from lower life and is wholly mortal, as some claim, then all questions concerning the dead can be easily answered—the dead have ceased to be; they are extinct, and all who die will likewise become extinct.

The theory of evolution as applied to the origin of man is unproved – and unprovable. Scripture teaches a different view about the origin and nature of man. The Bible definitely affirms that man was created by Jehovah, in the image of God: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:27). The exact order of the process is further described in these words: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). The Lord created man “a little lower than the angels [or, “lower than God,” ASV] and “crowned him with glory and honour” (Ps. 8:5). These Biblical statements show that man was divinely created a compound being – a material body and an inbreathed part by Jehovah. There is a great difference between men and animals. Man was created in the image of God, but animals were not (Cf. Luke 3:38; Mk. 10:6. Adam was the son of God.)

Paul teaches that man’s whole nature is *body*, *soul*, and *spirit*: “I pray God your whole *spirit* and *soul* and *body* be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thess. 5:23). The *body* is the fleshly or material part. *Soul* sometimes refers to the physical life (Ps. 78:50); it often refers to the whole man (Acts 2:41; 1 Pet. 3:20), and *soul* and *spirit* are sometimes used interchangeably (Luke 23:46; Acts 2:27)—as in this study—meaning that the *spirit* is the immortal nature of man. The Scriptures often refer to man as body and soul, or body and spirit, rather than the three-fold division, meaning that soul and spirit are one and the same entity (cf. Rom. 8:10; I Cor. 7:34; 5:5; Luke 8:55; Acts 2:31; Gen. 35:18; 1 Kings

17:21,22). Paul again affirmed man's compound nature when he wrote of the "outward man" and the "inward man" (II Cor. 4:16). The spirit dwells within the body.

Daniel cried: "I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body . . ." (Dan. 7:15). The real "I" of man is this invisible spirit within the body. Zechariah said: ". . . the Lord . . . formeth the spirit of man within him" (Zech. 12:1). Again, ". . . there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding" (Job 32:8); there are those who "dwell in houses of clay" (Job 4:19; cf. 14:22). Man, then, is a spirit enshrined in a body, the spirit being the true self.

The Bible teaches that the spirit of man, being the offspring of God, is like its Father and is immortal. "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24). In contrast with the "fathers of our flesh," God is "the Father of spirits [or, "our spirits," footnote ASV]" (Heb. 12:9). Paul declared, "We are the offspring of God" (Acts 17:29). "God is Spirit" and man's spirit is the "offspring of God." The spirit, being a distinct entity from God, is the immortal part of man. Although by his body man is allied to this earth, by his spirit he is in the likeness of God. Like begets like. Man's spirit is immortal, because God created man's spirit after His immortal Spirit (1 Tim. 1:17). God is eternal (Ps. 90:1,2); He is the source of all life (John 5:26; 1 Tim. 6:16; Luke 3:38). And, like God, man is immortal, for his spirit is created in "the image of God."

God "hath set eternity in their hearts" (Eccl. 3:11 ASV; cf. Prov. 20:27). Peter said that the "hidden man of the heart" is to be adorned "in that which is not corruptible" (1 Pet. 3:4). The

"heart" is "the hidden man," the soul, "the inward man" (Rom. 7:22), the real man; and "not corruptible" means "immortal." The Psalmist declared: "Your heart shall live forever" (Ps. 22:26). Only the body is mortal (Rom. 6:12; 8:11; II Cor. 4:11), but even it will become immortal at the resurrection (I Cor. 15:42-45. Cf. Rom. 2:7).

Man's spirit does not signify wind, air, or breath, but the rational part of man, the undying soul. The image of God in man consists of those God-like attributes of man's intellectual and moral nature (Jas. 3:9). The spirit of man is the part that knows the things of a man: "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" (I Cor. 2:11; cf. Gen. 6:5; Job 38:36; Rom. 10:1,10). Paul served God with his spirit (Rom. 1:9) and his mind (Rom. 7:25; cf. vs. 22; Eph. 4:23). The fact that man's soul came, not from the dust, but from the eternal God, justifies belief in the immortality of the soul and its survival at the body's dissolution.

Thayer (*Greek-English Lexicon*) defines *spirit* (his second definition) as "*the rational spirit, the power by which a human being feels, thinks, wills, decides; the soul:*" 3. "*a spirit, i.e., a simple essence, devoid of all or at least all grosser matter, and possessed of the power of knowing, deciding, and acting.*" (p. 520). On soul he says (2. C.) it is "*an essence which differs from the body and is not dissolved by death*" (p. 677).

Thus man, as created by Jehovah, is (has) an immortal spirit which lives beyond death. In respect to his visible or material organism, man is mortal; but with reference to his deathless, intelligent spirit within, derived from God, he is immortal.

## II. What Is Death?

The Bible teaches that physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body, at which separation the dust shall "return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7). The body returns to its origin, the dust, while the spirit, the real man, returns to its origin, God (Gen. 3:19).

The poet Longfellow expressed this truth:

*Life is real! Life is earnest!  
And the grave is not its goal;  
Dust thou art, to dust returneth,  
Was not spoken of the soul.*

James wrote that "the body without the spirit is dead" (Jas. 2:26). The Bible does not say that the spirit is dead without the body; it says the body is dead without the spirit. The spirit does not die. Thayer gives this definition of death: 1. ". . . *that separation (whether natural or violent) of the soul from the body by which the life on earth is ended*" (Gr.-Eng. Lex., p. 282).

The spirit departs from the body at death. When Rachel died, her soul departed (Gen: 35:18). In that sad hour, soul and body became separated from each other. Death is described as the "giving up of the ghost" or spirit. For examples: Abraham "gave up the ghost and died" (Gen. 25.8); Jesus, while on the cross, said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," whereupon "he gave up the ghost" (Luke 23:46. Cf. Gen. 35:29; 49:33; Acts 5:5,10; 7:59,60). The Bible compares the departure of the soul at death to the flying away of a bird: "We fly away" (Ps. 90:10). The "we" who "fly away" are the spirits, not the bodies. So death is spoken of as the soul's departure or exodus from



this world. In prison at Rome, Paul spoke of death as a departure from this life: "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to *depart*, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to *abide* in the flesh is more needful for you" (Phil. 1:23,24; cf. Luke 2:29; 9:31). Later he wrote, "The time of my *departure* is at hand" (II Tim. 4:6). The word here translated "departure" connotes in the original Greek loosening the mooring-ropes of a ship, pulling up the anchors, and setting sail on a voyage.

This metaphor of dying is beautifully expressed in the following poem:

***Crossing the Bar***

*Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me,  
And may there be no moaning at the bar  
When I put out to sea.*

*But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep,  
Turns again home.*

*Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark,  
And may there be no sadness of farewell  
When I embark.*

*For tho' from out our bourne of time and place,  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face,  
When I have crossed the bar.*

—TENNYSON

The human body is a tabernacle or dwelling place in which the real man lives. Death is referred to as the putting off of this tabernacle (II Pet. 1:13-15). The apostle Paul wrote: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house

not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Cor. 5:1). He also spoke of being "in this tabernacle" and "at home in the body," and also "absent from the body" and "present with the Lord" (vss. 4-8). Therefore, life is that state of man when the body and spirit are together; death is that condition that follows the separation of body and spirit.

The miracle of bringing persons back to life in Biblical times was simply the returning of the spirit to the body. Elijah prayed that the son of the widow of Zarephath might be restored to life. "I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again . . . ; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived" (I Kings 17:21,22). Death came when the soul became separated from the body; the child lived when "the soul of the child came into him [*i.e.*, into the body] again." When the Ruler's daughter was raised by Christ, "her spirit came again" (Luke 8:55. Cf. Acts 9:36-41). In dying, her spirit had left the body; in coming to life again, her spirit had to return. Thus, her spirit must have existed while she was dead.

The dissolution of the body does not also include the dissolution of the spirit. There is no reason to believe from any statement in the Scriptures that the spirit, which is a distinct entity from the body, cannot exist apart from the body after death. Spirit-beings *do* exist apart from material bodies; God and angels do (John 4:24; Ps. 104:4; Luke 24:39; Heb. 1:14). Man's spirit—which is a non-material and incorporeal being—may or may not be associated with a physical body. In fact, the Bible affirms many times that man's spirit does continue to exist after death. The patriarchs died and were "gathered to their people" (cf. Gen. 25:

8,9,17; 35:29; 49:33; Num. 20:26; Deut. 32:50). This can mean only one thing: they were joined in an existence beyond this life; the reunion was not a mere reunion of corpses but of spirits. David did not consider his dead child non-existent, but only separated from the body and living in another place. Thus he said: "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (II Sam. 12:23). He expected to depart this life some day and go to the child.

Jesus taught that the spirit survives the death of the body when he said: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul" (Matt. 10:28; cf. Luke 12:4). This implies that the soul does not die when the body dies; on the contrary, the soul, which man cannot kill, continues to live after death. But if man were composed merely of dust and animal life, then whoever killed the body would at the same time kill the soul.

That the dead continue to live was further emphasized by Christ while on the cross when He said to the dying penitent robber, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). This statement meant that the thief was to exist after death; he was to enter at once into a realm with Christ. Neither the spirit of the thief nor the spirit of Christ went out of existence that day when they died.

Moreover, the spirit's personal existence in a disembodied state between man's death and his resurrection is taught in the account of the transfiguration of Christ, when Moses and Elias appeared and talked with him (Matt. 17:1-8; Luke 9:28-36). At the time of the transfiguration, Moses had been dead about fifteen hundred years and his body

buried in some unknown place at Mount Nebo. Elias had been gone from this earth a long time. Yet Moses and Elias were still in existence, retaining their personal identity and individuality. Moses and Elias are not even now reduced to non-existence.

Think of it! Atheism—which cannot be proved—offers nothing to the person who, at the close of life, can only look forward to a dark grave and oblivion! Materialists say that man is wholly mortal and has no spirit dwelling in his body; to die means to cease to exist; the dead are “wholly unconscious, being entirely out of existence except in God’s memory.” (See J. F. Rutherford, *Where Are the Dead?* Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1932, pp. 29, 31.) According to materialists, when man dies, he dies “like the little dog Rover—all over!” After death he exists no more than the dead dog.

Some people argue that Eccl. 3:19,20 teaches that man is like the brute beast with no spirit to outlive the body. This passage, however, shows that the deaths of men and of beasts are alike only in respect to their bodies. Both die and return to dust from whence they came. But they are very unlike in another way: man has an immortal spirit; beasts do not (see vs. 21). Like that of the lower animals, man’s body is earthly, and his death is inevitable. There is perfect harmony, therefore, between this statement and Ps. 146:4, which says “his thoughts [or, “plans,” “purposes,” in Job 17:11] perish.” Further, Eccl. 12:7 says the spirit of man returns to God at death.

To the Sadducees in Christ’s time on earth, death meant annihilation; a dead man was a *nonentity*.

They were materialists who maintained that the soul died with the body. Therefore, after death there could be neither existence nor resurrection. They denied the existence of spiritual beings (Acts 23:8).

Once the Sadducees came to Jesus and presented a somewhat trivial case. A woman who had married seven men in succession died. They inquired of Jesus which of the seven men would be her husband in the resurrection. Christ told them that they misunderstood the nature of the resurrection and the future life: "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." Jesus proved from the writings of Moses (which they accepted) that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were yet living: "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I *am* [present tense] the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" Then Christ added: "God is not the God of the dead [as they thought of the dead], but of the living" (Matt. 22:29-32; cf. Mark 12:18-27). When God originally said this to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:6), Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead for generations. They were still living *then*, and they are still living *now*; only their bodies have perished. The same is true of all others who have died. The major premise of Christ's argument is that "God is the God of the living." Luke states that Jesus said to them: "For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: *for all live unto him*" (Luke 20:38). Whether the spirit is in the body

or out, "all live unto him." Christ's answer forever silenced the Sadducees.

Materialists miss the Biblical meaning of death; their definition of death is "to cease to exist," but this is not God's definition. With the Lord death means "separation." Whether the word in the Scriptures is used literally or figuratively, *death* always means *separation*, never *annihilation*. There are three types of death: (1) *physical*, the separation of soul and body (Jas. 2:26; Gen. 35:18); (2) *spiritual*, the separation of the soul from God (Eph. 2:1; John 5:25; Gen. 2:17; Isa. 59:1,2; Matt. 8:22; 1 Tim. 5:6; I John 3:14); (3) *eternal*, the separation from God forever in hell (Rev. 20:14,15; 21:8; Matt. 25:46; Rom. 6:23; Jas. 5:19,20; II Thess. 1:7-9; Ezek. 18:20). Sin brings about a spiritual separation between God and man, but a soul can never be put out of existence (Rev. 14:11).

*Life* is also used in these three senses: (1) *physical* (1 Kings 17:21,22; Luke 8:55); (2) *spiritual* (John 11:25,26; 8:51; 1 John 5:12); (3) *eternal* (Matt. 25:46; Tit. 1:2;3:7; 1 John 2:25; Rev. 22:14). There is a difference between *eternal life* and *eternal existence*. *Life* and *death* have reference to two states or conditions of existence: *union* and *separation*. Death does not mean the complete extinction of being. All men have eternal existence—some in happiness, because of a holy life; others in torment, because of a sinful life. A person may, therefore, be dead in one sense but alive in another. He can be alive physically and at the same time be dead spiritually.

Those who now affirm that no part of man survives death are only reaffirming the oft-refuted doctrine of the ancient Sadducees. The truth is,

however, *the physically dead are still living—with their own individual personalities.* It is not a case of “they have been,” but “they are.” The dead are yet alive, out of their bodies. They wait for the day of resurrection of their bodies.

### ***III. Are the Dead Conscious?***

Again, many ask: “What is the condition of the soul after death and before the resurrection? Is the departed soul conscious or unconscious?” The Holy Scriptures can answer these questions and provide accurate information.

The Lord’s narrative of the rich man and Lazarus teaches that the soul is conscious between physical death and the resurrection (Luke 16:19-31). The soul lives after the body dies, in bliss or in misery, according to the life lived upon this earth. The rich man died and was immediately “in torments.” He not only knew of his misery, but he remembered his five brothers, still alive on earth, and wished to keep them from coming to that place. Father Abraham asked him to recall his previous life on earth for it would help him understand why he was now tormented. In the meantime, Lazarus also died, but he was immediately happy, “comforted.” Hence, both the rich man and Lazarus were in a state of conscious existence. They could still remember their life on earth.

Some seek to evade the force of the plain language of Jesus by saying that this narrative is just a parable. Whether parable, history, or both, the Scripture teaches truth, not falsehood. To say it is a parable does not alter the facts about the two men. Unlike fables, the parables of the Lord are realistic. The conditions of after-life which Christ de-

scribed here actually exist, and he gave an accurate description of them. Jesus said: "There was a certain rich man." Was there? He said: "There was a certain beggar named Lazarus." Was there? Did the rich man die? Did Lazarus die? Jesus said they did. Christ often used historical facts to illustrate and teach spiritual truth. How foolish for one to think of the narrative as a fairy tale!

While the events in this narrative were factual, the Lord used some figurative language to clarify man's understanding. To describe spirit-beings Christ had to use concepts drawn from human experience. There may not have been any *literal* flame, or water, or gulf in the spirit realm; but something real and certain was represented by this imagery. The conscious joys and torments of these two disembodied spirits were facts, though described in figurative language.

Two great facts can be learned from this narrative of the rich man and Lazarus: (1) Death is not extinction; the spirit survives the dissolution of the body and lives after the body has returned to the dust; (2) disembodied spirits are in a state of consciousness—happy or miserable, depending upon the life they have lived while in the body. They are conscious of existence and retain memories of earthly life. The Bible, therefore, teaches that man's spirit is capable of separate and conscious existence when the body is dissolved.

Paul viewed death not as a loss but as a gain, a departure to be with Christ, which would be "far better" (Phil. 1:23). One cannot imagine that Paul meant he preferred the total blank of unconsciousness (not to mention annihilation!) to the



mingled joys and sorrows of this wonderful life on earth serving the Lord. How could this condition after death have been "far better" than living in this world? Indeed, to the Christian, "to die is gain" (vs. 21).

In addition, Paul's experience when he was caught up to "the third heaven," "into Paradise," as related in II Cor. 12:2-4, clearly teaches conscious existence outside of the body. Actually Paul did not know whether he was in or out of the body at that moment. If out of the body, he continued conscious existence. What was true in this case is likewise true in every case of separation of body and spirit: the spirit continues its conscious existence after departure from the body.

The souls of the early martyrs in their disembodied state are described as alive and conscious, while awaiting the day of judgment (Rev. 6:9-11). The righteous dead are blessed or happy: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord . . . that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13). A person lost to all consciousness is not happy; yet the Bible says those who die in the Lord are happy. It does not say they will be happy, but that they are happy now.

The passage most used as proof that the dead are unconscious is Eccl. 9:5, which says that "the dead know not anything." But the next verse says, "under the sun." This passage has reference solely to what the dead can know or do "under the sun," that is, in this busy world in which they once lived. After death, man's activity ceases on earth; he knows nothing of what is happening on earth after he dies. The Scripture has no reference whatsoever to the spirit's being unconscious after

death.

Some believe in "soul-sleeping," that is, that the spirit exists after death in a state of unconsciousness. Scriptures which speak of death as a "sleep" are used by the adherents of this belief to teach that the soul is unconscious between death and the resurrection (e.g., Mark 5:39; John 11:11; Acts 7:60; I Thess. 4:13-15) However, the word *sleep*, when used concerning physical death, always refers to the bodies, not to the spirits. Bodies "sleep in the dust of the earth" (Dan. 12:2), in "the graves" (Matt. 27:52,53). Thus, a *cemetery*, the burial place of the dead, is literally "a sleeping place" where dead bodies await their resurrection. The spirits are not in the graves. They are not asleep anywhere; they are conscious, "for all *live*" (Luke 20:38), whether alive or dead. Hence, *sleep* is used figuratively in the Scriptures to describe death, for there is a resemblance between a dead body and a sleeping body. A dead person looks as though he were asleep. At death the body falls asleep, but the soul does not fall asleep. And, as the sleeping person awakes in the morning to activities of a new day, so will the bodies that sleep in the graves be raised to a new life.

The idea of soul-sleeping is not taught in the Bible. Souls do not spend the long intervening years between death and the resurrection in some comatose state. In the Bible, "death" is neither "extinction" nor "unconsciousness" of the soul. The departed spirits are living and conscious.

#### ***IV. Where Are the Dead?***

At death the spirit leaves the body and maintains a separate, conscious existence—but *where?* The

soul is neither asleep with the body *in* the grave, nor does it hover *near* the grave, nor has it entered some other body, as some religionists suppose. Any idea of transmigration or reincarnation of souls is wholly at odds with Biblical teaching. The Bible says the spirit at death returns unto God who gave it (Eccl. 12:7).

Where, then, do souls go at death to await the resurrection? Is it to the ultimate destination, either heaven or hell, that shall be theirs after the judgment, or to an intermediate abode? At the day of final judgment, when Christ comes again, the Lord will say to the redeemed: "*Come*, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." To the wicked he will say: "*Depart* from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire. . . . And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matt. 25:31-46). At that day the followers of Christ will receive their crown of righteousness (II Tim. 4:8; I Pet. 5:4; Luke 14:14). Christ said: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3). Even the saints who lived under the Old Testament are still waiting for entrance into the eternal home of the righteous. Peter, on Pentecost, referring to David, declared: "David is not ascended into the heavens" (Acts 2:34). Hence, souls do not enter their eternal state, either heaven or hell, at the moment of death.

The place prepared by the Lord where all disembodied spirits dwell between death and the resurrection is an intermediate abode called *Hades*. Two passages in the New Testament Scriptures state this fact: (1) Luke 16:23 (ASV). The spirits of both the rich man and of Lazarus were in *Hades* after death. Of the rich man Jesus said, "And in *Hades* he lifted up his eyes." (2) Acts 2:27,31 (ASV). The spirit of Jesus went to *Hades* when He died. Peter, on Pentecost, referring to a prophecy of David, said: "For David saith concerning him [Christ] 'Thou wilt not leave my soul unto *Hades*.'" And he later added: "Neither was he left unto *Hades*." When man dies, the spirit goes to *Hades*, and the body goes to the tomb. *Hades* is divided into two compartments, *Paradise*, the abode of the righteous, and *Tartarus*, the abode of the wicked. At the resurrection righteous souls will leave *Paradise*, and wicked souls will leave *Tartarus*. Then, after the judgment the righteous will dwell in heaven and the wicked will exist in hell forever.

The original word *Hades* is translated *hell* in the King James Version (trans. 1611) in these passages: Luke 16:23 and Acts 2:27,31. It should be noted, however, that in this version four different words are all translated *hell*: *Hades*, *Gehenna*, *Tartarus*, and *Sheol*. For proper understanding, it is necessary to know how each of these words of the Bible is used.

*Hades* means the place to which all spirits go, regardless of their moral character. *Hades* primarily means "the unseen, or invisible world." The place of departed souls, though unseen to people on earth, is not unseen to God. Always, in the New Testament, *Hades* signifies only the region

of disembodied spirits. The grave denotes only the receptacle of the body. Thayer defines *Hades* as "the common receptacle of disembodied spirits" (*Gr.-Eng. Lex.*, p. 11). The word *Hades* occurs ten times in the Scriptures (Matt. 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14) in the American Standard Version (trans. 1901). In several versions *Hades* is also in 1 Corinthians 15:55.

*Gehenna* denotes the final abode of the wicked, the hell of fire. In both the King James and the American Standard versions it is always translated *hell*. *Gehenna* occurs twelve times in the Greek New Testament: Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; Jas. 3:6. Thus, Jesus did not say that the rich man lifted up his eyes in *Gehenna*, nor did Peter say that Christ's soul was not left in *Gehenna*. Instead, his spirit was in *Hades* while his body was in the tomb. Nor were the rich man and Lazarus in their final destinations (hell and heaven). The account of them speaks of conditions before the final judgment day, for the rich man still had five brothers on this earth. The resurrection and final judgment had not yet occurred and will not occur until the end of time. In both references the word is *Hades*, or the realm of disembodied spirits.

When the King James translation was made, the English word *hell* meant both the unseen place of the dead (*Hades*) and the place of eternal punishment after the judgment (*Gehenna*). The American Standard translators, knowing that the word *hell* no longer had the meaning of the Greek word *Hades*, and realizing there were two different words in the original Greek (*Hades* and *Gehenna*), gave

*Hades* an English spelling and left it in the text. In every place where *Gehenna* is found, they translated it *hell* and put the word *Gehenna* in the footnote.

*Tartarus* occurs only one time in the Greek New Testament Scriptures and is translated *hell* in both the King James and American Standard versions: “. . . God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (II Pet. 2:4). Reference here is to the fallen angels, and is similar to Jude’s statement concerning them (Jude 6). These angels are now in *Tartarus*, awaiting judgment. Hence, *Tartarus* is the compartment of the Hadean world occupied by wicked spirits between death and the resurrection as they await final judgment.

The word *Paradise* refers to the abode of righteous spirits in *Hades*. By comparing Christ’s reply to the robber (“Today shalt thou be with me in paradise,” Luke 23:43) with Peter’s statement about Christ (“Neither was he left unto Hades,” Acts 2:31 ASV), a person sees then that Paradise is a compartment of *Hades*. Christ went to Hades. Christ also went to Paradise. Therefore, Paradise is in *Hades*. Thus, the Bible teaches that there are two divisions in *Hades*: *Paradise* and *Tartarus*. Although both the good and bad go to *Hades* at death, their condition there is not the same; some are in a state of happiness, others in a state of misery.

The word *Paradise* is also applied to the eternal home of the redeemed, which they will inherit in their resurrected immortal bodies after the judgment (Rev. 2:7; cf. II Cor. 12:4). The word primarily means “a pleasure garden, a place of de-

light." The word is used in the Scriptures in the following senses: (1) the Garden of Eden (See the Septuagint Version of Gen. 2 and 3), (2) the place of rest for the righteous spirits after death, and (3) heaven (Rev. 22:1-5).

Paradise is any place prepared for enjoyment. It also signifies a condition of enjoyment. Thus, "Paradise" may be used properly to describe man's original home, or the place where righteous spirits go at death to await the resurrection, or their final home after judgment—*i.e.*, heaven.

When Christ said to the thief on the cross that both he and the thief would be together that day in Paradise, he referred to the place of rest for disembodied spirits (Cf. Job. 3:17; Rev. 14:13). To be in Paradise with Christ did not and could not mean a state of unconsciousness or non-existence, or heaven. [Note that Christ did not ascend to heaven until forty days after his resurrection. See Luke 24:50,51 and Acts 1:3-11.] If Jesus and the penitent robber were together in Paradise, and following his death on the cross if Jesus went to *Hades* (Acts 2:27,31), therefore Paradise is in *Hades*, and Jesus and the robber were together in *Hades* while they were together in Paradise. Hence, *Paradise* in Luke 23:43 does not refer to heaven, the eternal abode of the saved, for Christ did not go to heaven when he died.

On the third day after his crucifixion, Christ's spirit came out of *Hades*, and his body was raised from the dead. The spirit of the thief, on the other hand, did not come from *Hades*, and his body remained in the grave. Until the day of resurrection, his spirit will remain in *Hades* and his body in his tomb. In like manner, all disembodied spirits re-

main in *Hades* until the resurrection of their bodies. To affirm, therefore, as many do, that at death the departing spirit goes immediately to heaven (if he be righteous) or to hell (if wicked) is not in harmony with many plain Scriptures.

Some teach that since the ascension of Christ righteous souls now go immediately to heaven. The idea that Paradise has now been transferred to heaven is not supported by the Scriptures (Cf. Acts 2:34. Peter said David is not yet in heaven.)

Thus, both the rich man and Lazarus were in *Hades*; but they were not in the same compartment; for one was "comforted," the other "tormented," and a "great gulf" was between them (Luke 16:23-26). Lazarus was in "Abraham's bosom." This surely means a place of rest, equivalent to the "Paradise" in Luke 23:43. Souls of believers at death pass into a state of blessedness. They remain in that state until the resurrection, at which time they will be exalted to a state of final bliss. Moreover, just as there is a place of bliss for the righteous immediately after death, there is also a place of torment in *Hades* for those who have not lived according to God's will. The rich man went to *Hades* at death, and in that place he suffered torment. Although he was in anguish, he was not in *Gehenna*. Both good and bad spirits are in *Hades*: the rich man, tormented in *Tartarus*; Lazarus, comforted in Abraham's bosom. The punishment of the ungodly precedes as well as follows the final judgment. "The Lord knoweth how . . . to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment" (II Pet. 2:9 ASV). A distinction must be made between the punishment in *Tartarus* for disembodied spirits of the wicked,



and the punishment in *Gehenna* after the final judgment. The punishment in *Gehenna* comprehends "both soul and body" after the resurrection and judgment (Cf. Matt. 10:28; 25:46).

Although there are both joys and torments in *Hades* before the resurrection, ultimate pleasures and punishments must await the reunion of the spirit with the resurrected body and the final judgment. Whatever the state of the good and bad may be while in *Hades*, that state will certainly be exchanged for another of like nature at the resurrection.

The Old Testament Hebrew word *Sheol* parallels the New Testament Greek word *Hades*. Both mean the unseen realm of departed spirits (Cf. Ps. 16:10 with Acts 2:27 ASV). *Sheol* does not refer to *Gehenna*, nor to the literal grave, the abode of the body. In the King James Version, however, *Sheol* is translated "the grave," as well as "hell" and "the pit." *Sheol* is translated "the grave" thirty-one times: Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 44:29,31; I Sam. 2:6; I Kings 2:6,9; Job 7:9; 14:13; 17:13; 21:13; 24:19; Ps. 6:5; 30:3; 31:17; 49:14—twice, 15; 88:3; 89:48; 141:7; Prov. 1:12; 30:16; Eccl. 9:10; Song of Sol. 8:6; Isa. 14:11; 38:10,18; Ezek. 31:15; Hos. 13:14—twice. *Sheol* is translated "hell" thirty-one times: Deut. 32:22; II Sam. 22:6; Job 11:8; 26:6; Ps. 9:17; 16:10; 18:5; 55:15; 86:13; 116:3; 139:8; Prov. 5:5; 7:27; 9:18; 15:11,24; 23:14; 27:20; Isa. 5:14; 14:9,15; 28:15,18; 57:9; Ezek. 31:16,17; 32:21,27; Amos 9:2; Jonah 2:2; Hab. 2:5. *Sheol* is translated "the pit" three times: Num. 16:30,33; Job 17:16. The American Standard Version merely Anglicizes the word (*Sheol*) as it does *Hades*.

Let us summarize: *Sheol* or *Hades* refers to the intermediate state of disembodied spirits between death and the resurrection; *Paradise* and *Tartarus* are compartments in *Hades*; *Gehenna* is the place of eternal punishment after the resurrection.

Thus, the word *hell*, a translation of *Gehenna*, is correctly applied to the final punishment for the wicked after judgment. Scripture never uses *Hades* to mean the final state of punishment; instead, the word is always *Gehenna*. *Gehenna* is not *Tartarus*, the place of the wicked spirits awaiting judgment.

Emphasizing judgment and eternity, the word of God says comparatively little about the interim state of disembodied souls. There is no Biblical record of a report from this spirit-land. Lazarus said nothing about the conditions there after he returned to life (John 11); nor did Paul say anything about what he saw in "the third heaven" (II Cor. 12:3,4), for it was not lawful for him to reveal those things.

It is important to note that after death there is no opportunity for one to change his life's record. Death cannot work any change in a person's character. When death comes and the spirit enters into *Hades*, the "gulf" between the saved and the lost is "fixed" (Luke 16:26. Cf. Acts 1:25; Prov. 14:32; Eccl. 11:3; Rev. 22:11). One's life on earth determines his condition in *Hades*. Likewise, his deeds on earth determine his eternal reward (Cf. John 8:21; Rom. 14:12; II Cor. 5:10; Tit. 2:11,12). His soul is not on probation in the intermediate state. Probation ends at death; fate is sealed, and destiny is permanently fixed. The Bible says nothing about probation after death. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement"

(Heb. 9:27). There is no postmortem gospel (Heb. 3:7, 15). Christ did not give the people of Noah's day a "second chance" in *Hades*, as some think. Such people misunderstand the statement in I Pet. 3:18-20. The preaching done by Christ was through Noah, who was inspired by the Holy Spirit; the audience was the people living at the time the ark was being prepared (Cf. II Pet. 2:5; I Pet. 1:10,11; Gen. 6:3; Luke 4:18; Eph. 2:17).

Another frequently misunderstood Scripture on this subject of a second chance is I Pet. 4:6, where the writer refers to the preaching of the gospel "to them that are dead." The statement means that the gospel had been preached to living people, although at the time of writing they were dead.

The Bible does not teach vicarious baptism—the practice of baptizing living people on behalf of dead people. Paul's statement in I Cor. 15:29 means that people are baptized with the view to the resurrection of their dead bodies (cf. Acts 18:8; Rom. 6:3,4). The central idea of I Cor. 15 is that man's resurrection is dependent upon Christ's resurrection. It is impossible for one to be baptized for another—living or dead.

#### ***V. What About Purgatory?***

The theory of purgatory is that in *Hades* the souls make satisfaction by suffering for sins committed after baptism, the period of time depending on the degree of their guilt. Once they are purged, they go to heaven. Those who hold to this theory believe the "Church" on earth has the power by her prayers and the sacrifices of mass to shorten these sufferings or to remit them altogether. Cardinal Gibbons says:

The Catholic Church teaches that . . . there exists in the next life a middle state of temporary punishment, allotted for those who have died in venial sin, or who have not satisfied the justice of God for sins already forgiven. She also teaches us that, although the souls consigned to this intermediate state, commonly called purgatory, cannot help themselves, they may be aided by the suffrages of the faithful on earth. (*The Faith of Our Fathers*, London: John Murray Co., 1905, 47th. ed., p. 247.)

Although Cardinal Gibbon's idea is suggested in the Apocryphal book of II Maccabees (12:43-46), no Scriptural authority exists for this teaching. Biblically, "purgatory" is an unknown. The intermediate state of *Hades* is not a place of purgatory—for anybody. No soul can pass from *Tartarus to Paradise*, or vice versa. Neither the rich man, nor Lazarus, nor the thief on the cross went to purgatory. Men's sins are cleansed by the blood of Christ: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7). However cherished or lucrative this doctrine, it is no part of the teaching of Christ, or of the apostles, or of any other truly inspired man (Cf. II Thess. 2:3-12; Rev. 13:14).

Moreover, the Bible does not command prayer for the dead nor to the dead. (See I Tim. 2:5; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). Every Christian is a priest (I Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6) as well as a saint (I Cor. 1:2); he prays directly to God through Christ, not *to* or *through* saints. Praying for the dead is a superstitious practice. Likewise, the dead cannot benefit those on earth. The rich man's pleading for help for his brothers on earth availed nothing. Nothing can now be done to change the condition of the departed, because the gulf is *fixed*.

## ***VI. What About Spiritualism?***

Realizing that Scripture teaches the continued conscious existence of the departed, some claim that they can talk to the dead; but the Bible does not teach that the living can communicate with the spirits of those who have passed from this life. In fact, the practice of spiritualism or spiritism is severely condemned in the Scriptures. "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:31. Cf. 20:6,27; Deut. 18:10-12; Acts 19:18-20; Rev. 21:8; 22:15). Men should seek God and not pretend to hold consultation with the dead; they should go to "the law and to the testimony" (Isa. 8:19,20). By tricks of magic and sleight-of-hand performances, mediums deceive people into thinking they are receiving messages from their departed friends and loved ones.

The narrative of Samuel's appearance to King Saul in the house of the witch of Endor, when properly studied, falls short of proving a real case of spiritualistic communication (1 Sam. 28:3-25). Samuel appeared to Saul and talked with him, but not through a medium. At this seance the witch of Endor was just an ordinary scared observer. The night scene at Endor is God's exposé of her Satanic system of deception. In going to this spiritualist, Saul did wrong (1 Chron. 10:13,14). Spiritualism is of the devil and utterly false in its claims.

## ***VII. Will the Body be Raised?***

The Bible teaches the resurrection of the dead. Jesus declared: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and

they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28,29). Paul said: "There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:15). The resurrected body will be a changed body. "We shall all be changed," said Paul. This change shall be instantaneous: "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." Those who are dead shall be raised; those who are living at Christ's coming shall not die, but their bodies shall be made immortal (Cf. Phil. 3:21). "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:20-57).

Scripture says that men's spirits will leave *Hades* when Jesus comes again and the bodies are raised at the last day. At the end of time the spirits shall come from *Hades* and the resurrected bodies shall come from the graves; at that time all spirits will be united with their resurrected immortal bodies (John 5:28,29; I Thess. 4:14; Rev. 1:18; 20:13). This will be the end of *Hades* (Rev. 20:14). Then there shall be a great judgment day, when all men shall be given their eternal rewards or punishments (Matt. 12:41,42; 16:27; 25:31-46; Acts 17:31; 24:15).

Christ by his resurrection from the dead has "abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (II Tim. 1:10). The faithful child of God has nothing to fear in dying (Heb. 2:14,15). He knows that Christ has conquered death, and that ultimately all the dead shall be raised. He can say with the Psalmist: "Yea, though I walk *through* the valley of the shadow of

death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.” (Ps. 23:4; Cf. Rom. 8:38,39).

### **VIII. What About Future Recognition?**

Finally, “Will the redeemed know each other in heaven?” Although the Bible does not speak directly on the subject, many passages of Scripture seem to imply that they will. Jesus said that earthly relationships will not exist in heaven (Matt. 22:30; Mark 12:25); but he did teach that memory and personal identity, the essential elements of recognition, are retained in the future state (Matt. 25:34-46; Rev. 6:9,10). In *Hades* the rich man recognized Lazarus and begged for mercy (Luke 16:23, 24). Peter, in some way, recognized Moses and Elias while with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:3,4).

Jesus’ statement concerning the sociability of heaven as a feast implies personal recognition. He said: “Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 8:11). Will Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob be known? If they are known, surely others also will be known. Heaven will be the family of God of all ages in the Father’s house. There “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Rev. 21:4). The righteous spirits will be in resurrected, immortal *bodies*, not some kind of ghostlike beings (I Cor. 15:42-54).

When David’s dead child was yet unburied, he said: “I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me” (II Sam. 12:23). This surely meant, “I shall soon rejoin him there.” Is there not also implied the expectation of recognition? What comfort could

David find in the thought that he would go to his child, if that child would never be known to him on the other side of death? Paul said he would be made happy in heaven to know that those whom he had converted had remained faithful and would be among the saved (Phil. 2:16; 4:1; I Thess. 2:19,20; II Cor. 1:14; 4:14). Obviously, Paul knew that memory would not be annihilated. He anticipated the delightful renewing of old associations, recounting of mutual trials, and of giving thanks to God. John's recognition of Christ on the isle of Patmos implies future recognition among the saved (Rev. 1:13).

Man's knowledge of heaven and the future life is, of course, necessarily limited while he is on earth. He has only hints of the pleasures that await beyond the grave. John, an apostle, expressed this thought in these words: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:2; Cf. Deut. 29:29).

Christians know their separation here is only temporary. They shall meet one another, and live forever in heaven with the Lord. What a blessed hope Christians have of a life beyond the grave and a reunion with all the redeemed in the world to come! "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thess. 4:18).

### **Summary**

The Scriptures definitely teach that there is an eternal existence beyond the grave for all men.

Man was created in the image of God and exists in three states: (1) body and spirit united in a



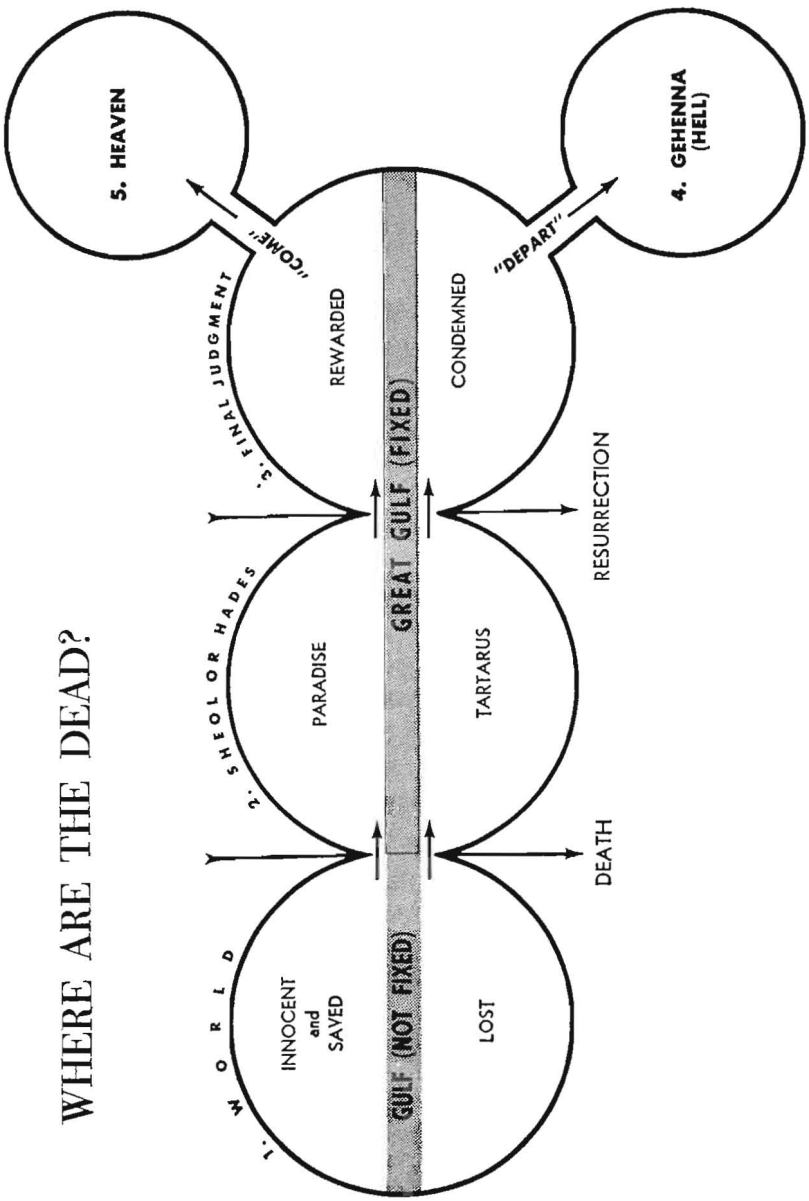
physical body; (2) body and spirit separated, with the spirit in *Hades* and the body in the tomb; (3) resurrected body and spirit reunited and in the final eternal abode, heaven or hell.

The diagram on the following page will clarify the teaching of this study. Circle #1 represents the realm of this world where spirits live in a physical body. Some in this life are righteous children of God, having been saved from past sins by an obedient faith in Christ and through the grace of God (Rom. 6:16-18; Mark 16:16; Acts 16:25-34; 2:36-38; Eph. 2:8; I John 1:7; Rev. 1:5; Acts 22:16). Some others, such as innocent children, are safe (Matt. 19:14). Still others are lost in sin (John 8:24; II Pet. 2:20,21). The first state of human existence terminates in death, when the body goes to the grave and the immortal spirit to *Hades*. Death is the door to the next world.

Circle #2 represents *Sheol* or *Hades*, the abode of all disembodied spirits. Here all souls are in a state of consciousness; the righteous are happy in *Paradise* and the wicked are miserable in *Tartarus*. While in this intermediate state the human spirit is separated from its body. In *Hades* the "gulf" is fixed. This state commences at death and terminates with the resurrection. When the third state begins, at the second coming of Christ, *Hades* will be destroyed.

Circle #3 represents the day of final judgment (Matt. 25:31-46; Rom. 14:12; Rev. 20:11-15). At that time all mankind will give an account of the deeds done in the body, whether good or bad; judgment will be pronounced, and the execution of judgment will begin (Cf. Matt. 7:21-23; Luke 12:47, 48).

# WHERE ARE THE DEAD?



Circle #4 represents *Gehenna* (hell), the eternal place of condemnation for all the wicked (Matt. 25:41,46; II Thess. 1:9; Mark 9:44-48; 12:40; Rev. 21:8). No one is annihilated after the judgment. The "eternal" or "everlasting" (Gr. *aionios*) life of the righteous in heaven will be endless; likewise, the "eternal" or "everlasting" (Gr. *aionios*) punishment of the wicked in hell will be endless.

Circle #5 represents heaven, the eternal home of the righteous (Rev. 21-22:5; cf. 7:13-17; John 14:1-3; I Pet. 1:4). There the inhabitants will live in perfect peace and never grow old, for in God's presence there is "fulness of joy" and "pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11).

### *Epilogue*

Heaven, the wonderful city of God, is described in the most beautiful imagery. Only through the eye of faith can the beauties of heaven be envisioned. It is a state of eternal joy and happiness, a land without sickness, pain, death, or sad farewells.

*There the saints of all ages in harmony meet,  
Their Savior and brethren transported to greet;  
While the anthems of rapture unceasingly roll,  
And the smile of the Lord is the feast of the soul.*

—Anonymous

As John Newton said in his great hymn "Amazing Grace":

*When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we've first begun.*

How wonderful it will be to live in that eternal city whose builder and maker is God!

# IS THE BIBLE FROM GOD OR MEN?

## INTRODUCTION

Two basic questions concerning Christianity are: (1) is there an eternal God who created the universe and man, and (2) did the Bible come from God? The purpose of this study is to examine the question of the origin of the Bible.

The Bible is here. Now, from whence did it come? There are only two possible answers: either the Bible came from God as Christians contend and believe, or the Bible came from man as infidels, agnostics, and atheists affirm. Is the Bible the result of unaided human wisdom, or of divine inspiration? Can we put implicit faith in the Scriptures as a revelation from God, or view the Bible as just another book of human origin? This is the most crucial question that confronts the religious world today.

## THE BIBLE'S CLAIM

The Bible itself claims to be from God. Either its claim is true or false. The apostle Paul wrote: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God..." (2 Timothy 3:16). This literally means "God-breathed," or "breathed out by God." This is a clear claim to plenary inspiration, that is, that the Bible is inspired in all its parts. The apostle Peter, speaking of the Old Testament prophets said: "For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved [or, "borne along," PBC] by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21 ASV). The writers of the New Testament were likewise in-

spired; the truth was revealed unto the “holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Ephesians 3:3-5; cf. John 16:13; 14:26; Jude 17).

If God gave the Bible we would expect Him to tell us so in that Book. If there is a God, and if that God is our Father, then we may be sure He has spoken to His children, for what earthly parent with a child away from home would not, if he could, communicate with him? About two thousand times in the Bible we find such expressions as, “Thus saith the Lord,” or “the word of the Lord came to me,” or “the Lord spake to me” (See, for example, 2 Samuel 23:2, Jeremiah 1:4-9; Matthew 1:22; 2:15; Acts 1:16, and many other passages.) When the Bible tells us plainly what kind of Book it is, we should not reject its testimony as unworthy of belief unless we have sufficient evidence. But how may we know that the Bible is inspired?

There are evidences, both internal and external, of the divine origin of the Bible. The Bible’s content bears confirming marks of its own claim to be from God. There is unmistakable evidence that it is the inspired Word of God; the evidences are abundant that “God... hath... spoken unto us...” (Hebrews 1:1, 2). We shall now examine some of the proofs whereby the Scriptures reveal their divine origin.

### **INTERNAL EVIDENCES**

**Inerrancy.** The Bible is verbally inspired of God and is inerrant. The apostle Paul, speaking of the truths of Christianity said: “But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit... Which things also we speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiri-

tual words” (I Corinthians 2:10-13 ASV). A word is simply the vehicle through which thought is communicated from one mind to another. Inspired words were the means which God used to convey to man the thoughts of His heart. Through the medium of words He revealed His will. The things that the writers uttered were not of their own origin, but were the very words of God Himself. The words of Scripture are divine words, and yet they are also the words of human writers. Hence, the original autographs of the Bible were verbally inspired as they came from the men guided by the Holy Spirit.

What is “God-breathed” must be inerrant, for God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). The Lord said through David that the word of God is “pure” (Psalms 19:8; 119:140), which means it is free from all error. David also wrote: “Thy word is true from the beginning; and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever” (Psalms 119:160; cf. 19:7). God gave to man a perfectly errorless Book, an infallible message. The writers expressed the truth when they affirmed the divine origin of the Holy Scriptures. God’s men wrote exactly what the Lord wanted them to write. God’s law is “the truth” (Psalms 119:142; John 17:17).

If the Bible is not to be depended upon when it speaks of itself, how do we know it is to be trusted when it speaks on other matters? If the Bible is not trustworthy, we have no assurance that our Christian faith is founded upon the truth. But if the Bible is the verbally inspired and the infallibly true word of God, it follows we are listening to God, and not to man, when we harken to its teaching.

The Bible is one Book. Though composed of sixty-six books, there is a golden thread of unity running throughout this entire volume. The Jews, through whom the Bible came, were not noted for any scientific or literary fame. Some of the writers were fishermen, some tax-collectors, and others shepherds. Most of them never travelled beyond the narrow limits of their native land. But, despite all this, these who were termed by men to be “unlearned and ignorant men” (Acts 4:13) gave to the world a Book of perfect harmony and free of all mistakes. Although they differed greatly from each other and perhaps knew not that they were engaged in writing a single book, when all of their works are put together there are no contradictions or errors. Surely this is proof of the Bible’s divine origin; one Master Mind controlled them all. Otherwise, how could forty men, different in habits, languages, and education, over a period of sixteen centuries—from Moses, the first writer, to John, the last writer— produce such a book if they were (as some claim) unaided by divine power?

The enemies of the Bible have gone over it with a microscope, seeking to find inconsistencies; they have paraded alleged contradictions, but no contradictions have been proven. Unlike the books written by men, every word of the Bible is absolutely reliable. The Bible in its entirety is the word of God. Therefore, the Bible differs from all other religious books in the world in that it has a divine Author. On this ground we rest our faith, believing we can trust the Bible implicitly as the verbally inspired and inerrant word of God.

**Fulfilled prophecies.** Next we shall examine the powerful proof of prophecy. Fulfilled prophecies are

facts which establish omniscience. Prophecy is history written in advance. What the prophets stated by inspiration concerning individuals, nations, and cities, long before the events occurred—sometimes centuries before—undeniably attests to the fact that the Bible is from God, as we see from their complete fulfillment. Let us notice a few examples.

Without doubt, the most important prophecies are those which relate to the coming of Christ. There are more than three hundred thirty distinct prophecies in the Old Testament about our Savior relating to His earthly life, which have been fulfilled. He was to be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), of the seed of Abraham (Genesis 12:2; Galatians 3:16), of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10; Hebrews 7:14), and of the family line of David (2 Samuel 7:13-16). The place of His nativity was to be Bethlehem of Judah (Micah 5:2). All the main events in His personal ministry were minutely and accurately predicted. He would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12). In His death, His hands and feet were to be pierced (Psalms 22:16). He was to be buried with the rich (Isaiah 53:9). He was to arise from the dead and to ascend into heaven (Psalms 16:10; Daniel 7:13, 14). He was to appear and following His ascension set up His kingdom during the fourth universal monarchy (Daniel 2:44), which was the time of the Roman Empire (Luke 2:1; Mark 1:15). All of these and many more prophecies were made concerning Christ hundreds of years before His birth, and were fulfilled, according to the records given in the New Testament.

In fact, Jesus claimed that all the Messianic prophecies were fulfilled in Him (John 5:39; Luke 24:44-49). He once made a defense for the Scriptures when



He said, "And the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). He believed that the Scriptures were infallible. It was customary for the apostles in their preaching after the church was established, to prove from the Old Testament that Jesus was the Christ (e.g., Acts 13:23-37). This agreement of prophecy and history cannot be explained away. That the prophets were inspired is the only explanation. How could these various prophecies have been made centuries before their fulfillment if there was no divine foreknowledge of these future events?

The prophecy of Moses concerning the final overthrow of the Jewish nation, recorded in Deuteronomy 28, is of remarkable interest. Moses said the Lord would bring against the Jews a nation from afar "as swift as the eagle flieth," speaking a strange language. They would besiege Jerusalem until all her walls would come down. In this siege the people would suffer unparalleled horrors. The "tender and delicate woman" who would not so much as set her foot upon the ground would secretly kill and eat the flesh of her own child. Great numbers would perish in the siege. This was all fulfilled when the Romans, under Titus, destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, fifteen hundred years after it was spoken. The exactness of this fulfillment was recorded by Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived during the time of the siege and the fall of the city. Jerusalem was conquered, the walls torn down, and over a million Jews were slain. So hungry were the people that many ate the flesh of their own sons and daughters.

Moses also predicted that the Jews would be removed and scattered throughout all the kingdoms of the earth, and that they should become a proverb and a by-word among the nations. And yet, notwithstanding all this, they would never be destroyed. In what country are they not found today? And in what land are they not a by-word? In what land have they not been persecuted? Yet the Jews remain. Moses must have given all of these prophecies guided by the Holy Spirit. Frederick the Great of Prussia once demanded proof in one word that the Bible was inspired. The answer given was "Jew."

A man cannot name the President of the United States one hundred fifty years from today and reveal what he will do in office, yet one of the Bible writers called the name of a Persian ruler and foretold what he would do. Isaiah, the prophet of God, called Cyrus by name one hundred fifty years before he was born and said he would give the proclamation for the Jews to return from Babylonian captivity (Isaiah 44:26-28; 45 :1-4). The kingdom of Judah was not even in bondage at this time, yet Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled.

The prophecy concerning Babylon, given by Isaiah (13:19-22; cf. Jeremiah 50), is also most interesting. At the height of Babylon's glory the prophet of God predicted that the city would be entirely overthrown and never be inhabited nor dwelt in from generation to generation; that the Arab would not pitch his tent there, nor shepherds make their fold there; but that wild beasts of the desert should lie there and owls and doleful creatures should infest it. Babylon, founded about 2234 B.C., was then one of the world's most beautiful cities. Its walls were fifteen miles square, three hun-

dred fifty feet high, and eighty-seven feet thick. It had hundreds of gates and towers, beautiful hanging gardens, and splendid palaces. There in the fertile valley of the river Euphrates she was the capital of the great Babylonian Empire. There were no signs of decay. But after two hundred years from the time the prophecy was given, in 536 B.C. at the drunken feast of Belshazzar (Daniel 5), proud Babylon bowed her head to rise no more. The Medes and the Persians took over and to this day Babylon has never been rebuilt; it is a heap of ruins. For ages it has been uninhabited. Not one word of the prophecy has failed.

Likewise, Ezekiel prophesied against Tyre, located on the Mediterranean Sea, at a time when there were no signs of her destruction (Ezekiel 26:1-14). But the city was taken and destroyed by the Chaldeans. Later, Tyre was rebuilt on an island in the sea, to again be taken and destroyed. Alexander the Great was the second destroyer, making a causeway in the sea by scraping the dust from the mainland, just as the prophet predicted. For centuries Tyre has been a bare rock, a place where fishermen spread their nets, never to be rebuilt.

These prophecies are only a few examples among many given in the Bible. Centuries lie between the predictions and their fulfillment and, in every case, the agreement is perfect. These cannot be ignored. No human guessing or prognostication of the signs of the time can account for this remarkable train of prophecy. The only sufficient reason why these predictions were so accurately fulfilled is that "men spake from God, being moved by the Holy spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). In an age of attacks upon the inspiration of the Bible and the cred-

ibility of the Christian faith, we dare not let go of one of the strongest evidences which we can employ in its defense, namely, the fulfillment of its prophecy.

**Scientific accuracy.** The Bible is not a text-book on science (its theme is man's salvation from sin through Jesus Christ), but in it we do find incidental references to various branches of science, and all that it says on these subjects is scientifically accurate. Although there are some who claim that the Bible is opposed to science, it proves itself to be the inspired Word of God because of its scientific wealth and accuracy. In fact, we could say that the Bible is pre-scientific; it anticipates scientific discoveries. These scientific references were made hundreds of years before they became known to man by discovery! We marvel at the accuracy with which Scripture presents these various subjects.

The word science simply means knowledge. What is commonly called science is frequently nothing more than certain theories and conclusions based on man's limited and imperfect knowledge of God's perfect laws. All of man's theories of science do not always agree with the Bible (I Timothy 6:20). If the Bible agreed with all the *theories* of science it could not possibly agree with *true* science. But when a *truth* or fact has been discovered, we find the Bible, if it speaks on that subject, has already declared that truth.

The world is interested in the origin of the universe and man. The idea is presently much discussed. There are three verses in Genesis one that answer more satisfactorily the questions people are asking than all the books written by men. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (v. 1). "And God said, Let

the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind... and it was so" (v. 24). "And God created man in his own image... male and female created he them" (v. 27; cf. 2:7). Christ also said: "...from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female" (Mark 10:6; cf. 1 Timothy 2:13). Man did not evolve from lower animals. He is the "offspring of God" (Acts 17:28, 29); God is the Father of our spirits (Hebrews 12:9).

The theory of evolution pertaining to the origin of man is unscientific. It has never been proved, nor shall it ever be proven. Life does not come from non-life. The theory of evolution is nothing more than the "flat earth" syndrome of modern man. It is embraced in spite of the evidence—not because of it. Too, the earth is not eternal; it was created. "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is" (Exodus 20:11). "For every house is builded by some one; but he that built all things is God" (Hebrews 3:4; cf. 11:3). As to the age of the earth, no one knows, nor does the Bible say. The Almighty Jehovah, who could create Adam and Eve full-grown, could instantly create a full-grown bed of coal or minerals. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth... For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalms 33:6, 9). No scientist can *prove* that this is not true.

The Bible is clear and accurate, therefore, as to the origin of things; the majestic first chapter of Genesis contains the only authentic account of creation. It is not a myth or a fable. If it is, then how can any part of the Bible be trusted? Besides, who is to judge where

myth begins and where it ends? Or, what is truth and what is error? One's view of the Bible is important; it determines his attitude toward its teaching.

Man, for thousands of years, did not know that the earth was round; he believed it was flat. Yet Isaiah, seven centuries before the birth of Christ, spoke of God as: "he that sitteth above the circle of the earth" (Isaiah 40:22). This was scientific foreknowledge. The patriarch Job, speaking of God, declared: "He stretcheth out the north over the empty space, and hangeth the earth upon nothing" (Job 26:7). Today every school boy and girl in America knows that the earth is round, poised in space, hanging "upon nothing," and that astronauts have circled the earth and looked down upon it from their spaceships. We ask, how was it possible that the writers of the Bible described physical phenomena with such amazing accuracy? There is but one plausible explanation: He who planned and made the vast universe inspired the writers, and that which they recorded was not ancient wisdom but divine revelation.

There is not a real scientific principle known that is in violation of, or contrary to, the Word of God. Nothing that any scientist knows today in any way contradicts any statement of the Bible. A true understanding of the Bible and a correct understanding of the facts of science are always found to be harmonious. When one adds together all of the scientific evidence he is overwhelmed with the proof that the Bible must be, as it claims, a divine book.

**Miracles.** Miracles attest to the divinity of the Bible. Miracles were works of supernatural character such as could not be produced by natural agents or means. For

example, when a blind man is healed by medicine, then it is by natural law; but when a blind man is healed instantly (as the blind man mentioned in John 9), then it is a miracle. The raising of Lazarus from the dead was a miracle (John 11). The miracles performed by Christ proved that His message was from God so that men might believe in Him (John 3:2; 20:30, 31). Miracles were used to show that certain others, as the apostles, had divine power and spoke God's word; their words were confirmed by "signs and wonders" (Hebrews 2:3, 4). After the ascension of Christ, the apostles "went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed" (Mark 16:20). Also, Moses proved by miracles before the children of Israel and Pharaoh that he had the word of God (Exodus 4:1-9, 29-31; chapters 7-13). Miracles were an indelible stamp of God's approval of His word and of His messengers. The pretensions of men today to work "miracles" pale into insignificance when compared to the miracles of the Bible; which declares they are only "lying wonders" (2 Thessalonians 2:9). However, infidels deny in vain the real miracles of the Word of God because they are a strong proof of its divine origin.

**Exalted moral and ethical teaching.** The Bible has given the finest teaching on morals and ethics the world has ever known. Scripture clearly teaches that the highest duty of man is to God his Creator. The duty man owes to others is also set forth, and the duty man owes to himself is defined. The Bible demands the denial of every vice, and the practice of every virtue. The degree of enlightenment in the world is in exact ratio with the prevalence of those ethical principles, so clearly taught in the Scriptures.

In the realm of law there is no higher code of ethics than that found in the Bible! The Greeks and Romans never produced such moral and ethical teaching. Where shall we find a legal code that excels the Mosaic Law (Exodus 20)? Where did Moses get this law which surpasses the wisdom and philosophy of the most enlightened ages? Where did Jesus get the unparalleled moral teaching of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6, 7) and the idea to fear God and to “love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:36-40), as well as the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12)? Where did the apostle Paul get the beautiful psalm on Christian love (I Corinthians 13)? It is impossible to account for the exalted qualities of this teaching on any other hypothesis than that the writers were under the special influence of God. Surely the Bible bears its own witness of its divine origin. Paul said: “The gospel which was preached by me... is not after man” (Galatians 1:11).

### **External Evidences**

**Influence.** The teaching of the Bible always enobles, elevates, and purifies. There is a universally accepted principle stated by Christ which can be applied to the Scriptures: “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:16). Think of the fruit the Bible has borne and is bearing today. Wherever this Book has gone, civilization has been lifted to a higher plane. It has made better husbands and wives, better sons and daughters, better employees and employers, better neighbors and nations. Its truth sweetens the home, exalts womanhood, sanctifies childhood, and redeems man. The spirit of this Book is the spirit of love, kindness, and goodwill. Without the Bible’s influence for good, our world would be a tragic place in which to live.



Surely this influence does not come from a source which is itself a collection of false claims and fables.

Some claim that human culture, philosophy, and science are better for man than the Bible. If so, the map of the world should show it. But when one looks at the history of the nations he sees that *human wisdom fails* to purify and build up the morals of the people. Look where the Word of God has gone, been loved and obeyed, and there we find the noblest men, the purest women, the greatest liberty, and the best government. Especially do we see woman, so often the degraded beast of burden, loved and honored as mother, wife, sister, or daughter. Name the nations of the earth that have been more advanced than others—such as America and Great Britain. There one would find an open Bible and a ministry that upheld the Christ in all of His glory and excellence of character. Now name the countries where the people have long been half enlightened—such as China, India, and Russia. There one will find that the Bible has been kept from the people. Think of the large portions of the earth now in the darkness of sin and paganism. There the Word of God is not being read, loved, and obeyed by the people. The Bible contains the only teaching that can lead mankind to the highest forms of conduct. No height of worldly wisdom and culture can purify the heart and make people what they ought to be. The Bible is worth more to man's spiritual progress and the happiness of the human family than all other books that have ever been written; it has done more to change man's nature for good than all the philosophies of men. Every step away from the moral teaching of this Book is a step, not forward, but backward to materialism, animalism, and barbarism. He who

tries to lessen the influence of the Bible over the nations is an enemy of mankind. Furthermore, any nation that neglects teaching the Bible to her children (as is largely being done in America today) will sooner or later reap the horrible results of it.

Hence, the very teaching itself is proof of the Bible's divine origin, and we do not hesitate to say that we believe the Bible is the word of God because of the great good it has done and continues to do in the world.

**Indestructibility.** The Bible has been in the world in its complete form now for almost two thousand years, yet it is unlike all other books in that it has not become obsolete. It is today more highly respected and more widely printed and sold than any book in all the world. It has been translated into more languages than any other book. Books, like men, are born, have their day, die, and are soon forgotten. They were once useful, but better books have taken their place and they have become outdated. Not so with the Bible. Age has failed to affect its power; as always, it vibrates with life (Hebrews 4:12; Romans 1:16).

The Bible has always been fiercely attacked by those who do not wish to obey it, but it has withstood its furious foes and false friends. Never has there been a book like the Bible that has incurred the hatred of man. It has been the anvil on which many a hammer has been worn out. It has passed through many fiery trials in its course of history as men have attempted to destroy it.

For example, the Roman Emperor Diocletian in A.D. 303 issued an edict to destroy the Bible. He thought he had accomplished his goal! But twenty-five years later

Constantine, the new emperor, commissioned fifty copies of the Bible to be prepared at government expense. Voltaire, the French infidel, in 1776 predicted that in one hundred years the Bible would be lost. But about twenty-five years after his death the British and Foreign Bible Society was founded, and this one Society alone has given to the world millions of copies of the Bible in several hundred different languages. One hundred years later, Voltaire's own printing press, on which his infidelic literature had been printed, was used to print Bibles. The very house in which he had lived was used as a storage room for the Word of God. Thomas Jefferson, in his book on *Western Virginia*, published about the time of Voltaire's death, predicted that fifty years from then there would not be a Bible in America unless found in some curiosity shop. Likewise, Thomas Paine, in his book *The Age of Reason*, predicted the end of the Bible. These men, too, have gone the way of all men of the flesh, but the Word of God still lives. The American Bible Society in New York City has, for many years, been printing and distributing millions of copies of the Bible and portions of God's Word all over America. Today it would be hard to find a home in the United States where there is not at least one copy of the Scriptures. Also, Robert G. Ingersoll (1833-1899), another noted infidel in America, highly criticized the Bible. He gave lectures on "The Mistakes of Moses." Today we can turn to the books of Moses and learn of "The Mistakes of Ingersoll!"

Indeed, a relentless warfare has for centuries been waged against the Bible. Yet in spite of what these and many others have done in their attacks to destroy it, the

Bible is still here. After all the storms of persecution that have been and are hurled against it by atheists, infidels, and higher critics, it lives. Jehovah has providentially preserved His Book through all the centuries. Jesus once said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). Peter wrote: "...the word of God... liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23-25). Critics have come and gone, nations have been born and passed away since the Bible was written, but it *still stands*. The Bible will live to the end of time. Nothing can destroy it. All the power that could be brought to bear to blot it from the earth has been tried, and yet it survives. The poet has beautifully expressed this truth in these words:

*Century follows century—There it stands.  
Empires rise and fall and are forgotten  
—There it stands.  
Atheists rail against it—There it stands.  
Agnostics smile cynically—There it stands.  
Profane prayerless punsters caricature it  
—There it stands.  
Unbelief abandons it—There it stands.  
Higher critics deny its claim to inspiration  
—There it stands.  
The flames are kindled against it  
—There it stands.  
The tooth of time gnaws but makes no dent in it  
—There it stands.  
Infidels predict its abandonment  
—There it stands.  
—The Word of God which liveth and  
abideth forever.*

—A. Z. Conrad

## **Conclusion**

These are some of the indisputable proofs that the Bible is the infallible word of the living God: (1) inerrancy, (2) fulfilled prophecies, (3) scientific accuracy, (4) miracles, (5) high moral and ethical teaching, (6) great influence for good, and (7) indestructibility.

Since the Bible is a perfect, complete, infallible, and an inerrant revelation from God to man, needing no revision, we should love and obey its precepts. God alone knows what is right for man, and the Bible is just as relevant to people today as it was in the first century. It is a guide for all men and for all time. The inspired Scriptures are able to furnish us completely "unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:17; cf. 2 Peter 1:3). The Bible is our only authoritative rule of faith and conduct, the only rightful creed and book of discipline for the church, the only basis of unity which the Lord has authorized, the only Book that reveals God's plan of human redemption through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 3:23; John 3:16), and the only Book that will judge us in the last day (John 12:48; Revelation 20: 11-13; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Not only does the Bible reveal man's origin, nature, and duty, it is the only telescope that reveals the world beyond the grave. We all know that we face imminent departure from this life, but what then? Scripture declares that this life is but the morning of existence. In John's apocalyptic vision we have a picture of man redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and of Heaven, the eternal home of the soul (Revelation 7:9-17; chapters 21 and 22). If our confidence in the Bible as a divine Book is destroyed, then the future we must face is all

darkness; we would have no hope! For only in the words of Scripture are to be found the message of “life and immortality” (2 Timothy 1:10; cf. Psalm 23).

Therefore, we believe that no group of men, unaided by a higher power, could have written the Bible, for man cannot write such a perfect book. The Bible is, without exception, the world’s most wonderful Book (Psalms 119:129). It is preeminently the “Book of books”—the one Book forever outshining all other books in the literary firmament, as the sun outshines all planets that move in their orbits. If we will respect and obey its commands, some sweet day heaven will be our home.

This old Book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its histories are true, its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler’s map, the pilgrim’s staff, the sailor’s compass, the soldier’s sword, and the Christian’s charter. Here Paradise is restored, heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand object, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It is given you in life, will be opened at the judgment, and will be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibilities, will reward the greatest labor, and will condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents. [Author unknown]

THE BIBLE

*Blessed Bible, how I love it!*

*How it doth my bosom cheer!*

*What has earth like this to covet?*

*Oh, what stores of wealth are here!*

*Man was lost and doomed to sorrow,*

*Not one ray of light or bliss*

*Could he from earth's treasures borrow*

*Till his way was cheered by this.*

*Yes, sweet Bible, I will hide thee,*

*Hide thee richly in this heart,*

*Thou through all my life will guide me,*

*And in death we will not part!*

*Part in death? No, never, never!*

*Through death's vale I'll lean on thee;*

*Then in worlds above forever*

*Sweeter still thy truths shall be.*

—Anonymous

**THE BIBLE --GOD'S INSPIRED BOOK**  
**VERSUS**  
**DIRECT HOLY SPIRIT GUIDANCE**

The Bible is the world's most precious Book. It came from God. The apostle Paul wrote: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (II Tim. 3:16). This literally means that the Holy Scriptures are "God-breathed," or "breathed from God." The Bible is inspired in all of its parts. It did not come of human origin. The Bible is the inspired, final, complete, and perfect revelation of God -- man's only inerrant and authoritative Guide in all spiritual matters.

Many religionists, however, think that the Holy Spirit is today revealing, guiding, or in some way directing them in addition to the Word of God. They say that man needs something else above the Bible for his guidance in life. They sometimes base this conclusion on the promise that Peter gave on the day of Pentecost when he told believers to "repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, **and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost**" (Acts 2:38).

They think receiving "the gift of the Holy Ghost (Spirit)" meant receiving a direct indwelling of the Spirit, maybe at times to work miracles, and to give some special help or guidance, in addition to the written Word of God, or to assist them in living the Christian life. But does God reveal truths **directly** to certain ones today in addition to that already given in the Bible? If the Lord does this to all those who claim this special help, then He is the Author of confusion. But Paul declared that "God is not the author of confusion" (I Cor. 14:33). God does not say one thing to one man and then something entirely different to some one else; God does



not and cannot lie (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2).

A misconception of the Holy Spirit and His work leads to all kinds of religious errors. There are great differences today relative to this subject. All that we can learn about the Spirit must come from the Scriptures, but often what the Bible teaches does not seem to matter; only how one **feels** is important. The question of one's receiving the "gift of the Holy Spirit," therefore, has been a subject of special interest within the past few years due to the rapid rise of the Pentecostal (Charismatic) Movement. Some believe and teach that Christians now receive the miraculous gifts of the Spirit as did the apostles and some of the early Christians. But, does this follow from the teachings of God's Word? Hence, there is a need to have an overall view of how (in what sense) a child of God has "the gift of the Holy Spirit" today. This is the purpose of our study.

### **HOLY SPIRIT, A PERSON**

It is of primary importance that we understand who (what) the Holy Spirit is. He is God, Deity, a divine Person, one of the Godhead (Acts 17:29). There is One God who consists of three distinct personalities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; John 4:24; 1:1-3, 14). The Holy Spirit is not a "force," a "puff of wind," or an "it." The Spirit inspired men to give to us the Holy Scriptures (II Tim. 3:16-17; II Pet. 1:21; John 16:7-13; I Cor. 2:10-13; Eph. 3:3-5; Acts 1:16; II Sam. 23:2). Thus, being perfectly given, the Bible is an all-sufficient Book for man's salvation (cf. II John 9; I Thess. 2:13; Gal. 1:8-9).

### **MEASURES OF THE SPIRIT**

Christ during His personal ministry possessed the Spirit without measure (John 3:34; cf. Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38). This implies that others might possess the Spirit

“by measure,” the “measure” being a portion of “power” bestowed by the Holy Spirit upon man (Luke 24:49). The New Testament mentions three “portions of power,” or “manifestations” (I Cor. 12:7), or “measures” of the Spirit given to others.

1. Jesus promised the **baptism** of the Spirit to the apostles to guide them into all truth (John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 1:5, 8). They received an overwhelming of the “power” of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, A.D. 33. This enabled them to speak in other languages (Acts 2:1-4, 6, 8), perform miracles to confirm the Word (Acts 2:43; 5:12; Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4), and to write Scripture (Rev. 1:11; 2:7).

Likewise, the Gentiles (Cornelius and his household) received “the like gift” some eight years later (Acts 10:44-47; 11:15-17) to prove that “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34-35) and that the Gentiles could obey the Gospel, be saved, and be added to the Lord’s church upon the same terms as the Jews (Acts 2:47). Furthermore, we know by implication that the apostle Paul received this portion of power from the Holy Spirit as he “was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles” (II Cor. 11:5; cf. 12:12).

No one today has “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” as no one can do the miracles that the apostles did, e.g., speaking in tongues, raising the dead, etc. Therefore, Acts 2:38 does not teach that all those who repent and are baptized shall receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This portion of power given by Christ in sending the Holy Spirit served its purpose in the apostolic age by revealing the truth, confirming it, recording it, and spreading it into all parts of the world (Col. 1:23). In A.D. 64, Paul said that there is “one baptism” (Eph. 4:5). This is water baptism for forgiveness of sins

(Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38; 8:35-39; 22:16; Mark 16:15-16). The baptism of Acts 2:38 is water baptism.

2. Certain members of the church in the apostolic age received **miraculous gifts** of the Spirit, bestowed by "the apostles' hands" (Acts 8:14-19; Rom. 1:11). Timothy had a gift by the laying on of Paul's hands (II Tim. 1:6). Nine of these gifts are mentioned in I Corinthians 12:4-11: miracles, prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues, etc. But all of these gifts were to cease with the completion of God's revealed will (I Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:7-13), "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Since no apostle is living today, and those receiving them could not pass them on, no one can receive any of these miraculous gifts. Therefore, when the last apostle died and the last man died upon whom an apostle had laid his hands, all miraculous gifts ended, having served their purpose. So, Acts 2:38 does not mean that all Jews and Gentiles who repent and are baptized will receive the miraculous gifts. No one has any of these gifts today. True, they were possessed by some members of the early church (Mark 16:17-18; I Cor. 12:28-30). But no one today can perform those miracles--they have ceased!

The Holy Spirit operates upon the heart of man for his conviction, conversion, and sanctification through, or by means of, the inspired Word of God. The Gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16). "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psa. 19:7). One is "born again" by the Word, the "incorruptible seed" of the kingdom (I Pet. 1:23; Luke 8:11). The Word of God is "the sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17). The Word is our guide: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psa. 119:105; cf. v. 130). The Word

is able to save (Jas. 1:21) and to build us up (I Pet. 2:2; Acts 20:32). There is no **direct** operation of the Spirit on man, over-and-above-the-Word, for his soul's salvation. This is accomplished only through the Word given by inspired men (Eph. 3:3-5). The Holy Spirit, a Person, uses His Word, the instrument, to operate on the heart of man. The Spirit quickens, but only by means of the Word (John 6:63; Psa. 119:50). The Spirit leads us (Rom. 8:14), but it is through the Word (Psa. 73:24). When an act is said to have been performed by a **person** and by a certain **instrument**, it is clearly understood that the person did the act by means of the instrument.

3. The Holy Spirit dwelt in the first century in the hearts of obedient children of God in a **non-miraculous** way, that is, through their obedience to the Word. Paul commanded, for example, the Ephesians to "be **filled with the Spirit**" (5:18), but in a parallel passage to the Colossians he said, "**Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly**" (3:16). That the Spirit of God dwells in Christians is affirmed in I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; and Romans 8:9-11. There is no denying the fact of the Spirit's indwelling, but there is a vast difference between the **fact** of the indwelling and the **method** or **manner** by which He indwells. Is it direct or indirect?

Three positions are usually offered with reference to the Spirit's indwelling in the Christian today: (1) The Spirit dwells in the Christian directly, without medium, separate and apart and over and above the written Word; (2) the Spirit dwells in no one today; all passages dealing with the Spirit's indwelling have reference to the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit in the apostolic age, which ceased with the completion of revelation; and (3) the Spirit dwells in the Christian through the medium of the written Word, His Law (Romans 8:2),

and by one's obedience to that Word. We reject positions numbers one and two as being false, but accept as true to the teaching of Scripture position number three, a figurative indwelling. [Compare Paul's statement to his beloved friends in Philippi: "I have you **in my heart**" (Phil. 1:7).]

Alexander Campbell correctly stated:

*Christians are, therefore, clearly and unequivocally temples of the Holy Spirit; and they are quickened, animated, encouraged, and sanctified by the power and influence of the Spirit of God, working in them through the truth* (emphasis mine, PBC).<sup>1</sup>

There is no such idea taught in the Bible as a non-miraculous direct, personal indwelling of the Spirit in the Christian. If the indwelling is personal and direct, it would be miraculous. Scripture does not so teach, but some think that there comes a direct indwelling upon one's baptism into Christ, based upon their interpretation of Acts 2:38.

### **GOD AND CHRIST INDWELL**

God dwells in the Christian (I John 3:24; 4:12; 4:15; II Cor. 6:16; John 4:24). But it is through one's obedience to the Word and not that the literal being of God dwells in the body of the Christian. Also, the Bible teaches that Christ dwells in Christians (Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20). But how? It is "by faith" (Eph. 3:17), and faith comes by hearing "the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). It is not literally, directly, or in some way "conjunctively," and separate and apart from the written Word. Christ dwells in Christians when His teachings control their lives. So, the Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian in the same way that God and Christ dwell in him, by faith, representatively.

It is a serious mistake not to understand that spiritual truths are often set forth in Scripture in figurative language. A few examples should be sufficient to show this. In instituting the Lord's Supper, Jesus "took **bread**, and blessed it...and said, Take, eat; **this is my body**." Then He took "the cup, and gave thanks" and said, "...this is my blood..." (Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20). But was the **bread** Christ's actual, literal **body**? And was the **fruit of the vine** (the cup) His literal **blood** in His physical body? Of course not!

Once Jesus said to His disciples: "**I am the vine, ye are the branches**" (John 15:5). Was this literal? No thoughtful one would so affirm! Christ said to the apostle John on the island of Patmos, "...the seven candlesticks which thou sawest **are** the seven churches" (Rev. 1:20). Were the seven churches of Asia seven literal candlesticks? Rather was not this also symbolic language to describe the influence of those congregations in a world of sin? Joseph in the land of Egypt, in giving interpretation to King Pharaoh's dream, said: "The seven good kine **are seven years**; and the seven good ears **are seven years**" (Gen. 41:26). The seven cattle and the seven ears of grain represented seven years. However, some want to make literal what they want to be literal, and they make figurative what they want to be figurative.

Guy N. Woods commented:

*The fact that the Scriptures assert that the Spirit dwells in the Christian does not justify the conclusion that this indwelling is personal, immediate, and apart from the Word of God.*<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, J. W. McGarvey correctly stated:

*The fact that the Holy Spirit dwells in us is*

*no proof that his action upon our moral sentiments is direct or immediate.*<sup>3</sup>

When Paul came to Ephesus, he found certain disciples. He asked them: "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" (Acts 19:1-3). This question had reference to the receiving of miraculous gifts of the Spirit by the laying on of the apostles' hands. Finding that they needed correct teaching concerning baptism, he taught them. "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 Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied" (vs. 5-6). However, this has no reference whatsoever to a person's receiving any of the miraculous gifts today after water baptism, since no apostle exists to bestow the gifts. Neither are they essential to salvation.

But an example of men having the non-miraculous indwelling of the influence of the Holy Spirit in life is found in the account of the selection of seven men to serve tables in the Jerusalem church. Among the men selected was Stephen, "a man full of faith **and of the Holy Ghost**" (Acts 6:3-5). Then the apostles laid their hands on them (v. 6) to impart the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. "And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great miracles among the people" (v. 8). But this was **after** he had been selected and **after** the apostles had laid their hands on him. However, he was a spiritual man prior to this (vs. 3, 5). J. W. McGarvey made this observation:

*The circumstances, that up to this time no miracles had been wrought, so far as we know, by any but the apostles, and that, immediately after the appointment of the seven, Stephen appears "doing great wonders*

*and miracles among the people,” seem to indicate that they were merely full of the Holy Spirit in the ordinary way, but received miraculous powers when the hands of the apostles were laid upon them.<sup>4</sup>*

David Lipscomb concurs with McGarvey:

*“Full of the Holy Ghost” does not necessarily mean miraculously filled and endowed with the Holy Spirit...It most likely meant men whose hearts were fully imbued with the Spirit, and who were wise and prudent.<sup>5</sup>*

Gareth L. Reese is very clear in his explanation of Stephen being “full of the Spirit” prior to his appointment of serving tables:

*“Full of the Spirit” must then mean “full of the fruit of the Spirit as respects a holy life,” men whose lives are bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit.<sup>6</sup>*

True, Luke’s account of this is the first mention of laying on of hands in the early church. The expression “full of the Holy Spirit” evidently does not mean that the seven men were endowed with miraculous gifts then, but that they were men under the influence of the Holy Spirit’s teaching, or who were of distinguished piety, bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit in their lives (Gal. 5:22-23). Furthermore, Philip later went to the city of Samaria and preached Christ, confirming his message by performing many miracles (Acts 8:5-13). But he did not have the power to bestow any of the miraculous gifts; only the apostles could do this (vs. 14-24).

By obedience to the inspired Word of God, therefore, the children of God have the **fruit-bearing** influence of



the Holy Spirit in their lives. They do not have “the baptism of the Spirit,” or any of the “miraculous gifts” of the Spirit, or a “personal, direct indwelling of the Spirit.” As they are motivated, moved and molded by the influence of the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit’s teachings, the Spirit indwells. But Deity does not literally reside within their physical bodies (cf. Phil. 2:5).

David Lipscomb, commenting on the Spirit’s operation through the written Word, correctly stated:

*The only spiritual instruction, guidance or influence possible to man is to be gained through coming to the word of God and taking it into the heart...and guiding our feelings, thoughts, purposes, and lives by its sacred teaching. In this way the Spirit that dwells in the word, introduced into our hearts, infects, pervades, and molds our feelings, thoughts, purposes, and lives.*<sup>7</sup>

In his historic debate with Ben M. Bogard in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1938, the scholarly N. B. Hardeman said:

*But how does the Spirit operate? This is the question. My answer first, last and all the time, is that he influences through the gospel, which is God’s power. The word is the medium through which the Spirit accomplishes His work.*<sup>8</sup>

## **RECEIVING THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Now, since receiving “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38) does not mean either (1) receiving the baptism of the Spirit, or (2) receiving the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, or (3) receiving a personal, direct indwelling of

the Holy Spirit, it then must mean a metaphorical indwelling spiritually, with one receiving blessings in Christ, through the Word.

Some get the idea of a personal, direct indwelling of the Holy Spirit immediately after baptism for the forgiveness of sins, which is based on erroneous translations of the Bible. For example, the *Today's English Version* (TEV) of Acts 2:38 reads: "...and you shall receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit." Likewise, the *Living Bible Paraphrased* says: "...then you also shall receive this gift, the Holy Spirit." Both are a mistranslation and are, therefore, unjustified. The forty-seven scholars of the *King James Version* (1611) said, "...and ye shall receive **the gift of the Holy Ghost.**" The 101 scholars of the *American Standard Version* (1901) said, "...and ye shall receive **the gift of the Holy Spirit.**" Likewise, does the *New King James Version* and the *New American Standard Version*. This is the correct translation. Hence, Peter did not say that the ones baptized would receive the Holy Spirit **in Person** as an indwelling gift. Even the outpouring of the Holy Spirit's power on the apostles on the day of Pentecost was not the receiving of the **Person** of the Spirit. They received the fulfillment of the promise of the power of the Holy Spirit on that day (Luke 24:47-49).

We should compare the phrase "**the gift of the Holy Spirit**" with the phrases "**the gift of God**" (John 4:10; Rom. 6:23) and "**the gift of Christ**" (Eph. 4:7). They mean a gift **from** God and a gift **from** Christ, not God and Christ **as a gift**.

### ACTS 2:38 AND ACTS 3:19 COMPARED

Furthermore, if we compare Acts 2:38 with Acts 3:19, given in Peter's second sermon, it will help us understand the meaning of "the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The two verses are parallel, having the same meaning. Note the two verses and see that after a person is baptized and is forgiven of his sins, he begins to enjoy all of God's spiritual blessings.

**Acts 2:38**

1. Repent
2. Be baptized
3. Remission of sins
4. Gift of the Holy Ghost (Spirit)

**Acts 3:19**

1. Repent
2. Be converted  
(turn again, ASV)
3. Sins blotted out
4. Times of refreshing  
from the Lord

Thus, receiving the blessings, or "refreshing" from the Lord (a figurative expression), is the same as receiving "the gift of the Holy Spirit." Both statements refer to receiving the spiritual blessings that follow after one is baptized into Christ and receives the forgiveness of his past sins. All "spiritual blessings" are "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3; cf II Cor. 5:17). These "blessings" include every blessing that Christians receive in living the Christian life. Now compare Acts 2:38 and Acts 3:19 with Paul's language in I Corinthians 12:13:

*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*

This verse means that by the teaching of the Holy Spirit we are immersed in water (Rom. 6:4) **unto** the remission of sins, or **into** the one body, the church, whether we be Jew or Gentile, whether we be bond or free, and have all been privileged to drink into the benefits of the **one** Holy Spirit of God. This passage of Scripture helps us to understand what receiving "the gift of the Holy Spirit" means. Evidently, it is the Spirit's gift and refers to all spiritual blessings in Christ.

Gary G. Colley, Sr. wrote this comment:

*“The gift of the Holy Spirit” is equal to the “seasons of refreshing” and refers to what the Holy Spirit gives to obedient believers. The Holy Spirit is not a “season of refreshing,” but he gives that gift...And “the gift of the Holy Spirit” or the “season of refreshing,” means the Holy Spirit’s gift of the blessings of salvation in Christ.<sup>9</sup>*

Therefore **assuming** and **asserting** that Acts 2:38 means receiving a direct, personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit does not prove it! One preacher was asked, “When do we actually receive the Holy Spirit, before, during or after baptism?” The preacher replied, “Peter promised us that at baptism we are given the Holy Spirit... We are forgiven at baptism, and it is then that we receive the Holy Spirit.”<sup>10</sup> But Peter said we receive “the gift of the Holy Spirit” after baptism.

So, as our study has shown, the Lord promises every baptized penitent believer those spiritual blessings (after pardon) from the Holy Spirit, as one lives obediently to the Word, in the body of Christ, in this life, and **eternal life** in the world to come. This is provided, of course, that one continues to live faithfully in the Lord’s service (cf. I Cor. 9:27; II Pet. 1:4-11; Rev. 2:10), “For...the gift of God is **eternal life** through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). These blessings are offered to all people through Christ. Peter, therefore, says, “For the promise is unto you, and to your children,” meaning these blessings of salvation are offered for all the Jews and their descendants; “and to all that are afar off,” means these same blessings are also for the Gentiles, to those of other lands, the whole human race. “Even as many as the Lord our God shall call” means that God calls by

the Gospel (II Thes. 2:14), and that this call, to both Jews and Gentiles, will continue from generation to generation down through the ages, to the end of time. The word “For” refers back to what is mentioned in verse 38, so the two verses cannot be separated.

The statements of James W. Zachary, a pioneer Gospel preacher, confirm what we have studied concerning the direct indwelling of the Holy Spirit:

*The Bible teaches that God dwells in Christians, that Christ lives in Christians, and that the Holy Spirit abides in Christians; but it does not teach that either God, Christ, or the Holy Spirit exists in any man in the sense of real personality... The personal habitation of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit is in heaven, and they only dwell in Christians by faith and through the influence of wisely adapted means and medium.<sup>11</sup>*

Yet, the receiving of some kind of direct influence of the Holy Spirit to assist the Christian, or to give some new revelation, in addition to the written Word, is the very heart and core of denominational teaching, especially among the Charismatics. For example, Ellen G. White, one of the leaders of the Seventh-Day Adventist Movement, wrote: “Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to man through His Word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>12</sup>

However, no revelation or communication has come from the Holy Spirit since the last word of the New Testament was written. The Bible is complete (II Pet. 1:3; Jude 3; Rev. 22:18-19).

Therefore, it is by an obedient faith that we receive the “promise of the Spirit,” the Holy Spirit’s blessings.

As the Scriptures speak about “our common salvation” (Jude 3), even so this measure or “gift of the Holy Spirit” is common to all Christians through faith, and it is not miraculous. It is the ordinary measure and common gift of God to all who through faith obey Him. And, thus, God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit live today in the obedient child of God by means of the Word (cf. Gal. 3:2; 4:6).

Consequently, the indwelling of Deity in an individual is merely an expression that denotes one who is directed by and is living in obedience to the Word. It is the same idea as God walking in him and dwelling in him (II Cor. 6:16). And Paul’s command to the Ephesians to be “filled with the Spirit” (5:18) means to keep on being filled with the Spirit by means of the Word. It is not direct or miraculous (cf. Gal. 5:16; II John 4:6). The Holy Spirit is not “an influence;” but He certainly exerts an influence in the believer’s heart (Luke 8:15).

### **CONSEQUENCES OF PERSONAL, DIRECT INDWELLING TEACHING**

The belief that the Holy Spirit dwells directly today often leads to all kinds of “experiences” and “feelings.” In fact, there is no end to this false doctrine if and when it is carried to its logical conclusions.

Some, however, who believe that the Holy Spirit dwells personally and literally in Christians say that by this direct indwelling He does not do anything for them by this indwelling, and that all leading, guidance, etc., is done only through the Word of God. But, if so, then why does the Spirit lie dormant in the heart of the Christian? Nevertheless, many of those who hold to this belief usually will, sooner or later, come to believe that at times the Holy Spirit is actually doing something **to** them in a **direct** way, over and above the Word of God. This

comes as a natural **consequence** of the direct-indwelling idea. But, if that be true, we would ask that person: "What does He do that is not accomplished through the Word of God? And how do you know that it is the Holy Spirit that is thus leading and guiding you in this direct way?" This idea of direct indwelling and guidance of the Spirit opens the door to every species of imposition as wide as the speculations of men may desire it! But the words of the Spirit are written in the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit operates upon and within the heart of man **only** through the Word. In the Bible the Spirit speaks to us, and He does not speak to us through any other medium (Rev. 2:7). Those who teach a direct, personal, non-miraculous indwelling and operation of the Spirit today in the heart of the Christian, apart from the Word of God and **in conjunction with the Word**, are holding to religious error. Thus when the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit dwells in the heart of the obedient child of God, it is an expression of speech called a **metonymy**--the cause for the effect. The cause is named, but the effect is meant.

Hence, the three "measures" or "manifestations" of the Holy Spirit to man, spoken of in the New Testament, are each called the "gift" of the Spirit--namely, (1) the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 1:4; 2:1-4; 10:44-45; 11:15-17), (2) the miraculous gifts of the Spirit bestowed on some of the early Christians by the laying on of the apostles' hands (Rom. 1:11; II Tim. 1:6; Acts 8:14-18), and (3) the non-miraculous gift of the Spirit possessed by all obedient children of God (Acts 2:38; 6:3). But all these "measures" do not mean or indicate the same **portion of power** from the Holy Spirit. The word "gift" does not tell which "manifestation" of the Spirit is under consideration. The context must determine which **gift** is meant. However, not every statement in the Bible that mentions the Holy Spirit refers to the baptism of

the Spirit, or to the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. For example, one might give to one person a gift of one dollar according to his need, and that would be as much a gift as if he would give to another man a gift of ten dollars and to another a gift of fifty dollars, according to their needs.

### **GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM**

In the long ago God made a promise to Abraham, saying, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18; cf. 12:1-3). The "seed" referred to Christ (Gal. 3:14, 16), and this "promise" is fulfilled in this Christian Age (cf. Gal. 3:26-29; Acts 13:22-23; 2:39).

Paul in Galatians 3:14 states, "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

Consequently, the work of the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead, in man's conversion and sanctification is not a great mystery, neither is it miraculous. The Holy Spirit through the Holy Scriptures reveals the work of God in man's salvation. God the Father planned the great scheme of redemption (Eph. 3:8-11); God the Son came into the world to execute the Father's plan by dying on the cross for all mankind (John 3:16; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 John 4:9-10, 14; 2:2); and God the Holy Spirit came in power to reveal the Gospel plan of salvation, to confirm it, and to record it for all future generations (John 16:13; Eph. 3:3-5; Rev. 2:7). Thus,

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (II Tim. 3:16-17).*



What more do we need? God “hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (II Pet. 1:3). Hence, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (I Pet. 4:11; cf II Tim. 4:1-2). The Lord promised and sent His Son Jesus Christ to save both Jews and Gentiles from their sins, by His grace, if they would obey Him (Titus 2:11; Heb. 5:9; Rev. 22:14). Hence, we can say with David:

*Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way (Psa. 119:128; cf. v. 160).*

Were we to grant (as some teach) that receiving “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38) refers to some of the early Christians receiving the miraculous gifts of the Spirit (which we do not), this would in no wise cause us to believe that the Holy Spirit today personally, literally, and directly dwells in Christians, to give any additional help or guidance over and above and in addition to God’s Holy Word. The Spirit indwells the child of God only through the inspired Word.

Neither does this discussion include teaching on God’s Providence, the Lord’s working “behind the scenes” by natural law, as it were, for the accomplishment of His purposes (cf. Gen. 50:15-20; Esther 4:13-14; Phile. 15). Nor does this study include the Spirit making “intercession for us” (Rom. 8:27-28), or Christ “who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom. 8:34).

There is a difference in what the Holy Spirit does to a person and what He does for a person. It seems that one cause of confusion in the minds of some is a failure to distinguish the difference between the providence of God and the indwelling or leading of the Holy Spirit. Providence is God’s part, a blessing usually recognized

only in retrospect. Man's part is to walk as the Spirit gives instruction through the Word. **Only** by this can we **know** that we are being led by the Spirit as the Father and the Son command. But receiving "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38) means receiving every benefit of salvation available to the Christian from that day forward--such as, the privilege of prayer, the assurance given in Romans 8:28, the hope of heaven, and all other promises made to obedient children of God. All these blessings are indeed "times of refreshing from the Lord" (Acts 3:19), the Holy Spirit's gift of blessings of salvation in Christ.

Ian McPherson, a Gospel preacher, made these statements regarding this point of our study:

*There are many who claim that "The gift of the Holy Ghost" refers to the Holy Spirit Himself given as a gift from God to dwell personally in the bodies of those who have been baptized. ... "The gift of the Holy Spirit" is a figure of speech that refers to the blessings that flow forth from the Holy Spirit as people obey the gospel.*

*Since the Holy Spirit is Deity, those who believe the personal indwelling idea would have to logically conclude that Christians are incarnate (i.e., God in the flesh), as Christ was. Although they do not usually admit this, it is a necessary inference because the Spirit Himself is Deity. The only incarnate person who ever lived is Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:23). It was this attribute that made Him an acceptable object of worship (cf. John 9:38).*

*The Scriptures are conclusive that the place of the indwelling of the Spirit is in the*

*heart (Gal. 4:6; 2 Cor. 1:22), which is the seat of intellect and emotion. In 2 Corinthians 7:3, Paul said to the Corinthians, "Ye are in our hearts." All of us recognize that this does not mean that either the Corinthians, or their spirits were literally and actually in Paul. This was simply an expression showing how the Corinthians had embedded themselves into his mind and affected his life. Those who believe in the personal indwelling are forced into the conclusion that the indwelling Spirit works directly on the heart (intellect) of man, and therefore (by inference) they endorse the direct activity of the Spirit on the minds of believers (thus making the Word insufficient).*

*Acts 2:38 teaches us that when a person repents and is baptized, he receives the gift from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the giver of the gift, not the gift itself. A parallel verse is Acts 3:19 which has an identical meaning. The expressions, "The gift of the Holy Ghost" and, "The times of refreshing" both refer to the blessings received through the gospel by the Holy Spirit. Neither refer to a direct indwelling of the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup>*

Ashley S. Johnson, a nineteenth-century preacher, in his book, *The Holy Spirit and the Human Mind*, correctly stated the work of the Holy Spirit on the human mind by saying:

*Every theory of the Holy Spirit's work in conversion and Christian growth that eliminates the thoughts of God expressed in human language and recorded in human*

*language in the Scriptures, and that eliminates the human understanding from conversion and Christian growth, is a delusion and a snare!*<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, we must resist every effort to represent the “leading” of the Holy Spirit--in conversion, or in the life of the child of God--as a “feeling,” an “impulse,” or some other form of non-verbal communication besides, or in addition to, the inspired Scriptures. The Spirit leads, guides and directs man today only through the Word, and He indwells in the heart of the faithful child of God only through the inspired Word.

H. Leo Boles in his book, *The Holy Spirit*, says, “...*the Holy Spirit dwells in us through His agent, the word of truth. ...When the word of Christ dwells in Christians, the Holy spirit dwells in them. ...Neither God nor Christ dwells personally in us.*”<sup>15</sup>

### CONCLUSION

To summarize, all power of the Holy Spirit exercised today on the heart of man is only through the inspired written Word of God. In this manner the Spirit indwells the Christian the same way in which God and Christ indwell. As children of God cherish the Spirit’s message in their hearts and live by it, the Holy Spirit dwells in them, and collectively in the church. Everyone who becomes obedient to the Lord receives the benefits--the blessings--provided by the Spirit in this Christian dispensation and “in the world to come eternal life” (Mark 10:30; cf. Titus 1:2; Rom. 8:24-25; Rev. 22:14). These are the blessings that were to be brought by Christ our Redeemer.

The Bible closes with the gracious invitation: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come...And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water

of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). Peter on the day of Pentecost, speaking by inspiration, closed his sermon by exhorting his listeners to be saved by obedience to the will of the Lord. He urged them to submit to God’s way of salvation which he had just explained (Acts 2:40-41). We plead with all men everywhere today to do the same. “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive **the gift of the Holy Ghost**” (Acts 2:38).

So in Acts 2:38, Peter is not promising the “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” or any of the “spiritual gifts” of the Spirit, or a “direct guidance” of the Spirit over and above, and in addition to, the inspired Word of God, by a personal indwelling of the Spirit. The Bible teaches the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but it is not in some direct, personal manner. The teaching of a “personal indwelling” is a personal opinion. Deity does not dwell in Christians personally. “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Eph. 3:17). “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit dwell in the Christian’s heart through faith and direct him by means of the inspired Word. All influence of the Spirit on the heart of man for conviction, conversion, and sanctification (edification) is only through the influence of the revealed Word of God.

The teaching of a personal, direct indwelling of the Spirit is but the gradual opening of the door for a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Many false doctrines in the religious world result from testimonials given by those who have, as they claim, experienced some sort of special leading from God, but no one today receives any special, direct guidance of the Spirit in addition to the inspired Word of God. All who claim to be guided

directly by the Holy Spirit, as were the apostles of the New Testament, are deceived (Matt. 7:15).

Batsell Barrett Baxter is very clear in explaining how the Holy Spirit dwells in every Christian:

***The Holy spirit dwells in us just exactly in the same way that Christ dwells in us. ...as you and I meditate upon God's word, understand the teachings from God and Christ and the Holy Spirit, open our lives unto them and imbibe the spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells within us. ...Since the Holy Spirit comes into our lives exclusively through God's word, the Holy Spirit does not speak to us directly.***<sup>16</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System*, (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1912 edition, Section VIII) p. 68.
  - <sup>2</sup> Guy N. Woods, *Commentary on I John* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1954), p. 286.
  - <sup>3</sup> J. W. McGarvey, *Commentary on Acts* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, Eighth Edition, 1983, of original commentary), p. 143.
  - <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.
  - <sup>5</sup> David Lipscomb, *Commentary on Acts* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1896), p. 73.
  - <sup>6</sup> Gareth L. Reese, *Commentary on Acts* (Joplin: College Press, Sixth Printing, 1986), p. 251.
  - <sup>7</sup> David Lipscomb, *Salvation From Sin* (Nashville: McQuiddy Printing Company, 1913), p. 93.
  - <sup>8</sup> N. B. Hardeman, *Hardeman-Bogard Debate* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1938), p. 21.
  - <sup>9</sup> Gary G. Colley, Sr., *Christian Worker* (Austin: Vol. 79, No. 11), p. 2, 6.
  - <sup>10</sup> David Thurman, *Gospel Minutes* (Ft. Worth: Vol. 44, No. 16), p. 4.
  - <sup>11</sup> James W. Zachary, *The Witness Of The Spirits* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, reprint edition, 1954), pp. 50-51.
  - <sup>12</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ And Satan* (Nashville: Southern Printing Assn.), pp. vii, viii.
  - <sup>13</sup> Ian McPherson, "The Holy Spirit in Prophecy and Fulfillment," *Love the Brotherhood* (Bellerive, Tasmania, Australia: Vol. 2, No. 7, Aug. 1995).
  - <sup>14</sup> Ashley S. Johnson, *The Holy Spirit and the Human Mind* (Delight, AR.: Gospel Light Publishing Company, n. d. reprint edition), p. 74.
  - <sup>15</sup> H. Leo Boles, *The Holy Spirit, His Personality, Nature, Works* (Nashville, TN.: Gospel Advocate Company, 1942), p. 207.
  - <sup>16</sup> Batsell Barrett Baxter, *The Holy Spirit* (Rossville, GA.: O'Neal Publishing Co., N.D.), pp.17-19.

George W. DeHoff's Commentary on Acts, page 364, reads regarding receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost:

*The New Testament teaches that the Holy Spirit through the word of God dwells in every Christian. "The gift of the Holy Spirit" here has reference to the "seasons of refreshing" (Acts 3:19) and to all of the precious blessings which the Holy Spirit gives to the children of God.*

In the book Queries and Answers by Lipscomb and Sewell, edited by M. C. Kurfrees, on page 639, in explaining "the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38," is this statement:

*The promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit is likely of general character, and refers to all spiritual blessings pertaining to the Christian religion.*

Then on page 640 is this further comment:

*The words of the New Testament are the words of the Spirit; and when these words dwell in us and become the ruling principle of our lives, controlling all our purposes, words, thoughts, and actions, then certainly the Spirit of God and of Christ is dwelling in us...*

So Paul said: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:16).

# *Issues Facing the Church: Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage*

One of the most important issues facing the church today and the entire world is regarding the home and the subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage. We need to study this subject in light of what the Bible, God's inspired Word, says about it. However, we realize this touches the heartstrings of our emotions, but people must be taught to obey the will of the Lord to be eternally saved (Hebrews 5:9). There is no problem that we face that is as dangerous as this problem, especially among the young people. Nearly every church has people in its membership who have been divorced and have married a second time.

## **Home and Marriage as Defined by the Lord**

The home is of Divine origin, dear to the heart, and one of the sweetest words in human language. God created the home in the beginning of time. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Then on the sixth day of the week of creation, when all else had been created, Jehovah God created "man in his own image... male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27). Further, it is stated in Scripture,

*And the Lord God planted a garden east-*



*ward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed... And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him (Genesis 2:8, 18).*

In the beautiful Garden of Eden, the Paradise on earth, there was not found a help meet for Adam (vs. 20). The word meet, sometimes erroneously called mate, means a helper, a suitable companion, the kind of help the man needed. The animals had their mates but not man. None of the animals were suited for Adam. Then God put Adam, the first man, to sleep and took a rib from his side and created Eve, the first woman, and gave her to him as his companion. (Genesis 2:15-23). This completed Adam's happiness.

Then later God gave the law of the marriage relationship, saying:

*Therefore, shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Genesis 2:24).*

### **Home, A Rich Gift**

The home is one of the rich gifts from our Creator. Deep in the human soul is that of home affections. When many of us speak of home, we are borne on the wings of imagination to that place made sacred by the remembrances of a father's care, a mother's love, and the cherished associations of brothers and sisters. How often we hear persons speak of the home of their childhood. Their minds seem to delight in dwelling upon their home of

former days.

The home should be the sacred refuge of our lives, whether rich or poor. The affection and love of a good home is wonderful and bears the stamp of heaven, which is worth many social ties. It has often been said, "He is happiest, be he king or peasant, who finds peace in his home."

A happy home is the one single spot of rest which man upon this earth has for the cultivation of his noblest Christian character. In a real sense, home makes the man. As the home goes, so goes the nation. The strength of any nation is the well-ordered homes of people. To Adam, Paradise was home. To the good among his descendants, home is Paradise. The home is the basic unit of society.

The spirit and tone of our homes will have a great influence on our children. The home is the chief school of human virtues. From our homes are born children, and they go out with the stamp of these homes upon them. Only as these homes are what they should be, will children be what they should be. Solomon wrote, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

The Christian home is a great power for good. We should always be grateful for our good Christian homes! In the present age, the crying needs are homes built on Christian values. Building good homes is one of the greatest works in which people can engage.

God expects the home to be the religious training ground for the children. Moses told the people of Israel exactly that in Deuteronomy 6:5-9. Note especially verse 7:

*And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.*

Paul reminded fathers, in Ephesians 6:4, that they are to bring up the children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” God gave children to the parents, not to the church or to the state, per se. Therefore, it is the parents who must realize and accept this important responsibility to teach and set the right example before their children. Of course, the church is to help in this teaching also.

### **Home: God’s Protection**

God, in His teaching in the Bible gives dignity to marriage and the home. Yet, in many respects, the teaching of the Word of God regarding the home, as God planned it, is being banished from our way of life. As a result, the nations of the world are in serious moral and spiritual crisis. Fornication has become a national pastime. Many are making a mockery of the social institution of marriage between a man and a woman. Many have wrong ideas about the marriage laws. Often, what is being preached and taught with the label of Christianity has little resemblance to real Christianity as taught in the New Testament regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage. How sad!

The relationship of husband and wife, the tender love of children and of brothers and sisters, is a human family, a home. This is what God would have each to be. There is nothing on earth so beautiful as the household where the teaching of Christianity

dwells in the hearts of the inhabitants. In many homes, on the wall in some room, is the plaque that reads:

*“Christ is the head of this house.”*

How wonderful it is in the family if this is true! A good home should be the object of every family. The great joy of a happy marriage and a happy family is nothing short of heaven on earth! But in every home the will of the Lord should always be first (cf. Matthew 6:33; 10:37-39; Luke 14:26-27). God’s blessings alone can make the home what it should be, but home is nothing but a name if true love, affection, and obedience to the Lord are not there. Home is not as dear to everybody as it should be. A cottage will not hold the bulky, expensive furniture of man, but if God is there, a cottage will hold as much happiness as might be stacked in a sumptuous mansion.

Much of man’s success and happiness depends upon the character of his home. If he has no one to care for him at home, if there is neglect or coldness, then, even if he prospers without, it is dark indeed within. He may despair of life’s best blessings. The great evil of divorce, which threatens the stability of our society, can be corrected by making the home a Christian one. As a rule, “the family that prays together stays together.”

### **Home: God’s Law of Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage**

God planned marriage for all human beings if they choose to be married. However, God has given laws to protect the sacredness of the home. Jesus, in

the Sermon on the Mount, speaking of marriage, divorce and remarriage, stated:

*But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery (Matthew 5:32).*

Later in Christ's ministry, the Pharisees tempted Him, asking Him about divorce and remarriage. Christ answered by referring to what God did at the beginning. He made one man and one woman, not two or more wives for one man, or two or more husbands for the one woman (Matthew 19:3-8). He also stated: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (v. 6). God joins the woman and the man in marriage. Man does not join them. Marriage is more than a civil contract, a legal ceremony. It is a Divine institution. It is much to be regretted that in our nation, and in most all countries of the world, the civil authorities have practically set aside the law of Christ by allowing divorces and remarriages for a variety of causes. When a couple, man and woman, take the marriage vows, it should be with the intent to dwell together as husband and wife until they are separated by death. God, in the beginning, intended it to be that way: one man, one wife, for life. However, the increasing rate of divorces in America is alarming. Current statistics tell us that marriages are failing in large numbers today. In some areas of our nation, upward to forty-three percent of first marriages break up within five years. Within recent years, divorces and remarriages have become socially

acceptable. Our nation has now over one million divorces per year. Many are living together not married, and abortions are on the increase. Eighty-five percent of teenage marriages now end in divorce. It is no wonder there is a moral crisis in the land.

We do not hear much preaching from our pulpits against divorce and remarriage. The Old Testament prophet, Malachi, said that God hates "putting away" (2:16). The divorce rate is at an all time high because homes are being built without regard for the Law of the Lord.

We need to guide our young people and help them to fall in love with the right persons, and to be the right persons, so they can bring an end to easy divorce. From such broken homes are coming the juvenile and adult delinquents of our times. In the minds of some people, there is nothing sacred about marriage and the home. But there can be no divorce without a sin against God that jeopardizes the soul of someone. When a marriage is broken, a soul is usually lost.

When God said a man is to "cleave" unto his wife, He used a strong word which literally means to "be glued to a thing." People who marry are subject to God's laws concerning marriage. Immorality is an effort to destroy marriage as it is ordained by God.

One of the purposes of marriage and the home in the beginning was the replenishing of the earth, under godly rules and regulations (Genesis 1:28). Paul teaches also that another purpose of marriage is the comfort and the pleasure of the married person (I Corinthians 7:2-5). A nation cannot endure when there is no regard for the sacredness of the marriage vows.

In the United States, it is often quoted that fifty

percent of marriages end in divorce. All fifty states offer some form of no-fault divorce. The divorce rate for the year 2000 was 47.6%.

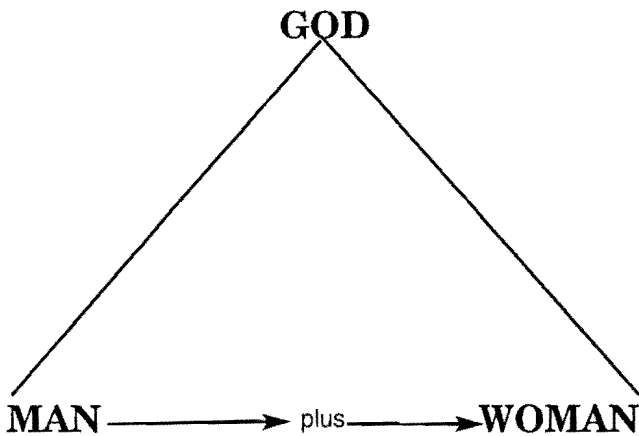
Any teaching or legislation by any church or state on the subject that is contrary to the teaching of the Lord as herein recorded in the Holy Scriptures is rebellion against the authority of God. The couple cannot be separated but by the authority of the Lord. When God has joined together, man cannot put asunder. Fornication on the part of a married partner gives the innocent partner the right to divorce and remarry. If a person's spouse commits fornication, then the innocent party can put away (divorce) his wife/husband and marry another, who is free to marry, without committing adultery.

All faithful teachers of God's Word today, preachers and others, will teach exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ said concerning marriage, divorce and remarriage. Only one offense, fornication, makes a divorce and remarriage lawful. Hence all remarriages after the divorce where fornication is not the cause of the divorce, are adulterous. When King Herod had taken his brother Philip's wife as his own wife, John the Baptist said, "It is not lawful for thee to have her" (Matthew 14:3-4). For saying this, John lost his head (cf. Matthew 14:9-12; Mark 6:18).

Jesus did not say the guilty party is free to again enter a lawful marriage contract. The Lord plans for one man and one woman to be joined in wedlock, never to be separated until death.

The Lord's teaching on this subject is plain and easy to understand. Adam could not have divorced his wife and taken another one because there was no other one to take. A marriage between one man

and one woman, for their lifetime, was the original home as Jehovah created it. No earthly laws can trample down the law of God or make right that which He has made wrong. God “ties the knot” and he “unties” it. The state has nothing to do with the spiritual union, even though marriages can be easily dissolved under our legal system. This is a very serious matter that concerns many of the homes in the church and in the nation. Modern society sorely needs some teaching on this subject. Our TV programs, daily newspapers, videos, magazines, and many books are all tools filled with suggestions to violate God’s moral laws in sexual activities. God help us to teach the truth “in love” (Ephesians 4:15)



that souls may not be lost eternally in hell.

*“What therefore God hath joined together,  
let not man put asunder.”*



## **Adultery: A Work of the Flesh**

The Bible teaches that those who live in the sin of adultery – or practice adultery – and die in that condition, without genuine repentance and the Lord’s forgiveness, cannot enter into heaven, the eternal kingdom of God. Paul wrote to the saints in Corinth (Corinth was known for its gross immorality):

*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate [homosexuals, NKJV], nor abusers of themselves with mankind [sodomites, NKJV], nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians 6:9-10).*

Paul went on to say that many of these people had made a change in their lives by obeying the gospel and had been forgiven and had become Christians:

*And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (I Corinthians 6:11).*

Luke records in Acts 18:8 that in Paul’s preaching in this wicked city “many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.” People can turn from their sins in genuine repentance and be forgiven, and then live the Christian life and go to heaven by the grace of God (cf. Acts 2:37-38). But the Bible also

teaches that any sin persisted in and unrepented of, will damn the soul; so forgiveness is not unconditional. Divorced people can live in celibacy the rest of their lives. When one repents, he does not continue in sin. This includes unscriptural marriages. This is God's law, and we cannot change it. So when one believes and repents and confesses his faith in Christ and is baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16), he does not continue in a sinful relationship. How can one repent and continue in a sinful relationship where the sin is still practiced? Repentance must be entire (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30). If there is no repentance, there is no forgiveness. Those that live in an adulterous relationship are living in adultery (Colossians 3:5-8). Baptism does not forgive a state of adultery when one continues to live in the adultery. It is true that men and women can be legally married but not be Scripturally married. The state did not create man in the beginning or make the marriage law. The Lord, who did create man and gave him the law governing marriage, gives only one reason for divorce and remarriage: fornication. The innocent party may put away the guilty party on the grounds of fornication. The innocent party has the right to remarry; the guilty party does not. Hence, if fornication is committed, the guilty party may be divorced, or put away, and the innocent party may marry another and not be guilty of adultery but no divorce is Scriptural for both sides. The guilty party does not have the Scriptural permission that the innocent party has (Matthew 19:9). However, the guilty party may repent of his/her sin, live right and go to heaven. If one repents of the adultery, he is forgiven (cf. Matthew 19:12), but the guilty party has forfeited the right to remarry. The

divorce on grounds other than fornication, does not allow either party to remarry; in that case either marriage would begin a state of adultery (I Corinthians 7:10-11).

Again, Paul in writing to the Galatians mentions the works of the flesh which include adultery and fornication and says “that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication... as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).*

Some today want to accept homosexuality and other forms of fornication as “alternate lifestyles.” Such are condemned in the Word of God. We must heed the warnings as given in the Bible that homosexuality is sinful. Furthermore, God never did intend for a man to be married to another man or a woman to be married to another woman, or for a man to have more than one wife. The Lord does not sanction such relationships. With mankind, as with womankind: it is “abomination.” “*Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination*” (Leviticus 18:22; cf. Leviticus 20:10-16; Romans 1:24-32). Individuals practicing homosexuality are commonly referred to as “gays” or “lesbians” (cf. Genesis 19), but such relationships have always been wrong in God’s sight. Homosexuality is sinful. Same-sex “marriages” are wrong. Homosexuality is not God’s plan for marriage.

The Lord’s marriage law is universal; it applies to all people everywhere. Jesus said:

*Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery (Matthew 19:9).*

Paul mentioned “adultery” also in Romans 13:9 as a sin, and John closed the book of Revelation by saying that those who practice certain sexual sins [as whoremongers and fornicators, ASV] shall not go to heaven (Revelation 21:8; 22:15). Pre-marital and extra-marital sex is wrong. God’s law still reads, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14; Romans 13:9). And just as Paul wrote, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” (I Thessalonians 4:3). We must do everything we can to teach God’s word on this important subject.

### **Christ and Paul**

Twice Paul says that a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives:

*For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress though she be married to another man. (Romans 7:2-3)*

*The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she*

*is at liberty to be married to whom she will;  
only in the Lord (I Corinthians 7:39).*

Some have, therefore, assumed that Paul allows no exception, that nothing but death can dissolve the marriage bond. If this conclusion is correct, then we have Christ teaching one thing and Paul teaching another. Christ taught what had been God's law from the beginning, and surely Paul by inspiration would not teach something different. But what is the answer? Why did not Paul mention the exception that Christ gave? The answer is: in giving a law or a rule it is not necessary to always mention the exception or the exceptions. Paul in Romans 7:2-3 was not discussing marriage but the freedom of the Jews now from the Law of Moses, and gave the marriage bond as an illustration. A woman whose husband was dead is free to be married to another man, as the Jews who were once under the Law of Moses were now free by death to be married to Christ. It is not God's will that fornication should be committed. Paul only mentioned what is contained in the law.

In I Corinthians, 7th chapter, he says a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives; he mentions no exceptions (vs. 39). Also, Mark, in chapter 10:11-12 and Luke in chapter 16:18, do not mention the exception as does Matthew. Paul also gave inspired advice under certain conditions (vss. 1-14, 25-26, 40), but he never did contradict Christ. He only mentions some things Christ had not taught about. But, definitely, Paul spoke by the Spirit of God.

The innocent party can extend forgiveness to the guilty person when the sin of fornication has been committed, and so a divorce is avoided and the mar-

riage continues. This does not usually happen. The conclusion is that divorce and remarriage, except it be for fornication, is wrong in God's sight. Even the innocent partner, unjustly put away, has no right to a remarriage without committing adultery. We cannot change God's law. If fornication is not the grounds for the divorce and both of the parties of the marriage remarry, then all four of these persons are living in an adulterous relationship.

Sometimes, Paul's language in I Corinthians 7:12-15 is used as a second cause for a believer's divorce and remarriage.

*But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sancitified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.*

Paul says Christ said nothing about a mixed marriage in His personal ministry. The word *bondage* means slavery. No believer is under obligation to give up faithfulness to Christ in order to keep the unbeliever, or pagan, in the marriage relationship. Let him depart if he desires, but you remain faithful. Of course, if he leaves and commits the sin of fornication, which he possibly will, then

the believer may on this ground obtain a divorce and remarry if she so desires. She is not to give up Christ just to maintain the relationship. Let him go. (cf. I Peter 3:1-4).

### **The Judgment Day**

We should always remember that we cannot hide anything from God. He knows and sees those who are doing wrong and practicing the works of the flesh. No darkness can hide anything from Him (Psalm 139:7-12; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Hebrews 4:13). How long can America continue to disregard God's laws concerning morality? How long can we continue to disregard the laws of marriage, divorce and remarriage? Many today are living in "legalized adultery." They are not Scripturally married but living in sin. Judgment day is coming (Matthew 7:21-27). Eternity is before us.

Too, some think that if they divorce not for fornication, they both can wait, hoping the other one will remarry. Then they believe the first one that has remarried has committed adultery, and that this gives them now a Scriptural right to remarry. This, too, is not what Jesus said. It is often called "the waiting game." It was not a divorce "for fornication." Jesus said that fornication gives one the right to break the bond and remarry, but divorce on grounds other than for fornication does not allow either party to remarry.

### **Many Good Homes**

There are many good homes today, and these provide an influence for good in our nation and in the world. This is how God intended for all homes to be. A husband should always love his wife and

remember that a good wife is heaven's last, best gift to man. Her voice is the sweetest music and her prayers the ablest advocates of heaven's blessing on his head (cf. Proverbs 31:10-31). This will help to avoid the sin of adultery. Paul wrote:

*Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (I Corinthians 7:2).*

The same applies to the wife who has a good husband (cf. Ephesians 5:22-33). She should love him as her only companion in life and a true "help meet." The many good Christian homes in the land today are the "salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). God bless all such homes!

### **Marriages Worthy of Honor**

In Hebrews 13:4, the Bible says:

*Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers [fornicators, NKJV] and adulterers God will judge.*

Marriage should be held honorable in all respects. The doctrine that celibacy is a superior state of purity is false (cf. I Timothy 4:1-3). Marriage is honorable, for God, knowing that it was not good for man to be alone, instituted it for him in Paradise. Jehovah married and blessed the first couple. Christ honored marriage with His presence at the first miracle in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11). God has placed sexual intercourse within the boundaries of marriage, and only there.

Marriage is honorable when the husband and



wife respect each other. Sarah respected Abraham by calling him “lord” (I Peter 3:6). Marriage is honored when husbands are like Elkanah, who was better to his wife than “ten sons” (I Samuel 1:8). Ruth showed “kindness” and virtue to Boaz (Ruth 3:10-11). Aquila and Priscilla had an honorable marriage because they worked together in the cause of Christ by teaching others, hosting the church in their home, and even risking their lives for Paul (cf. Acts 18:26; Romans 16:3-5; I Corinthians 16-19; II Timothy 4:19). Their names are always mentioned together. The willingness of Aquila and Priscilla to lay “down their own necks” for Paul, earned the gratitude of all the churches. They were well known as faithful workers in the Lord’s kingdom. Finally, let us remember the greatest example of love in a marriage is the sacrifice, the nurture, and the cherishing that Christ has for His church.

*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it (Ephesians 5:25).*

Selfishness is the root of most of the trouble between married people. Let us, therefore, be Christians and love each other and live faithfully the Christian life until the end of life’s journey.

### **Heaven – The Home of the Soul**

A sweet type of heaven is home (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:5). It is the home that awaits us beyond the grave, a place of eternal bliss. There the friendships on earth, which cruel death has severed, will never more be broken. In heaven, parted loved ones and friends shall meet again, never to be separated.

It is an inspiring hope that when we become separated here on earth by death, and when a few more years have rolled over the heads of some of us remaining, that we, if we have been faithful Christians “unto death” (Revelations 2:10), shall meet again in heaven. This will be our eternal home. There we will dwell in the presence of our heavenly Father forever. Death will never knock on the door of those mansions. In that land there will not be a single grave or a funeral service.

Aged parents rejoice very much when on special days, like birthdays or holidays, they have their children back home for visits. There is almost always a son or a daughter absent, absent from the country, or perhaps absent from the world. But how our Heavenly Father, who created the earthly home, will rejoice in that day in heaven, the eternal home of the soul, when He and all His faithful children are with Him in glory! How glad parents, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives and cousins will be to meet again after a long separation. That will really be a great “family reunion.” Perhaps a score or two years ago they parted at the grave. Now they meet again, never to be separated. May the circle be unbroken.

Jesus is now preparing a place for us. He said to His disciples,

*I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:2-3).*

Home! “O, think of the home over there.” No sorrow, no crying, no tears, no death (cf. Revelation

21:4-5). Home sweet home! Beautiful home!  
Glorious home! Home with each other! Home with  
the angels! Home with God and Christ, our dear  
Savior: Home! Home! Through the rich grace of our  
Lord and by our obedience to His will, may we all  
reach our heavenly home (Revelation 22:14).

Home sweet Home will always be  
The dearest shrine of memory.  
When Daytime brings with tender cheer  
A smile of hearts, true and sincere.  
Where sweetest dreams of Nighttime keep  
A peaceful watch when we're asleep;  
There welcome waits at all the doors  
And love walks softly o'er its floors.  
For Home sweet Home will always be  
The dearest shrine of Memory.

—Anonymous



# RECEIVING ETERNAL LIFE

From the beginning of the world-yea, from eternity-God had a plan for man's eternal happiness through Christ. Through Adam's disobedience sin entered into the world and physical death passed upon all mankind (Gen. 3; I Cor. 15:22). In Genesis three we have the first hint of a coming Redeemer to save man from sin. God planned for a Savior, the seed of the woman, who would bruise the serpent's head.

And Jehovah said unto the serpent...I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Gen. 3:14-15 ASV).

Many years later God made a promise to Abraham, saying, "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18; cf. Gen. 12:1-3). The promised "seed" referred to Christ (Gal. 3:8, 16). The Lord, therefore, purposed to save men through Christ.

Later, Jesus, God's Son, came into the world in fulfillment of God's purpose (Matt. 1:18-25; 2:1-12; Luke 2:1-20) to save those who believe in Him, all who want to love and do His will (John 3:16; I Tim. 2:4; 4:10; Heb. 2:9; Matt. 11:28-30). Consequently, God had formed a plan which was eternal in reference to the salvation of man, which was executed through Christ and His coming into the world. In this plan, which includes the church, God's great wisdom is shown. The church makes known the "manifold [the variegated, multi-faceted] wisdom of God" (Eph.

3:10), through its blessings to both Jews and Gentiles. The divine church of the Lord shows God's wisdom. He planned it.

### **GOD'S PURPOSE**

Referring to the plan of the Lord for man's salvation, Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome and spoke of those "who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Note his words:

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified (Rom. 8:29-30).

In these verses the purpose of God with reference to the redemption of man through the gospel of Christ is viewed as completed, as it ever will be in fact when the saved are in heaven. The plan and purpose of God, which are certain of fulfillment, are often spoken of as fulfilled when the fulfillment is yet future (for example, see Genesis 17:5).

God "foreknew" that some would obey the gospel. These, when they became obedient to God's will, were foreordained; or appointed, to become conformed to the image of His Son.

Those who were called are "justified," that is, forgiven of their sins. And these are the ones who, in purpose, not actually, are "glorified." Not that this particular man would be saved and that one not, but because, leaving each person free to choose his own destiny, God could clearly foresee what that destiny

would be. The word “foreknew” (v. 28 ASV)-to set before-is the key that unlocks the meaning of this passage. Paul, therefore, is viewing the whole process of redemption according to God’s eternal purpose, through Christ, from the beginning unto its complete fulfillment. Such foreknowledge does not amount to an immutable decree. The doctrine of Calvinism of “irresistible grace,” which amounts to an immutable decree, is incompatible with the free-agency and responsibility of man (Jos. 24:15; John 5:40; Acts 28:24-28). The Bible is harmonious in all of its teaching. It clearly affirms that the whole scheme of redemption was in the mind of God before it was revealed to man, and each person is free to either accept or reject God’s Word.

### **NOT UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION**

Hence, when one obeys the gospel he is elected according to the “foreknowledge of God” (I Pet. 1:2); God foreknew the provisions of the gospel. But God desires that *all* be saved (2 Pet. 3:9). Christ died for *all* (Heb. 2:9). So the verbs in Romans 8:29-30 are in the past tense. In God’s mind Christians had been “foreknown,” “predestinated,” “called,” “justified,” and “glorified.” God has purposed all people who obey Him to eternal life and all who refuse to obey Him to eternal death (hell). “Glorified,” then, is spoken of as a thing done because of the certainty of it. This is what God planned-to bring them to heaven. As proof that the glorification of which Paul speaks in Romans 8:29-30 is not something we can and do possess on this earth, recall that Jesus on the night He was betrayed prayed, “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had

with thee before the world was” (John 17:5). Thus Jesus, having accomplished the work God gave Him (John 17:4), looked forward to receiving the glory which He would possess upon His ascension to the Father (cf. John 17:20; Acts 1:9-11; Phil. 2:9). It is God Himself who foreknew, predestinated, called, justified, and glorified.

The things in the Christian Age were all developed according to this purpose, or intention, of God and revealed to man by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures (Eph. 3:3-5; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). Therefore, faithful Christians receive “eternal glory” that results from the salvation which is in Christ Jesus. Hence, the apostle Paul could go and preach the gospel and endure many trials for the purpose of telling a lost world of God’s plan for man’s salvation. Thus, he wrote:

Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (2 Tim. 2:10).

Also, speaking of God’s plan for man’s redemption, Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, used this phrase: “According to the *eternal purpose* which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:11). People are called by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14), which is God’s power to save (Rom. 1:16); they are called according to God’s purpose. Hence, those who obey this word and answer the gospel call are the ones who are “the called according to his purpose,” the forgiven (2 Tim. 1:9), the saved by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8), and those who are added by the Lord to His church (Acts 2:47; Mark 16:16). Also, the beloved apostle John wrote to Christians:

And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even *eternal life* (1 John 2:25).

### ETERNAL GLORY - WHEN?

This brings us then to the important question of this study: *when* does a child of God receive eternal life? The question has long been before the religious world. Is eternal life now a present possession? Or, does it come at the end of life's faithful journey?

Those who hold to the view of "once saved, always saved" affirm that the moment one is saved (believes in Christ) he has eternal life and cannot be lost. If it is eternal, he cannot lose it. They often use the language of Christ in John 5:24 as a proof-text of their views:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that *heareth* my word, *and believeth* on him that sent me, *hath* everlasting life, and *shall not come into condemnation*; but is passed from death unto life.

Also, among other passages of Scripture, 1 John 5:11, 13 are given:

And this is the record, that God *hath given to us eternal life*, and this life is in his Son. ...These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may *know* that ye *have eternal life*.

Yet, the beloved apostle John said God has "*promised us*" eternal life (1 John 2:25). Surely, therefore, John did not write one thing in his epistle and then contradict it, as he was guided by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). There are no contradictions in God's word (Ps. 119:160). How then



can these statements be harmonized? The answer is very simple.

### **LIFE NOW - HOW?**

John wrote that life is in the Son, and “He that hath the Son hath life”; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (I John 5:11-12). The child of God in this world has spiritual life in Christ. He has passed from death (spiritual) to life (spiritual) (Eph. 2:1-6; Col. 2:13). He is in Christ.

Therefore, to be in Christ is to have life, for Christ is our life (Col. 3:4). In Christ one has “all spiritual blessings” (Eph. 1:3). There are no spiritual blessings out of Christ (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). Jesus said He came that we “might have life,” and have it “more abundantly” (John 10:10). He is “the life” (John 14:6). Some will not come to Christ that they might have “life” (John 5:40). One enters into Christ at his conversion (Gal. 3:27). So, a child of God has life now in Christ.

### **CHRIST, “THAT ETERNAL LIFE”**

John also speaks of Christ as “that eternal life” (1 John 1:2) which, before His advent into the world, had been with the Father. But the believer does not have “that eternal life” eternally in this world. The Scriptures teach that *the one who keeps on hearing the word of Christ and continues to believe continues to have this life in Christ*. He continues to enjoy the spiritual life now and continues to have the hope of heaven in the world to come. Hear John again:

Let that therefore abide in you, which you have heard from the beginning [the gospel]. If that

which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall *continue* in the Son, and in the Father” (1 John 2:24).

Although the obedient child of God enjoys fellowship with God, the Father, and His Son now as a present reality in this life (1 John 1:3, 6, 7), this is not heaven. At the resurrection the just shall be raised to eternal life (John 5:28, 29; Acts 24:15). To obey Christ in this life is to inherit eternal life (Heb. 5:9). But this *eternal life* is more than mere endless existence. Every human being will have endless existence whether he will be saved or lost (Matt. 25:46). Eternal life is a quality of life which emanates from God; it is *union* with the Father in heaven, in an immortal body, and it is conditional (John 6:40; Rev. 21:7). Likewise, *eternal death*, or “the second death,” is eternal *separation* from God in hell (Rev. 20:14, 15; 21:8), in eternal torment (Mark 9:43-48), an endless conscious existence (2 Thess. 1:7-9; cf. Luke 16:23-28; Matt. 10:28).

### **CAN FALL FROM GRACE**

Paul, in writing to the Galatians, warned them of the danger of departing from Christ (Christianity) and going back to the old Law of Moses; it was falling from grace, and being severed from Christ:

Ye are *severed* from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are *fallen away from grace* (Gal. 5:4 ASV).

A child of God is “kept by the power of God through faith” (1 Pet. 1:5), but one can *cease* to believe: “...which for a while believe, and in time of temptation *fall away*” (Luke 8:13).

One can make “shipwreck” of his faith, as did Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:19-20), or “depart from the faith” (1 Tim. 4:1), or deny the faith (1 Tim. 5:8), or cast off his faith (1 Tim. 5:12), and turn aside after Satan (1 Tim. 5:15). Also, one can err from the truth (2 Tim. 2:17-18). The child of God is saved by his faith, but these things can happen to his faith. Thus, it is possible for a child of God to fall from the grace, or favor, of God in this life because of sin and be finally and eternally lost.

### **MUST CONTINUE IN THE FAITH**

To go to heaven, therefore, the child of God must “continue in the faith.” Paul said to the Colossians that God will “...present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight: *if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel*” (Col. 1:22-23). The Scriptures teach that all must “hear” the word of God, and “keep” it to be eternally saved in heaven (Luke 8:15; 11:28; John 8:51).

In the allegory of the Vine and the Branches Jesus teaches that life is in the vine, but fruit-bearing is essential to remaining on the vine. “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:6). The consequences of failure to abide in Christ, the true vine, are fruitlessness and removal. Each Christian is a branch on the vine, but no one can continue to abide in Christ, the vine, except by continued obedience. It is possible for one to *cease* to abide in Christ by disobedience and be cut off of the vine (cf. Rev. 3:16).

So, if the believer fails to abide in Christ, “that eternal life” (Christ) continues, but his participation in that life in Christ ceases. As long as a child of God continues in faithful obedience to the Lord’s will, he continues to enjoy the spiritual life in the Son, bears fruit, and remains on the vine. However, one can become unfaithful and be cut off. Christ said: “Every branch *in me* that beareth not fruit he taketh away” (v. 2). The believer is secure, but *only* the one who *continues* to believe. Thus, this is not *unconditional* security of the believer. Where the faith is, the possession of this life in Christ is, and when the one remits, the other is forfeited. Hence, having the continued life in Christ is conditioned only of a present living (obedient) faith; there must be this continuance. Believers, then, should heed the many warnings against the peril of departing from the faith; for example, Hebrews 10:38: “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.” Also, Christ’s words of admonition, through John the writer, should be noted: “He that *overcometh*, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life” (Rev. 3:5; cf. 2:7; 20:15; 21:27; Phil. 4:3). Why are all of these warnings in the Bible to Christians if a child of God—one who has been saved from his past sins and added to the Lord’s spiritual body, the church—cannot so sin as to be eternally lost?

### **CONTINUED FAITHFULNESS NECESSARY TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE**

The Lord’s promises are conditional: receiving eternal life in heaven depends upon man’s continued faithfulness to the Lord. David wrote that “the Lord

preserveth the faithful” (Psa. 31:23). Therefore, only those who are faithful and endure to the end of life’s journey will receive the blessings of eternal life.

Paul wrote: “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway [rejected, ASV]” (1 Cor. 9:27). This leads us to note that being a believer in Christ (2 Tim. 1:12) and being elected to the apostleship did not secure the apostle Paul’s final salvation. He realized that he could be a “castaway”-“rejected.” Is the Christian’s salvation today more secure than was Paul’s? Surely not.

### NOT “FAITH ONLY”

So, neither John 3:16 nor any other verse of Scripture that speaks of salvation “by faith,” means a mere mental assent, or “faith only,” although this is a commonly taught error in the religious world. But it must be an obedient faith, for Scripture says, “...he that *obeyeth* not the Son shall not see life” (John 3:36 ASV). Also in 1 Peter 2:7-8, faith and obedience are used with synonymous meaning: “Unto you therefore which *believe* he is precious: but unto them which be *disobedient*...” etc.

Note the example of Moses who smote the rock in disobedience to God’s command to speak to the rock (Num. 20:8-12). The Lord said to Moses after this, “Ye *believed* me not.” Moses certainly believed in the existence of God; but, due to a lack of confidence in Jehovah, he failed to do what God told him. So the Lord said: “...ye *believed not* in me” (ASV). To believe in the Lord is to commit ourselves into His hands and to diligently follow His directions-

that is, do what He says.

Thus, always in Scripture the faith that obeys is the faith that saves (cf. Heb. 11:6-7; 30; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 16:30-34; 22:16). One is saved “by faith,” but not by “faith only.” “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and *not by faith only*” (Jas. 2:24). “By faith” means (includes) obedience to all things commanded by the Lord. Paul declared that the faith that avails is the faith that “works by love” (Gal. 5:6). Jesus said if we love Him we will keep His commandments (John 14:15, 23, 24). The apostle John wrote: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (1 John 5:3).

The spiritual life-union with Christ begun here when one is baptized into Christ as a penitent believer (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3, 4)-therefore, will, to the faithful child of God, be consummated in heaven, at the resurrection and the judgment (Phil. 3:20, 21; 1 Cor. 15:51). This is *when* the child of God will receive “everlasting [eternal] life” (John 3:16). As of now, in this world, his inheritance is “reserved in heaven” (1 Pet. 1:4). “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through [in, ASV] Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

### “SHALL NOT” - CONDITIONAL

The “*shall not* come into condemnation” of John 5:24 is conditional. Jesus also said: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that *believeth not* the Son *shall not see life*; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). One is required to believe that he may have eternal life. But the unbeliever can cease to be an unbeliever

and become a believer (Acts 8:12, 13; 18:8). So, just as the unbeliever “shall not see life” is conditional, meaning as long as he continues in unbelief, the believer “shall not come into condemnation” as long as he remains a believer. Both “shall nots” are conditional (cf. Ezek. 18:21-24; 33:1-20; 33:1-20; Jonah 3:4-10). The real question, then, is: *Is it possible for a believer to cease believing and no longer be able to claim this promise?* The answer is yes. This we have already noted in our study.

A believer can become an unbeliever and die in that condition and be eternally lost. The example of the Israelites marching in the wilderness and their failure to enter into Canaan is given as a warning to Christians (1 Cor. 10:1-12; Rom. 15:4; Heb. 3:7-4:11; Ps. 106:12, 13, 24). Since the Christian’s abiding in Christ is conditional, eternal life in heaven is also conditional and is spoken of as a promise. The child of God does not have eternal life independently and unconditionally until he reaches the eternal home, heaven. So long as he lives on earth, the possibility of his falling away cannot be shut out (cf. 2 Tim. 4:10). Hence, there is a need for continual watchfulness (Heb. 4:1, 11; 2 Pet. 2:20-22), for by his own sins he can become separated from God (Isa. 59:2).

### **PRESENT TENSE - YET FUTURE**

It is true that Scripture states in John 5:24 (cf. 1 John 5:11, 13) that the believer “*hath* everlasting [eternal, ASV] life.” But sometimes God, when making a promise of something that is definite to come to pass, uses the present tense. Take, for

example, the promise of the birth of Christ, given by Isaiah some seven hundred years before the event: “For unto us a child *is* born, unto us a son *is* given...” (Isa. 9:6). Again, “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them *hath* the light shined” (Isa. 9:2; cf. Matt 4:14-16). So the Lord sometimes speaks of events that have not transpired as though they had transpired (cf. Rom. 4:13; John 10:16; Acts 18:10; Josh. 6:2). The believer, then, has eternal life in what sense in this world? He has it in hope, in prospect.

### IN HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE

Paul said he was “in hope of eternal life” (Tit. 1:2; cf. 3:7). Hope is made up of desire and expectation based on God’s Word. But one does not have what he hopes for. Paul declared:

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it (Rom. 8:24-25).

David Lipscomb commented on this passage: “The things that are present, that we now enjoy, are not objects of hope; for who hopes for that which he now possesses? Hope looks to the future blessings” (*Commentary on the New Testament Epistles, Romans*, p. 150). And, commenting on Titus 1:2, he wrote: “That which the apostle had in view in prosecuting the work of his apostleship is the hope for himself and for all believers of eternal life” (*ibid.*, *Titus*, p. 262). So, hope is future in fruition. If Paul had “eternal life,” then surely he would not have said



he was “in hope” of it. If the thing hoped for-eternal life- is now in actual possession by the believer today, how can it be said to be the object of his hope? Hope looks toward something that is not a present possession.

Furthermore, Paul said the Christian’s hope is laid up for him “in heaven” (Col. 1:5). That is the thing hoped for. Eternal life is in the next world, beyond the final day of judgment (cf. 1 Tim. 6:19; Gal. 6:8). Hence, eternal life is not in “hope” if Christians have it as a present reality.

### CHRIST’S STATEMENT

Note Christ’s words:

And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and *in the world to come eternal life* (Mark 10:29-30).

Thus, by the phrase, “in the world to come” in Mark 10:29-30 and Luke 18:30, Christ is not referring to this present Christian Age but to the heavenly. At the end of Mark 10:30 Jesus was speaking of eternal life. He was explaining to the people in verses twenty-nine and thirty how it would be to live the Christian life in this world and then to receive “in the world to come eternal life” as a reward.

Guy N. Woods correctly stated:

Eternal life is not a present possession of the Christian; it is a promise....The believer has eternal life in prospect and promise, but not in realization (*Commentary on The New Testament Epistles: Peter, John and Jude*, pp. 316, 317).

Albert Barnes, a well-known commentator of the nineteenth century, wisely observed:

...the usual phrase to denote the condition of the righteous after the resurrection is *eternal* or *everlasting life* (*Commentary on Daniel*, vol. II, p. 260).

Therefore, to follow Christ in this life is to inherit eternal life “in the world to come.” This is the clear teaching of God’s Word.

C.E.W. Dorris said: “Eternal life is in heaven. Hence, we must wait until we reach heaven to come in possession of it” (*Commentary on Mark*, p. 241). Also H. Leo Boles correctly stated: “The reward for leaving all and following Christ begins in this world, but has its greatest realization in the life to come” (*Commentary on Luke*, p. 352). This reward is laid up, ready for us, reserved for us, and will be given to the faithful children of God at the consummation of all things at the final judgment. Then the wicked “shall go away *into* everlasting [eternal, ASV] punishment: but the righteous *into* life eternal [eternal life, ASV]” (Matt. 25:46).

### THE ETERNAL KINGDOM

When one is born again, he enters into the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5), the church of our Lord (Acts 2:47). But there is the eternal phase of the kingdom, the heavenly kingdom above. [These are sometimes spoken

of as the “first dominion” and the “second dominion,” or phase.] Heaven is entered by faithful endurance. Paul and Barnabas exhorted the Christians “to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation *enter into* the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Likewise, Peter in his second epistle to children of God, instructed them to abound in the Christian graces and, if so, they would never fall. “For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the *everlasting kingdom* of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:5-11; cf. Col. 1:13; Heb. 12:28; Dan 2:44; 2 Tim. 4:18). In 2 Peter 1:11 the writer speaks of the Christian’s entrance into the future and final aspect of the eternal kingdom.

The Lord, through the apostle John on the Isle of Patmos, said to the suffering saints in Smyrna: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10), and “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (v. 11). Paul, in prison at Rome nearing the end of his earthly life, expressed that he would receive his crown of righteousness at the day of judgment (2 Tim. 4:6-8). But if eternal life or the crown of righteousness comes at the moment one is saved from his past sins and becomes a Christian, then logically we must concede to the doctrine of the eternal security of the child of God, regardless of how he may live afterward.

However, as we have seen in this study, eternal life is now in promise, in prospect. The child of God does not have it in actuality. We are not in heaven in this life. Eternal life awaits the faithful child of God at the end of life’s journey as a jeweled crown. Christians do not now possess eternal life as a present reality.

At the judgment then is the time when the Lord will give His sheep, who hear His voice and follow Him, eternal life (John 10:27-28). The faithful child of God eagerly expects eternal life because of God's precious promise (cf. Rom. 15:4). He does not, and must not disparage the immutable word of God (Heb. 6:13-19). Hence, "The righteous hath hope in his death" (Prov. 14:32; cf. Jas. 1:12).

### **OLIPHANT AND HARDEMAN EXPLAIN**

As further confirmation of these truths, consider some statements from the *Oliphant - Rice Debate* held in Dallas, Texas in January 1935. In his first speech with John R. Rice on the proposition: "*The Scriptures teach that a child of God who has been saved by the blood of Christ can so sin as to be finally lost,*" W. L. Oliphant stated:

Since much of this discussion will probably hinge upon the question of when the child of God receives eternal life, I want to get before you the Bible teaching on that question in the very beginning. It is not my purpose to array scripture against scripture. I do not believe the word of God contradicts itself....Now the Bible teaches that the child of God will be given eternal life in the world to come.

.....

The Christian does not have eternal life independently and unconditionally until he reaches "the world to come" (Mark 10:30). So eternal life in the actual sense, possessed by an individual in his own right, is a promise to be fulfilled in the world to come.

Then in his last speech, commenting on John 10:27-28, he said:

Let us analyze the passage: (1) They are sheep. (2) They hear his voice. (3) They follow him. (4) He gives them eternal life. (5) They shall never perish. It is after they have become sheep, heard the voice of Christ and followed him, that he gives them eternal life. How long are we to follow Christ? "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10) pp. 411, 413, 517).

In discussing the proposition of the "*impossibility of apostasy*" with Ben. M. Bogard, in Little Rock, Arkansas, in April 1938, N. B. Hardeman gave the following explanation concerning when the child of God receives eternal life:

Now when? Matt. 25:46, when the great last day is come, and the separation is made, these shall go away "into everlasting life." But again, you ask now what is the harmony in it? I John 2:25, and get it, and see just the beauty of all of God's word harmonized rather than one passage arrayed against the other. John said, "And this is the promise that he hath promised us." What is it, John? "Eternal life." So, how does a child of God have eternal life? Has it in promise; has it in prospect. ..."He that believeth on the Son" hath everlasting life. There is no contradiction in it. ... When does he go away into it? At the final judgment. Friends, that's the way to handle the Bible, and not have contradictions everywhere. ... eternal life is promised at the end of our earthly pilgrimage. Why, of course, I believe that the child

of God has eternal life. Has it now? Has it in prospect just as John said-has it in promise; and there is no man that has left father and mother, son or daughter, wife or houses, for my sake and the gospel, but he shall receive now in this time those very things an hundredfold-now watch it-and in the world to come eternal life. When do I get in the real possession of it? At the last great day. ... when life's battles are fought, when its race has been run, and the victories are all won; then the righteous who are faithful unto the end will go away into life eternal, there to receive a crown of righteousness, that fades not away (*Hardeman-Bogard Debate*, pp. 289, 290).

In his *Tabernacle Sermons*, Hardeman said: "...a man can change from a believer to an unbeliever, and he can reach that state where it is impossible for him to be saved" (vol. V, p. 31). So, a child of God can "fall from grace" (Gal. 5:4 ASV) and be lost. If not, why the warning, "take heed lest he fall"? (1 Cor. 10:12). And why did Peter write to Christians and say, "...for *if* ye do these things, ye shall never fall"? (2 Pet. 1:10). What if one does not do these things as a child of God? He will fall from God's grace. Too, the writer to the Hebrew Christians said:

Take heed, *brethren*, lest there be in any of *you* an evil heart of unbelief, in *departing* from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of *you* be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:12-13; cf. v. 14).

Thus, the Scriptures teach that eternal life is a promise to be fulfilled in the world to come. One

does not receive eternal life the very moment he believes, and one saved by the grace of God can depart from the path of faithfulness and finally inherit everlasting shame and ruin. No one can harmonize the doctrine of "once saved, always saved," or that a child of God now in this life has eternal life in "actual possession," with the Bible. To do otherwise, we would have to redefine the very meaning of eternal. Eternal life comes at the end of the probationary period of our life: "...and the *end* eternal life" (Rom. 6:22 ASV; cf. 2:6-11). It is impossible for a child of God, who lives in faithful obedience to the Lord's will to the end of this life, to be eternally lost (cf. Isa. 14:24, 27). But a child of God can so sin as to be eternally lost.

### **HOW TO RECEIVE ETERNAL LIFE**

Christ, in His prayer to the Father just before going to the cross, declared:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent (John 17:3).

This is the source of eternal life; this is the manner that it is to be obtained. To *know* God and Christ is comprehensive; it is more than a mere knowledge of their existence-it is to obey their will in all things (Heb. 5:9; Acts 10:34, 35). God has provided, through the Savior, the means of obtaining eternal life, the right to endless glory. It is by loving obedience to His will (Tit. 2:11-12; I Jno. 2:3).

The hope of eternal life is the dearest of all hopes to mankind. Heaven, with all of its beauties and glories, is awaiting the faithful children of God (Rev.

21:1-27; 22:1-5). This is the eternal purpose of God. But it is the character and not the person that is elected to obtain God's blessings. He is anxious to save all, but man must be willing to accept God's gift on His terms (2 Pet. 3:9; Matt. 7:21; 1 Tim. 2:4). "And *whosoever will*, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). One must hear the gospel and believe in Christ as the Son of God, sincerely repent of all sins, confess faith in Christ, and be baptized (immersed) for the remission of sins, and then live faithfully the Christian life to the end of life's earthly journey to receive eternal life (cf. Mark 16:16; Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:38; 8:35-39; 16:30-34; 18:8; Rom. 10:9-10; Rev. 2:10). As an illustration of God's election of grace, we are reminded of an oft-repeated saying, "God votes for us, the devil votes against us, and each man casts his own deciding vote."

## CONCLUSION

God predetermined, therefore, that all who obey Him would be eternally saved, but He left man up to exercising his own will in the matter. Man has the moral freedom to reject the teaching of the gospel and "judge" himself "unworthy of everlasting life" (Acts 13:46). Man's receiving eternal life is not an arbitrary thing on God's part. Through Ezekial the prophet, Jehovah said:

As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way, and live (Ezek. 33:11).

Eternal life, then, is the reward which awaits the righteous, the greatest blessing which can be bestowed upon man by the grace of God. The Lord will render to



the faithful children of God “eternal life,” but to the wicked He will render “eternal punishment.” Christ is the only way to the Father. He said: “I am the way . . . no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).” In keeping God’s commandments there is “great reward” (Psa. 19:11).

Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city (Rev. 22:14).

We often sing:

*We read of a place that's called heaven,  
It's made for the pure and the free;  
These truths in God's Word He has given,  
How beautiful heaven must be.*

*How beautiful heaven must be,  
Sweet home of the happy and free;  
Fair haven of rest for the weary,  
How beautiful heaven must be.*

-- Mrs. A. S. Bridgewater

*Earth holds no treasures but perish with using,  
However precious they be;  
Yet there's a country to which I am going:  
Heaven holds all to me.*

*Heaven holds all to me,  
Brighter its glory will be;  
Joy without measure will be my treasure:  
Heaven holds all to me.*

-- Tillit S. Teddlie

The poet has written:  
*This world, however beautiful,  
was never meant to be  
The place that we would call our home  
for all eternity.  
And though we would not choose to leave,  
a loving God knows best,  
And in His time He lifts us  
to a place of rest.  
For He has built a mansion  
where His children will abide  
Free from pain and sorrow,  
forever at His side.  
And though these ones we love so much  
Have left our present sight  
And passed into a better world  
of majesty and light,  
Someday we'll be together  
in our Father's home above  
Where we'll thank Him for His mercy  
and praise Him for His love.*

-- Author Unknown

How great to hear one day these words: "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25:21). This is the glorious hope that every faithful child of God possesses. This is *Receiving Eternal Life* (Matt. 25:46).

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord (I Cor. 15:58).

## **BEYOND THE SUNSET**

*Beyond the sunset, O blissful morning,  
When with our Savior heav'n is begun;  
Earth's toiling ended, O Glorious dawning,  
Beyond the sunset, when day is done.*

*Beyond the sunset, no clouds will gather,  
No storms will threaten, no fears annoy;  
O day of gladness, O day unending,  
Beyond the sunset, eternal joy!*

*Beyond the sunset, a hand will guide me  
To God, the Father, whom I adore;  
His glorious presence, His words of welcome,  
Will be my portion on that fair shore.*

*Beyond the sunset, O glad reunion,  
With our dear loved ones who've gone before;  
In that fair home-land we'll know no parting;  
Beyond the sunset for evermore.*

*-- Virgil P. Brock*



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THE OLD FRAME BUILDING BURNED APRIL 1, 1934.

THE CONGREGATION WAS ESTABLISHED ABOUT 1838.



**PRESTON COTHAM**

November 23, 1920 –

February 5, 1998

(BROTHER OF

PERRY COTHAM)

**THOMAS S. BOYD**

October 17, 1864 –  
November 6, 1902



**PARENTS OF  
NANNIE BOYD COTHAM  
AND  
GRANDPARENTS OF  
PERRY B. COTHAM**



**EMMA HOWARD  
BOYD**

November 4, 1867 –  
February 20, 1935



*Over the years of doing worldwide evangelistic work, I have visited and preached in Thailand and distributed many Bibles. In this picture J. C. Bailey (left) and Otis Gatewood (right) are standing with me. We three were honored by Dorsey Traw (local evangelist) and the church in Chiang Mai, Thailand, for our many years of foreign mission work in many countries of the world, at their lectureship in December 1988.*



*Some of the preachers who attended the Asian Bible Lectureship in Chiang Mai, December 4 - 8, 1988.*



*In connection with evangelistic meetings and the distribution of tracts and Bibles, I have spoken on many lectureships in some seventy nations of the world. Here I am shown speaking in the lectureship in Indonesia in 1992. Barry Hatcher was the American missionary who was then working in this country.*



*In July 1988, following a lectureship in Thessaloniki, Greece, I visited Mike Davidow in Warsaw and Sopot, Poland. While there I purchased a van load of Bibles in the Polish language. In this picture Mike (to my left) is standing with me by the old van, loaded with Bibles, ready for distribution. Mark, Mike's brother, is standing to our right. Mark also helps in the spreading of the gospel in Poland. I bought over 7,000 Bibles for Poland.*



*In June and in November, 1993, I visited Kiev, Ukraine (a part of the former Soviet Union). While there, I bought and distributed many Bibles besides teaching classes each day in one of the universities and then preaching at night. In November, 1998, I worked with Randy Watson, missionary, in Riga, Latvia. While preaching for the church in the evenings, we also visited a few of the high schools and universities in the city during the day, in which I taught some lessons and gave out Russian Bibles. We also visited an orphanage in which I gave some heavyweight used clothing to a few of the children. I also spoke to all the adults and children in an assembly and gave to them a Bible in their language. This picture shows a few of the children who came out of the building with me, with their Bibles, as I was leaving. My translator, also a member of the church and a university professor, is standing to my right. Latvia was once a part of the great Soviet Union.*



*This picture shows a portion of the crowd that attended my seminar in Kakinada, India, one morning in one of the early meetings. The crowds continued to increase in attendance each year, with hundreds of people being baptized in each of the seminars. I always distributed tracts and Bibles on each visit to India.*





*I have made eleven trips to India, the second most populated nation in the world. I have bought over the years many hundreds of Bibles for the people (in their dialect) and distributed thousands of my tracts. Nehemiah Gootam (third from left, sitting) is the director of the Kakinada School of Preaching. Joshua Gootam (second from right, sitting) is his brother; he directs the Bible correspondence studies, does radio work, conducts gospel meetings (along with his brother), helps to teach in the school of preaching, and does much printing of literature. He has translated and printed my tracts for India and Nepal. Both of these men were among the first converts to New Testament Christianity made by J. C. Bailey when, in 1963, he went to India to preach the gospel. The church has grown tremendously in India in the last few years, and these men have had a great part in this growth. This picture shows the class of preachers in the school in September 1992, while I was there. Great crowds continued to attend my seminars held in Kakinada each year.*



*This is a picture of some of the Christians that attended one of the morning sessions of the seminar in Chiang Mai, Thailand, December 4 - 8, 1988.*

## THE COTHAM BROTHERS



This picture was made when we three attended the “Home-coming” for the Antioch church, May 20, 1990. Preston to my left and Harry to my right.



I am grateful for the assistance that the good people of the Skillman Ave. church in Dallas, Texas, have given to me since June 1, 1972, which has enabled me to go into many lands with God’s redeeming message of salvation, in obedience to the Great Commission of Christ. May God bless all who have had a part in any way in this wonderful work.

—PERRY B. COTHAM



*THE ROSE STILL GROWS BEYOND THE WALL*

*Near a shady wall a rose once grew,  
    Budded and blossomed in God's free light,  
Watered and fed by morning dew,  
    Shedding its sweetness day and night.*

*As it grew and blossomed fair and tall,  
    Slowly rising to loftier height,  
It came to a crevice in the wall,  
    Through which there shown a beam of light.*

*Onward it crept with added strength,  
    With never a thought of fear or pride,  
It followed the light through the crevice's length,  
    And unfolded itself on the other side.*

*The light, the dew, the broadening view  
    Were found the same as they were before;  
And it lost itself in beauties new,  
    Breathing its fragrance more and more.*

*Shall claim of death cause us to grieve,  
    And make our courage faint and fall?  
Nay! Let us faith and hope receive:  
    The rose still grows beyond the wall,*

*Scattering fragrance far and wide,  
    Just as it did in days of yore,  
Just as it did on the other side,  
    Just as it will forevermore.*

*—A. L. Frink*

*GOD HAS PROMISED*

*GOD hath not promised  
Skies always blue,  
Flower-strewn pathways  
All our lives through;  
God hath not promised  
Sun without rain,  
Joy without sorrow,  
Peace without pain.*

*But God hath promised  
Strength for the day,  
Rest for the labor,  
Light for the way,  
Grace for the trials,  
Help from above,  
Unfailing sympathy,  
Undying love.*

*—Author unknown*

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*So live that when thy summons comes to join  
The innumerable caravan that moves  
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take  
His chamber in the silent halls of death,  
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,  
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed  
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave  
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch  
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.*

*-William Cullen Bryant*

OUR THREE CHILDREN

(Pictures made when they graduated from high school)



Perry Coleman  
(1960, Grand Prairie, TX)



Nan Elizabeth  
(1963, Grand Prairie, TX)



Harry Don  
(1970, Big Spring, TX)





**Perry B. Cotham**

Perry B. Cotham was born and reared by Christian parents. He was baptized at an early age and soon began preaching in 1929, at age 17. Perry and I are natives of western Kentucky; I from Graves County, and he from Calloway County. We were classmates at Freed-Hardeman University and at Murray (Kentucky) State University. We have preached at many of the same places over the years. Our parents worshipped together at the old Antioch church in Graves County where M. C. Kurfrees preached his first sermon earlier.

We have admired the great depth of knowledge which Brother Cotham has of the Scriptures, the enthusiasm with which he preaches the gospel of Christ and his willingness to go to hard places to teach the truth. He has become one of the most outstanding gospel preachers in the Brotherhood and is recognized as one of the most loyal to the church. Perry has preached in all fifty of the states of America and in all the inhabited continents of the world, including more than seventy-five nations. His tracts have been distributed throughout the Brotherhood, and most of them have been translated and printed in different foreign languages.

Perry believes, practices and teaches the need for congregations to fulfill the Great Commission of the Lord by conducting gospel meetings and in the distribution of tracts and Bibles, in all parts of the world.

Adron Doran, President Emeritus  
Morehead State University, Morehead, Kentucky