



Desert Tree Ministry

Bible Training Center

Baptism

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Baptism

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Baptism

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In this small book, we will address some of the common questions regarding baptism such as:

- What is the meaning of baptism?
- Why are some people baptized more than one time?
- What steps are required before baptism?
- What is the test of discipleship that is required before baptism?
- etc...

Steps in Conversion

Repentance, faith, and baptism are the requisite steps in conversion. {Ev 306.3}

We could certainly talk about many details of conversion and how it happens, but let us try to keep it simple as we find it here in three steps: repentance, faith, and baptism.

(Step 1) Repentance

John the Baptist's strong message was,

Matthew 3:2 Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!

Peter also taught repentance before baptism and instructed his listeners to "Repent and ... be baptized."

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Repentance is abandoning sin in our lives and in our hearts, which leads to a real and practical change in the life. Before being baptized, a person must repent and abandon sin in his life.

Repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it. We shall not renounce sin unless we see its sinfulness; until we turn away from it in heart, there will be no real change in the life. {SC 23.2}

Christ is the source of every right impulse. He is the only one that can implant in the heart enmity against sin. Every desire for truth and purity, every conviction of our own sinfulness, is an evidence that His Spirit is moving upon our hearts. {SC 26.3}

Notice also the instruction of the apostle James. While he does not use the word "repent," the idea of turning away from sin is clearly portrayed.

James 1:21-22 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Here we find two instructions: "lay aside" and "receive."

- What are we to lay aside? We are to lay aside anything that separates us from Jesus. We are to lay aside all filthiness and all sin.
- What are we to receive? We are to receive the saving Word of God, implanted in our hearts.

In Matthew 13:18-23, we find an explanation of the parable of the sower. The soil represents the heart and the seed represents the Word of God. Of the four qualities of soil, only one produced fruit. The first example hears the Word of God, but does not understand. The next two examples receive the Word of God, but do not bear fruit. Only the last example produces fruit.

Matthew 13:23 But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

- Hears the Word
- Understands the Word
- Produces fruit

Acts 2:41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

It is those candidates who received the word who were baptized. The meaning of receiving the word means that they not only heard the words of truth with their ears, but that they understood the truth and let it take root in their hearts. They were willing to repent of their sins and to make changes in their lives as a result of understanding truth. We will study the importance of bearing fruit later.

(Step 2) Faith

You have confessed your sins, and in heart put them away. You have resolved to give yourself to God. Now go to Him, and ask that He will wash away your sins and give you a new heart. Then believe that He does this because He has promised. This is the lesson which Jesus taught while He was on earth, that the gift which God promises us, we must believe we do receive, and it is ours. {SC 49.3}

Acts 8:36-37 *Now as [Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch] went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."*

This passage reminds us of the Old Testament teaching in Deuteronomy 6:5 repeated by Jesus:

Mark 12:30 *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*

Let us be quick to recognize that believing with all your heart is not the same as simply repeating the words, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God."

Matthew 7:21-23 *Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'*

James 2:19 *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble!*

The devils believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but they are not changed or converted by that belief. They are not changed to be like Jesus. They know the truth, but practice sin. Scripture teaches that we must love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We must give ourselves 100% to God, without exception, without reservation.

In like manner you are a sinner. You cannot atone for your past sins; you cannot change your heart and make yourself holy. But God promises to do all this for you through Christ. You believe that promise. You confess your sins and give yourself to God. You will to serve Him. Just as surely as you do this, God will fulfill His word to you. If you believe the promise,—believe that you are forgiven and cleansed,—God supplies the fact; you are made whole, just as Christ gave the paralytic power to walk when the man believed that he was healed. It is so if you believe it.

Do not wait to feel that you are made whole, but say, "I believe it; it is so, not because I feel it, but because God has promised." {SC 51}

(Step 3) Baptism

Baptism is a ceremony that publicly declares the repentance and faith of the individual being baptized. Baptism itself does not change the person. It is not the water in the river that washes sins away, but the person decides to be baptized because he has repented from his sin and believes in Jesus to be the "Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world." Before knowing Jesus as his Friend, this person lived a life of sin serving himself and Satan. But the Holy Spirit has been working on his heart and he desires to live for Jesus now. He has abandoned his life of sin. He has faith that Jesus has already forgiven his sins. Through baptism, he publicly declares that he has repented and that he will now live a life of obedience through faith.

The Bible uses a very clear and vivid illustration of life and death to help us understand baptism. We'll look at it briefly here, and in more detail in a later chapter.

Romans 6:4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

A converted person does not continue with life as normal without changing anything. Baptism is a symbolic death and burial of the sinful life and a resurrection of a new life. It is a symbol of a very real and genuine change in the life.

All who have taken the baptismal vow have solemnly consecrated themselves to the service of God. {CG 530.3}

Conclusion

In summary, baptism is a symbol showing that the candidate:

- Has repented (abandoned his sins)
- Has faith (believes on Jesus with all his heart)
- Has received the word (heard and understood truth)
- Is walking in newness of life (is obedient to the truth)

Stories of Baptism

In this section, we will attempt to take a brief look at each story of baptism in the New Testament. Each story can teach us important lessons about baptism and preparing candidates for baptism. Please read each Bible passage first before continuing to read the section in this book.

(Story 1) John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-17; Luke 3:3-18)

John was sent by God to baptize with water to prepare the way for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

John 1:33 I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

John's preaching attracted many people, yet he was a simple man. His diet and clothing were simple. His preaching was a clear message of repentance. He did not need a fancy church or other expensive materials. He preached outside in nature by the river, and many people were convicted of the truth and baptized by him.

Matthew 3:5-6 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

While many people were baptized by John, he did not baptize everybody who came to him requesting baptism.

Matthew 3:7-8 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance."

Many of the scribes and Pharisees came confessing their sins, and asking for baptism. They had exalted themselves as better than other men, and had led the people to entertain a high opinion of their piety; now the guilty secrets of their lives were unveiled. But John was impressed by the Holy Spirit that many of these men had no real conviction of sin. They were timeservers. As friends of the prophet, they hoped to find favor with the coming Prince. And by receiving baptism at the hands of this popular young teacher, they thought to strengthen their influence with the people.

John met them with the scathing inquiry, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance; and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." (Matthew 3:7-9) {DA 105}

Notice that John was impressed by the Holy Spirit that these men were not ready for baptism. This is a key point. As we work with baptismal candidates, we need to be impressed by the Holy Spirit. We need His wisdom and guidance at every step. Had John baptized these "vipers," his message and his work would have been weakened.

Let us identify one way that the Holy Spirit can help us determine if a candidate is ready for baptism or not. It is easy to get confused between the ideas of judging someone and identifying their fruit. We do not want to be judgmental. Was John the Baptist right in refusing baptism to these people?

- They professed to believe the truth.
- They confessed their sins.
- They wanted to be baptized.

But apparently, these things were not enough evidence to convince John to baptize them. Notice what John told them when he refused to baptize them:

Matthew 3:8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance.

John went on to explain what he meant by bearing fruits.

"And now also," said the prophet, "the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." (Matthew 3:10) Not by its name, but by its fruit, is the value of a tree determined. If the fruit is worthless, the name cannot save the tree from destruction. John declared to the Jews that their standing before God was to be decided by their character and life. Profession was worthless. If their life and character were not in harmony with God's law, they were not His people. {DA 107.1}

This message of identifying the character by the fruit was later repeated by Jesus in His advice on how to identify false prophets.

Matthew 7:16-20 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

This in no way conflicts with Jesus' teaching about judging others earlier in the same chapter in the Bible:

Matthew 7:1 Judge not, that you be not judged.

There is one thing that we have no right to do, and that is to judge another man's heart or impugn his motives. But when a person presents himself as a candidate for church membership, we are to examine the fruit of his life, and leave the responsibility of his motive with himself. But great care should be exercised in accepting members into the church; for Satan has his specious devices through which he purposes to crowd false brethren into the church, through whom he can work more successfully to weaken the cause of God. {Ev 313.3}

See also: 5T 217-235.

(Story 2) 3000 in One Day (Acts 2:37-42)

In this story, three thousand people were baptized on the same day! This was truly a mass baptism. Let's begin to analyze this story by looking at the message that was being preached.

The message of Peter and the other disciples was a message of repentance and baptism in the context of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus.

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Remember, Jesus had just suffered and died a very public death. And now, news of His resurrection was spread everywhere. They courageously preached a clear, uncompromising message to the people. But they were not alone in their preaching. As promised, Jesus had sent the Helper (the Holy Spirit) to bless them and their work.

Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 2:6 And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.

The disciples had spent several years with Jesus, listening to His preaching and teaching. Spending time with Jesus was an important qualification for them to be effective in winning souls for Jesus. Now it was their turn to preach and teach. The disciples were bold and clear in their speaking because they were filled with the Holy Spirit and were speaking under His direction. Here is what Peter preached about:

- the prophecies, and how they were being fulfilled
- the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus
- repentance, salvation from sin, and baptism

Each person heard the message in his own language! Peter understood the importance of teaching. He taught the baptismal candidates many things before baptism.

Acts 2:40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."

Among the crowds that came to hear Peter preach were men who were highly educated. Some of them had been through theology school and were supposed to be experts in the Scriptures.

Acts 2:5 *And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.*

John did not have a theology degree, but his teaching attracted both uneducated and highly educated people. Many of those who were baptized were devout men and studied the Scriptures, but the same people were responsible for Jesus' death out of ignorance (Acts 3:17). But ignorance didn't excuse them. They needed to repent.

Among those who listened to the disciples were devout Jews, who were sincere in their belief. The power that accompanied the words of the speaker convinced them that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. {AA 43.1}

Acts 2:41 *Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. (See Matthew 13:23)*

During His life on this earth [Christ] had sown the seed of truth and had watered it with His blood. The conversions that took place on the Day of Pentecost were the result of this sowing, the harvest of Christ's work, revealing the power of His teaching. {AA 44.4}

The apostles were able to baptize three thousand people in one day because they were reaping, not sowing. Jesus had been planting the seeds of truth throughout His life, especially the last three and a half years. Many people heard truth, and the seed of truth took root, but had not grown much. Now, understanding the gospel more fully, the people were ready to be baptized. Now they were ready to receive the Word of God rather than reject it.

Notice that baptism implies a certain level of spiritual maturity. These people were not baptized when the seed was first sown, but were baptized as a harvest of Jesus' previous work.

The lives of the newly baptized members demonstrated the fruits of true conversion as we read in these verses:

Acts 2:42,46-47 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Here is a summary of some of those fruits:

- They continued steadfastly in doctrine. They did not abandon what they learned.
- They visited with each other and they met daily in the temple.
- They continued steadfastly in prayer.
- Their reputation with the people was good. Their lives were witnesses to the internal change

(Story 3) Simon (Acts 8:4-25)

Simon was a sorcerer who had practiced his sorcery and magic for a long time. Many people respected him and thought that he was working through the power of God. But when Philip came into town preaching the true gospel, Philip also did miracles, healing the paralyzed and lame and casting out demons.

Acts 8:12-13 When [the people] believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

Philip preached about two things:

- the kingdom of God
- the name of Jesus

This was the teaching that led many people to be baptized. Simon the sorcerer also believed in Jesus and was baptized! Not long after his baptism, Simon was observing how Peter and John were laying

hands on people and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. He wanted to be able to do this, too.

Acts 8:18-19 *And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."*

Peter's rebuke that followed was harsh:

Acts 8:20-23 *But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."*

Although Simon was baptized, his actions showed that his conversion was shallow and that his motives were not pure. Perhaps he thought that being baptized would give him greater influence over the people. And he thought that by offering money, he could purchase the gift of God. But he was deeply mistaken, and received a swift rebuke from Peter.

He valued the gift of God as a means of worldly gain. {COL 253.2}

The world has no right to doubt the truth of Christianity because there are unworthy members in the church, nor should Christians become disheartened because of these false brethren. How was it with the early church? Ananias and Sapphira joined themselves to the disciples. Simon Magus was baptized. Demas, who forsook Paul, had been counted a believer. Judas Iscariot was numbered with the apostles. The Redeemer does not want to lose one soul; His experience with Judas is recorded to show His long patience with perverse human nature; and He bids us bear with it as He has borne. He has said that false brethren will be found in the church till the close of time. {COL 72.3}

(Story 4) The Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40)

In this story, we find an Ethiopian man and Philip. As the Ethiopian was returning back home from worshiping at Jerusalem,

God sent Philip to talk with him. The same day, the Ethiopian was baptized by Philip. Let's look at some of the details of this story.

First, the Bible gives us a number of details about this man from Ethiopia.

Acts 8:27-28 So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.

Let's summarize:

- He was from the African country of Ethiopia.
- He was a eunuch, a man dedicated to his work, and loyal to the queen.
- He was a man high in the government of the queen of Ethiopia.
- He was a man of trust and integrity; he was accountant and treasurer for the entire country of Ethiopia.
- He was loyal to God.
- He used his time wisely by studying the Bible as he traveled.

The Ethiopian did not know everything, but he was faithful to the truth that he knew already. He was loyal to the queen. He was honest and trustworthy. He was not only loyal to the queen, but loyal to God, as he went to Jerusalem to worship. All this was good, but he sensed a need for more truth and made good use of his time by reading the Bible as he traveled.

Acts 8:28 ...he was reading Isaiah the prophet.

Most people do not study the book of Isaiah, or any other book of the Bible, as they travel. But this man loved Bible study so much that he was studying as he traveled in his chariot!

The Bible also helps us understand a little bit about the character of Philip. He allowed his life to be controlled by the Spirit.

Acts 8:26, 29-30 Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. ... Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot." So Philip ran to him.

Acts 8:39-40 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus.

Philip was obedient to the Spirit and approached the chariot. The Bible says that he ran to the chariot! We don't know how far he had to run, but he had to put forth some effort to obey. When he got to the chariot, God used Philip to help the Ethiopian understand what he was reading. God could have revealed the meaning through the Holy Spirit, but in this case, He chose to work through Philip.

Acts 8:29-31 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot." So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

The Holy Spirit through Philip helped the Ethiopian understand that this passage was talking about Jesus. God could also have sent an angel to explain the book of Isaiah, but God chose to work through Philip. The Holy Spirit and angels teamed up together with Philip for the salvation of this man.

As Philip and the Ethiopian rode in the chariot, Philip explained the Scriptures. Philip's teaching was powerful because it was simple and because it was based on Scripture. Philip's first concern was that the Ethiopian know Jesus.

Acts 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

We do not know how long Philip explained the Scriptures to the Ethiopian. It probably was not more than a few hours. But in that

short time, the Ethiopian had accepted the message of Jesus and understood the teaching of baptism because when he saw water, he requested baptism.

Acts 8:36-37 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." ...

The baptismal candidate (the Ethiopian) asked a very important question: "Is there anything that prevents me from being baptized?" It would be well if each baptismal candidate today would carefully review his life before baptism. Baptism is not simply a shallow ritual but a symbol of a deep and complete commitment to God.

Philip's response is equally instructive. Philip taught that baptism is for somebody who believes with all of his heart. Philip wanted to know that the Ethiopian was 100% committed to the truth, with no reservations.

In this story, we have several ingredients of a successful baptism:

- We find the baptismal candidate himself searching in Scriptures for the truth.
- We find Philip, a servant of God, willing to be controlled by the Spirit.
- We find the Holy Spirit and angels, eager to cooperate with humans for the salvation of humans.

(Story 5) Saul (Acts 9:10-22; 22:3-16)

Saul was an enemy of God's people. His objective was to search out followers of Jesus and throw them into prison or kill them. One day, on his way to capture followers of Jesus, he was stopped suddenly by a bright light. Jesus appeared to him. From this moment on, Saul's heart was changed. An encounter with Jesus is what each baptismal candidate needs. Notice Saul's response showing a change in heart:

Acts 9:6 *So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

Now, Saul was completely blind. Before, he was self-confident. Now, he was obliged to depend on his friends to lead him into the next town. For three days, Saul did not eat or drink.

But then Jesus also spoke to Ananias in a vision and instructed him to go visit Saul and to restore his sight. Ananias, a disciple of Jesus, was understandably hesitant to visit Saul, but Jesus reassured Ananias that He had chosen Saul to do a special work. When Jesus repeated His command to "Go," Ananias went. Notice how Ananias greeted Saul:

Acts 9:17 *And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."*

"Brother Saul." Amazingly, Ananias greeted Saul as his brother. Ananias was not only obedient to Jesus to go and visit Saul, but he showed a spirit of forgiveness by greeting Saul in this way. Then, only three days after encountering Jesus, Saul was baptized.

Acts 9:18 *Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.*

Three days earlier, Saul was determined to hunt and eliminate Jesus' disciples. In a brief encounter on the road with Jesus, his heart was changed, and now he became the opposite of what he was: he became a disciple of Jesus!

Acts 9:19 *So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.*

Follow-up training is important for newly baptized people. Saul had a lot of things to change in his life, and it was helpful for him to spend some time with the other disciples.

Acts 9:20 *Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.*

Saul was baptized just three days after encountering Jesus.

Ananias was led by the Holy Spirit

Saul's fruit thereafter showed the genuineness of his conversion. He went immediately out and started preaching. We should give new converts a work to do immediately.

When souls are converted, set them to work at once. And as they labor according to their ability, they will grow stronger. It is by meeting opposing influences that we become confirmed in the faith. As the light shines into their hearts, let them diffuse its rays. Teach the newly converted that they are to enter into fellowship with Christ, to be His witnesses, and to make Him known unto the world.

None should be forward to enter into controversy, but they should tell the simple story of the love of Jesus. All should constantly search the Scriptures for the reason of their faith, so that, if asked, they may give "a reason of the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear."

The best medicine you can give the church is not preaching or sermonizing, but planning work for them. If set to work, the despondent would soon forget their despondency, the weak would become strong, the ignorant intelligent, and all would be prepared to present the truth as it is in Jesus. They would find an unfailing helper in Him who has promised to save all who come unto Him. {Ev 355-356}

The marvelous light that illumined the darkness of Saul was the work of the Lord; but there was also a work that was to be done for him by the disciples. Christ had performed the work of revelation and conviction; and now the penitent was in a condition to learn from those whom God had ordained to teach His truth. {AA 121.1}

(Story 6) Cornelius (Acts 10)

In Acts 10, we find a fascinating story about Peter, unclean animals in a sheet, and Cornelius. Cornelius was baptized the same day that Peter first visited him. Let's learn the Biblical context of this baptism.

Cornelius was not a Jew; he was a Gentile. But he already had a Christ-like character in many ways. Read again the following verses and identify character traits of Cornelius.

Acts 10:2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

Acts 10:22 And they said, "Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you."

Acts 10:32-33 "Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter...." So I sent to you immediately...

Let's summarize:

- He did not just talk about religion, but he was sincere and faithful in practicing religion.
- He shared the light that he knew with others. He led all his household to fear God.
- He gave offerings generously.
- He had developed a habit of continual prayer.
- The fruit of his beliefs was evident by his good reputation even among the Jews.
- He practiced unquestioning prompt obedience.

As we look at the character traits of Cornelius, we find that he was already advanced in his spiritual life. He was more advanced than many Christians in the church today! Cornelius was following all the light that he had. Yet God wanted to reveal more light to him. God loves to reveal more light to those who accept light already given.

To bring more light to Cornelius, God sent an angel with a message. But the angel did not bring the full message. He instructed Cornelius to call Peter, who would then tell Cornelius what he must do. God could have chosen the angels to do all of His work, but He wants us humans to be involved, too. Like Peter, we are a team together with God and the angels. Read the message of the angel to Cornelius:

Acts 10:5-6 "Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."

Notice that the angel said, "He will tell you what you must do." Certainly, God could have sent the angel to give Cornelius the message directly. But God's plan is different. He wants people to be involved in reaching people. The witness of a converted sinner sharing the gospel is a powerful influence.

God also sends the Holy Spirit to work. We are a team together with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 10:44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.

When we make an effort to do God's work, He blesses. As Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came in a special measure on Cornelius and those listening with him.

Another important point in this story is that Cornelius was a spiritual leader in his family and among his friends.

Acts 10:2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household,...

Acts 10:24 And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.

Even before Peter met with Cornelius, Cornelius was already showing signs of conversion. One sign is that he did not keep light to himself, but shared it with his family. He called together his relatives and close friends to hear Peter's message. He could not keep the light of truth to himself!

A man is no sooner converted than in his heart is born a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; the saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart. The Spirit of Christ illuminating the soul is represented by the light, which dispels all darkness; it is compared to salt, because of its preserving qualities; and to leaven, which secretly exerts its transforming power. {4T 318, 319}

Perhaps the central lesson God wanted to teach Peter was that the Gospel is for everybody.

Acts 10:28 God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality."

Some people are ready to accept the truth, but we miss them because of our prejudice. Perhaps sometimes we tend to focus our efforts on a certain people group: our tribe, the poor, the rich, those people that we like the best. But Scripture clearly teaches that the truth is for everybody. God showed Peter the importance of bringing light to people outside of his people group and who were considered pagan and unclean.

When Peter preached, he chose the most effective subject: he preached about Jesus. The most important training for a baptismal candidate is not necessarily to memorize the 28 doctrines. Memorizing the doctrines without knowing Jesus as their Savior is not useful. Peter preached Jesus to Cornelius. In all of our doctrinal teaching, Jesus should be the center focus.

Then to that company of attentive hearers the apostle preached Christ--His life, His miracles, His betrayal and crucifixion, His resurrection and ascension, and His work in heaven as man's representative and advocate. As Peter pointed those present to Jesus as the sinner's only hope, he himself understood more fully the meaning of the vision he had seen, and his heart glowed with the spirit of the truth that he was presenting. {AA 138.5}

Yet another lesson we can learn from this story is the importance of evaluating the baptismal candidate before baptism. Analyze carefully the question asked here:

Acts 10:47-48 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

It is wise for us to step back and ask this question regarding a baptismal candidate. "Is he or she ready? Is there any reason we know of why he or she should not be baptized?"

The fruits that Cornelius showed after baptism confirmed that his conversion and baptism was genuine.

The conversion of Cornelius and his household was but the first fruits of a harvest to be gathered in. From this household a wide-spread work of grace was carried on in that heathen city. {AA 139.3}

In the next chapter of Acts, we find a brief mention of Cornelius again.

Acts 11:15-17 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"

In this case, the baptism of the Holy Spirit came just before the baptism of water. The Holy Spirit was given in response to their belief, but did not replace the need for water baptism. They were baptized with the Holy Spirit and with water.

(Story 7) Lydia (Acts 16:13-15)

Acts 16:13-15 And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

While the Biblical account of Lydia is not lengthy, it gives us a few clues about her life before baptism.

- Her habit was to meet with other women on Sabbath to pray.

- She worshiped God.
- She allowed the Lord to open her heart.
- She obeyed the truth she learned from Paul.

(Story 8) Jailer and his family (Acts 16:16-34)

Acts 16:32-33 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.

The Bible says "immediately" he and all his family were baptized. Just a few hours before, the jailer had fastened the feet of Paul and Silas to stocks to ensure that they would not escape the prison. But the jailer's heart was changed rapidly and miraculously and was willing to wash their wounds a short time later. What were some of the influences that brought conversion to the jailer?

- Paul and Silas were sustained by a divine power. The jailer recognized that they were freed by supernatural power.
- Paul and Silas remained joyful and sang even when they were suffering and being mistreated.
- Paul and Silas were not afraid during the violent midnight earthquake.
- Paul and Silas demonstrated Christlike forgiveness. They ministered to the jailer before their own wounds had been washed.

During the brief time that the jailer had observed Paul and Silas, he was impressed by their practical, godly lives and was convicted of his sins.¹ His immediate request was "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" It was not a lengthy evangelistic series or a series of Bible studies that brought conviction to the jailer. It was the Holy Spirit working on his heart through the godly example of Paul and Silas that brought conviction.

1 See {AA 426.2}

After responding, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household," Paul and Silas taught the jailer and his family from the Word of God. They preached about Jesus. The Word of God continued to change the jailer's heart and "that same hour" he washed their wounds. Then, "immediately," while it was still night, he and his family were baptized!

When a sense of the loving-kindness of God is constantly refreshing the soul, it will be revealed in the countenance by an expression of peace and joy. It will be manifest in the words and works. And the generous, holy Spirit of Christ, working upon the heart, will yield in the life a converting influence upon others. {AG 325.2}

It was a simple question the jailer asked in the middle of the night: "What must I do to be saved?" But in this question, Paul and Silas could detect a sincere conviction of sin. And this conviction of sin demonstrated by action was enough evidence to Paul and Silas that the jailer was open to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is the source of every right impulse. He is the only one that can implant in the heart enmity against sin. Every desire for truth and purity, every conviction of our own sinfulness, is an evidence that His Spirit is moving upon our hearts. {SC 26.3}

In summary, Paul and Silas baptized the jailer and his family immediately because:

- They showed conviction of sin.
- They showed evidence of this conviction by washing the wounds of Paul and Silas
- Paul and Silas probably knew that they were not welcome in this town and that they would be sent away soon.

(Story 9) Corinthians (Acts 18:8)

Acts 18:8 *Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.*

This passage does not give us very many details about the baptismal candidates. But the two key words here are probably "hearing" and "believed." The hearing came before believing. They were convinced by what they heard to believe and be baptized. This shows us the importance of sharing with others the truth that we know.

Romans 10:14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

Summary

We have now looked at all the stories of baptism in the New Testament. We will now try to summarize a few of the lessons found in these stories.

First, we notice that the evangelist doing the baptizing was under God's control. In the majority of cases, the evangelist was given a direct command of God to "go" and preach in that town or to "go" and speak to that person. (See John 1:33; Acts 8:26; 9:11; 16:10) The Bible also often reveals that the evangelist was filled with and guided by the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 2:8; 8:18; 8:29; 9:17; 16:6-7) As we do the work of evangelism and search for candidates for baptism, it is important that we pray to God for wisdom and for the Holy Spirit. We are powerless by ourselves, but through the Holy Spirit, we may be used by Him for the conversion of many people.

Second, we will identify several influences that encourage a person to desire a changed life. The primary influence is the Holy Spirit. As we have just seen, it is the power of the Holy Spirit that changes the hearts of the people.

After the descent of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were so filled with love for Him and for those for whom He died, that hearts were melted by the words they spoke and the prayers they offered. They spoke in the power of the Spirit; and under the influence of that power, thousands were converted. {AA 22.2}

Another life-changing influence is Jesus. When Saul encountered Jesus, He was a changed man. Meeting Jesus is life-changing. As we preach and teach, always remember to make Jesus the center of your teaching.

The very first and most important thing is to melt and subdue the soul by presenting our Lord Jesus Christ as the sin-pardoning Saviour. Never should a sermon be preached, or Bible instruction in any line be given, without pointing the hearers to the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29. Every true doctrine makes Christ the center, every precept receives force from His words.

Keep before the people the cross of Calvary. Show what caused the death of Christ--the transgression of the law. Let not sin be cloaked or treated as a matter of little consequence. It is to be presented as guilt against the Son of God. Then point the people to Christ, telling them that immortality comes only through receiving Him as their personal Saviour. {6T 53-54}

Another life-changing influence is the example of a disciple of Jesus. God could choose angels to evangelize people, but usually God includes humans among the influences that bring a person to Jesus. It was to us humans, not angels, that the command was given, "Go, and make disciples." Observing the witness of the lives of Paul and Silas was what brought the jailer in Philippi to baptism. Remember, our daily example is the most powerful sermon we can preach!

It is not only by preaching the truth, not only by distributing literature, that we are to witness for God. Let us remember that a Christlike life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Christianity, and that a cheap Christian character works more harm in the world than the character of a worldling. {ChS 26.1}

A well-ordered Christian household is a powerful argument in favor of the reality of the Christian religion--an argument that the infidel cannot gainsay. All can see that there is an influence at work in the family that affects the children, and that the God of Abraham is with them. If the homes of professed Christians had a right religious mold, they would exert a mighty influence for good. They would indeed be the "light of the world." {AH 36.2}

Lastly, we can learn a lot by making a list of the character traits and habits of the baptismal candidates in the stories. Let's do this in the next chapter!

The Test of Discipleship

One day a number of people were baptized in the river. A small crowd of bystanders had paused their fishing and other activities to witness the baptism. When all the candidates had been baptized, the pastor made an appeal to the crowd. "Is there anyone else here who would like to be baptized today? If you would like to be baptized, please step forward to the edge of the river." A few volunteers stepped forward, and after a brief consultation, one or two of them were baptized!

On another occasion the pastor looked over the group of candidates before baptism. One lady was still wearing her bracelets. The pastor informed her that she could not be baptized while wearing those things. Embarrassed, the lady took off her bracelets and threw them to the ground. Then, she was baptized.

These few examples represent hundreds of similar stories. When we reflect on them, questions arise. Were these people prepared for baptism? Did the volunteer who was baptized after he responded to the call to come to the river understand the meaning of baptism? Was he a disciple of Jesus? Did the lady remove her jewelry because of social pressure or because she was convicted of sin in her heart? Unfortunately, in many cases, such people are not converted and quickly return to their old way of life after baptism. An extreme example of this is the man who was seen drinking at the local neighborhood bar on his way home from being baptized!

All of these questions are related to one word: preparation. How much, if any, preparation is needed for a candidate to be baptized? Is it biblical to baptize somebody the same day that he asks for

baptism? Does a person need to know all the fundamental beliefs of the church before being baptized? We will address these questions in the sections that follow. Permit me to lay a foundation before returning to these questions.

Baptizing Disciples

In the Great Commission given by Jesus to His disciples, we find a small but important detail that helps us understand the process and importance of preparation for baptism.

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

How much authority did Jesus have to give this command? All authority in heaven and on earth.

The first part of Jesus' command was to go. "Go" is an action word. That means we must be active in searching for people.

The second part of Jesus' command was to make disciples. Making disciples is the job of every person who is already a disciple of Jesus. These disciples are to be made from all the nations. Making disciples involves not only teaching the truth but living the truth.

The third part of Jesus' command was to baptize them. Who are to be baptized? The command is not to baptize "all nations," but to baptize "them," those who are already disciples.

The fourth part of Jesus' command was to teach them. Just like disciples were formed through teaching before baptism, teaching is also vital after baptism.

Jesus taught that we are to make disciples and baptize them. The disciples are made before they are baptized. Who then is qualified to be a disciple? The Bible continues to give us light on this topic.

Defining a Disciple

A disciple is one who follows his leader. As Jesus chose various people to become His disciples He said, "Follow me," and they followed Him. A disciple imitates his leader and practices what his teacher teaches. While Jesus' disciples followed Him, they were obviously not perfect. Many of them were uneducated in schools when they became disciples and had a lot of things to learn and unlearn. But they were disciples. Study the following verses for a deeper understanding of the biblical definition of a disciple.

Matthew 15:1-3 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?"

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

Matthew 21:6 So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them.

Luke 6:40 (See also Matthew 10:24) A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.

Luke 14:26-27 If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

Luke 14:33 So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

John 8:31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed."

John 10:27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

John 13:35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 15:8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

From the above verses, we can understand a lot about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. A disciple of Jesus is a person who is trained to be like Jesus. A disciple does not follow tradition, but he follows God's law. A disciple denies self and follows Jesus. A disciple is obedient. A disciple is loyal to God above any other person, even family members. A disciple forsakes all that he has, and values eternal life above any other advantage. A disciple abides in the Word. A disciple hears God's voice. A disciple has love for others. A disciple bears fruit.

A careful study of the preceding verses will help us to understand the principles of being a disciple. The Great Commission tells us to baptize disciples. If we are to baptize people who are disciples already, we must learn how to identify disciples. We must remember that only God can fully know the heart of a person. However, Scripture provides us with numerous examples of characteristics that help us to identify disciples by their fruits. Many people claim to be disciples, but are really false disciples.

1 John 2:4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

James 2:10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

Identifying Disciples

Studying principles is important, but it is often especially helpful to study real-world examples. What can we learn from the previous stories that will help us to identify disciples who are ready for baptism?

- Does the candidate bear fruits worthy of repentance? [John the Baptist]
- Is the candidate a person of trust and integrity? [Ethiopian]
- Is the candidate loyal to God? [Ethiopian]

- Is the candidate searching for truth in the Bible?
[Ethiopian]
- Does the candidate show humility and sorrow for his sins?
[Saul]
- Does the candidate only talk about religion or is he/she sincere and faithful in practicing religion? [Cornelius]
- Does the candidate show evidence of conversion by sharing the light that he knows with others? [Cornelius]
- Is the candidate faithful in giving offerings (and tithe)?
[Cornelius]
- Has the candidate developed a habit of continual prayer?
[Cornelius]
- What is the reputation of the candidate? Have others recognized that he/she is under the influence of the Holy Spirit? [Cornelius]
- Does the candidate practice unquestioning prompt obedience? [Cornelius]
- Is it the candidate's habit was to meet regularly with other believers each Sabbath? [Lydia]
- Does the candidate worship God? [Lydia]
- Does the candidate allow the Lord to open his/her heart?
[Lydia]
- Does the candidate obey the truth he/she learns? [Lydia]
- Does the candidate show conviction for sin? [Jailer]

The Test of Discipleship

By now, I hope it is clear that preparation of the candidate is necessary before baptism. But how much preparation is necessary? How do we know that a person is a disciple? That question is answered simply here:

The test of discipleship is not brought to bear as closely as it should be upon those who present themselves for baptism. ... When they give evidence that they fully understand their position, they are to be accepted. {Ev 308.3}

The test of discipleship is not brought to bear as closely as it should be upon those who present themselves for baptism. It should be understood whether they are simply taking the name of Seventh-day Adventists, or whether they are taking their stand on the Lord's side, to come out from the world and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing. Before baptism, there should be a thorough inquiry as to the experience of the candidates. Let this inquiry be made, not in a cold and distant way, but kindly, tenderly, pointing the new converts to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Bring the requirements of the gospel to bear upon the candidates for baptism. {Ev 311.2}

Character is the true test of discipleship. {5T 305.4}

Obedience is the test of discipleship. It is the keeping of the commandments that proves the sincerity of our professions of love. When the doctrine we accept kills sin in the heart, purifies the soul from defilement, bears fruit unto holiness, we may know that it is the truth of God. When benevolence, kindness, tenderheartedness, sympathy, are manifest in our lives; when the joy of right doing is in our hearts; when we exalt Christ, and not self, we may know that our faith is of the right order. "Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." 1 John 2:3. {MB 146.3}

Notice that there is a test of discipleship before baptism. Obedience is the test of discipleship, and character is the true test of discipleship. It is love (our character) that leads us to obedience.

John 14:15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.

(For more study on this topic of "the test of discipleship," please read in the book *Steps to Christ* chapter 7 entitled, "The Test of Discipleship.")

The focus is not on any given amount of time, but on this test of discipleship. How long does it take to administer the test of discipleship? No doubt, many stories in the book of Acts recount rapid baptism. The most extreme, perhaps, is the jailer in Philippi who believed in Jesus after midnight and was baptized before sunrise! Others like the Ethiopian eunuch and the 3,000 among Peter's audience were baptized within hours of hearing the

message preached to them. Saul was baptized three days after his encounter with Jesus on the road.

Some people, after a shallow reading of these passages, use these stories to excuse an attitude of "baptize now, teach later." "After all," they say, "the Ethiopian was baptized the same day that Philip joined him in his chariot. We should baptize anybody who says, 'I believe.'" But often the test of discipleship is abandoned, and a non-disciple is baptized.

There is need of a more thorough preparation on the part of candidates for baptism. They are in need of more faithful instruction than has usually been given them. The principles of the Christian life should be made plain to those who have newly come to the truth. None can depend upon their profession of faith as proof that they have a saving connection with Christ. We are not only to say, "I believe," but to practice the truth. It is by conformity to the will of God in our words, our deportment, our character, that we prove our connection with Him. Whenever one renounces sin, which is the transgression of the law, his life will be brought into conformity to the law, into perfect obedience. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. The light of the word carefully studied, the voice of conscience, the strivings of the Spirit, produce in the heart genuine love for Christ, who gave Himself a whole sacrifice to redeem the whole person, body, soul, and spirit. And love is manifested in obedience. The line of demarcation will be plain and distinct between those who love God and keep His commandments, and those who love Him not and disregard His precepts. {CCh 295.5}

How do we prove our connection with Jesus? What is the test of discipleship? We just read,

"It is by conformity to the will of God in our words, our deportment, our character, that we prove our connection with Him."

A careless, "baptize now, teach later" attitude is a dangerous attitude because it actually harms and weakens the church. It is an attitude that allows us to baptize many people rapidly, but one that neglects the methodical preparation of the candidates. It is an attitude that encourages the baptism of hypocrites rather than disciples. The Bible, however, records in many cases that the candidate has passed this test of discipleship before baptism.

In some cases, an evangelist or pastor wants to make himself look good by reporting many baptisms. This desire also leads to the neglect of the test of discipleship.

God would be better pleased to have six truly converted to the truth as the result of their labors, than to have sixty make a nominal profession, and yet not be thoroughly converted. {Ev 320.1}

The accession of members who have not been renewed in heart and reformed in life is a source of weakness to the church. This fact is often ignored. Some ministers and churches are so desirous of securing an increase of numbers that they do not bear faithful testimony against unchristian habits and practices. Those who accept the truth are not taught that they cannot safely be worldlings in conduct while they are Christians in name. Heretofore they were Satan's subjects; henceforth they are to be subjects of Christ. The life must testify to the change of leaders. {Ev 319.3}

Our focus should not be on the amount of time a candidate must spend in preparation for baptism, but on a quality examination and evaluation of the candidate. We cannot directly read the heart of a person, but we can identify his fruit, and it is in this manner that we are to conduct the test of discipleship.

Matthew 7:20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Using some of the principles laid out in this chapter, we can ask the Holy Spirit to guide us and to give us wisdom to identify fruits of conversion in the candidate for baptism. Who has the candidate chosen as their leader? Are they a disciple of Satan or a disciple of Jesus? Does a reformed life indicate a renewed heart?

We have a solemn responsibility to not weaken the church. Remember, our goal is not to weaken the church with hypocrites but to strengthen it with disciples. Before recommending a candidate for baptism, we must thoroughly evaluate the fruits of their lives to determine if they are ready.

The preparation for baptism is a matter that needs to be carefully considered. The new converts to the truth should be faithfully instructed in the plain "Thus saith the Lord." The Word of the Lord is to be read and explained to them point by point. {Ev 308.1}

All who enter upon the new life should understand, prior to their baptism, that the Lord requires the undivided affections. The practicing of the truth is essential. The bearing of fruit testifies to the character of the tree. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. The line of demarcation will be plain and distinct between those who love God and keep His commandments and those who love Him not and disregard His precepts. There is need of a thorough conversion to the truth. {Ev 308.2}

Our ministering brethren make a decided failure of doing their work in a manner directed by the Lord. They fail to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. They have not gained an experience through personal communion with God, or a true knowledge of what constitutes Christian character; therefore many are baptized who have no fitness for this sacred ordinance, but who are knit to self and the world. They have not seen Christ or received Him by faith. {Ev 319.2}

Challenges to Preparing Candidates

- Satan knows the importance of preparation and will send distractions.
- It can take a lot of time and effort to prepare someone for baptism.
- Sometimes there are pressures for a pastor or evangelist to baptize many people so that his reports look good.
- Sometimes the pastor or evangelist is not converted.

Advantages to Preparing Candidates

- The church becomes stronger.
- The newly baptized members are much more likely to remain in the church.
- The newly baptized members will be more active in evangelism.

See also:

Signs of the Times January 11, 1883 Tests of Christian Character

Examination and Vow

Church Manual

The content of this section is excerpts copied from *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual Revised 2005 17th edition*, chapter 6, "Church Membership"

Public Examination—The church has a right to know concerning the faith and attitude of every individual applying for church membership. It is proper for a public examination of all candidates to be held prior to their baptism, preferably in the presence of the church. If this should prove to be impracticable, then it should be brought before the church board or a committee appointed by the church board, such as the board of elders, whose report should then be rendered to the church prior to the baptism. When the alternative mentioned under the preceding section is used, opportunity should be given for candidates to give public expression of their desire to unite with the church and to be identified with and by the church.

Baptismal Covenant—A summary of doctrinal beliefs, prepared especially for the instruction of candidates for baptism, together with Baptismal Vow and Certificate of Baptism and Commitment, have been adopted by the denomination as a baptismal covenant. A printed copy of this covenant, with the Certificate of Baptism and Commitment properly completed, should be furnished to all those who are accepted for church membership by baptism. In the case of those received on profession of faith, an appropriate certificate will also be given.

This summary of doctrinal beliefs is especially prepared for the instruction of candidates for baptism. Each candidate should be thoroughly familiar with the teachings contained in this summary and with the duties enjoined upon believers and by practice demonstrate a willing acceptance of all the doctrines taught by Seventh-day

Adventists and the principles of conduct which are the outward expression of these teachings, for it is "by their fruits ye shall know them."

Prospective members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, before baptism or acceptance on profession of faith, should be carefully instructed from the Scriptures in the fundamental beliefs of the church as presented in chapter 3 (see p. 9) of this Church Manual. In order to assist evangelists, pastors, and others in giving such instruction and making it Scripture-based and practical, a specially prepared summary appears as an appendix on pages 219-223 of this Church Manual and in the Minister's Handbook.

Baptismal Vow—Candidates for baptism or those being received into fellowship by profession of faith shall affirm their acceptance of the doctrinal beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the presence of the church or other properly appointed body. (See p. 31.) The minister or elder should address the following questions to the candidate(s), whose reply may be by verbal assent or by raising the hand.

Vow

1. Do you believe there is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons?
2. Do you accept the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary as the atoning sacrifice for your sins and believe that by God's grace through faith in His shed blood you are saved from sin and its penalty?
3. Do you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and personal Saviour, believing that God, in Christ, has forgiven your sins and given you a new heart, and do you renounce the sinful ways of the world?
4. Do you accept by faith the righteousness of Christ, your Intercessor in the heavenly sanctuary, and accept His promise of transforming grace and power to live a loving, Christ-centered life in your home and before the world?
5. Do you believe that the Bible is God's inspired Word, the only rule of faith and practice for the Christian? Do you covenant to spend time regularly in prayer and Bible study?

6. Do you accept the Ten Commandments as a transcript of the character of God and a revelation of His will? Is it your purpose by the power of the indwelling Christ to keep this law, including the fourth commandment, which requires the observance of the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath of the Lord and the memorial of Creation?
7. Do you look forward to the soon coming of Jesus and the blessed hope, when “this mortal shall . . . put on immortality”? As you prepare to meet the Lord, will you witness to His loving salvation by using your talents in personal soul-winning endeavor to help others to be ready for His glorious appearing?
8. Do you accept the biblical teaching of spiritual gifts and believe that the gift of prophecy is one of the identifying marks of the remnant church?
9. Do you believe in church organization? Is it your purpose to worship God and to support the church through your tithes and offerings and by your personal effort and influence?
10. Do you believe that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit; and will you honor God by caring for it, avoiding the use of that which is harmful, abstaining from all unclean foods; from the use, manufacture, or sale of alcoholic beverages; the use, manufacture, or sale of tobacco in any of its forms for human consumption; and from the misuse of or trafficking in narcotics or other drugs?
11. Do you know and understand the fundamental Bible principles as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Do you purpose, by the grace of God, to fulfill His will by ordering your life in harmony with these principles?
12. Do you accept the New Testament teaching of baptism by immersion and desire to be so baptized as a public expression of faith in Christ and His forgiveness of your sins?
13. Do you accept and believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant church of Bible prophecy and that people of every nation, race, and language are invited and accepted into its fellowship? Do you desire to be a member of this local congregation of the world church?

A Personalized Vow

MY BAPTISMAL VOW

By voluntarily submitting to the rite of baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, I have given to the highest authorities of heaven my solemn oath of allegiance. I have gratefully accepted God's invitation to separate from the world and put away my sinful beliefs and practices. I have broken all connection with Satan and his agencies and have publicly acknowledged the Lord, Jehovah, as my Ruler. Joyfully I have fully yielded myself to love Him alone and obey all His commandments.

In my old nature, with a carnal mind, I was completely unable to obey--or even want to obey--any of God's righteous requirements. But God's gift of enmity made me long for something better than slavery to sin. God has promised to give me all things that pertain to life and godliness, and that by claiming His exceedingly great and precious promises, I may be a partaker of His divine nature and escape the corruption of sin. Therefore I have gratefully accepted His gift of salvation. Now, having died to sin and having been born again by the Holy Spirit, I have received from God a new life, a new nature, a new mind--the mind of Jesus. While I recognize that there is nothing good in me, and that I can do nothing good by myself, I am fully confident that according to His promise my Creator is able to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law in me and completely restore me into His image.

Therefore, trusting Christ's promise that by abiding in Him and working together with Him, I can do all things God requires through Christ who strengthens me, I have taken these baptismal vows. I have pledged and consecrated myself entirely to God's service. Having surrendered all that I am and all that I have to God, I am now bound under the most sacred covenant obligations to Him.

Having openly renounced the world, sin, and the service of Satan,

1. I WILL remain separate from the world, its spirit, and its idolatrous practices.
2. I WILL keep all worldly considerations secondary to my new obligations.
3. I WILL no longer live in pride and self-indulgence, and will withdraw my affections from dress and display.
4. I WILL oppose evil and will put no wicked thing before my eyes.
5. I WILL keep my whole life--body, mind, and soul--dead to the world, to sin, and to all selfishness.
6. I WILL seek for heavenly things--the glory of God, honor in the sight of heaven, and eternal life.
7. I WILL accept nothing but the Bible as the authority on belief and the standard of practice.

Having chosen to live a new life, the life of Jesus,

1. I WILL practice the same love, grace, unselfish benevolence, self-denial, and self-sacrifice that characterized His life.
2. I WILL live the truth and the principles of the gospel before the world.
3. I WILL show that Jesus is my Teacher and that I am learning of Him.
4. I WILL keep my mouth a sanctified mouth, and my tongue a converted tongue, speaking evil of no one.
5. I WILL resolutely deny self and crucify my affections and desires, bringing all my thoughts into obedience to the will of Christ.
6. I WILL live a righteous life like Jesus and pattern my life after His.
7. I WILL place myself where I may obtain all possible incentives and encouragement in the Christian life.

As a subject of Christ's kingdom,

1. I WILL do what pleases Jesus.
2. I WILL be subordinate to the will of God and will remain under the control of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
3. I WILL keep the sacred law of Jehovah and will faithfully obey all the commandments of the Holy Scriptures.
4. I WILL keep the seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth commandment as a sign that I have chosen to obey God.
5. I WILL think, speak, and act according to the will of God.
6. I WILL be holy and uncorrupted.
7. I WILL believe what God says, obey His Word, and receive His grace to accomplish whatever He commands.

Desiring others to experience joy and freedom as subjects of Christ,

1. I WILL devote my life to the Master's service.
2. I WILL put my heart and mind and soul into the work of extending the kingdom of God.
3. I WILL use all the ability God has given me in personal, earnest labor for the salvation of sinners.
4. I WILL spend no money selfishly, but will give all I can spare to advance the work of God.
5. I WILL make earnest, self-denying efforts to promote the work of soul-saving in the hardest parts of the field.
6. I WILL do good works for the purpose of seeking to save others who don't know the truth.
7. I WILL let my light shine forth to the world, that others, by seeing my good works, may glorify God.

Recognizing my responsibility to assist my brothers and sisters in Christ,

1. I WILL guard the interests of my brothers and sisters in the church.
2. I WILL keep alive in the church the principles of self-denial and self-sacrifice which Christ followed.
3. I WILL do all in my power to build up, not tear down, the church of Christ.
4. I WILL discourage pride, covetousness, and unbelief.
5. I WILL love my brethren and constantly seek for unity and harmony.

Desiring to give supreme honor to God, my Creator and Redeemer,

1. I WILL worship and obey Him.
2. I WILL speak of His goodness and praise His holy name.
3. I WILL do nothing which would bring an evil report upon the Christian name.
4. I WILL use all my abilities, knowledge, affections, speech, and property to glorify His name and advance His kingdom.
5. I WILL seek God's honor and not my own in whatever I eat, drink, wear, or whatever I do.
6. I WILL distinguish myself by showing humility of mind.
7. I WILL be loyal and true to my allegiance to God.

A Joyous Funeral

As we look around at the various baptism customs in the churches today, we see a lot of variation. For example, some churches baptize infants, while other churches wait to baptize people until they believe in Jesus and can make their own decision. Some churches sprinkle or pour water on a person, while others believe in immersion. Nowhere in Scripture do we find the idea of infant baptism, sprinkling, or pouring. Scripture teaches baptism by immersion.

Immersion

John 3:23 Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there.

Mark 1:9-10 It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.

Acts 8:38-39 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.

Jesus gave us His example of being baptized by immersion. The Bible is clear that He was baptized by John in the Jordan and that He came up out of the water. John was baptizing where there was much water because baptism involves totally submerging the person in water.

Why was Jesus baptized by immersion and not by sprinkling? Sometimes sprinkling a person would seem easier than finding enough water to totally submerge a person. To help us understand baptism by immersion, the Bible uses the illustration of death, burial, and resurrection. When somebody dies, he stops breathing, his heart stops beating, his eyes stop seeing, his ears stop hearing, and his mind stops thinking. He feels neither pain nor pleasure, neither heat nor cold. He is neither angry nor sad, neither hungry nor thirsty. And when a person dies, his body needs to be buried.

When a person is buried, he is entirely buried deep in the ground where no dog or other animal can dig him up again. Normally, nobody is buried with his arm or leg sticking out of the grave. We all know that a buried person is completely buried in the ground. It is there where he awaits the resurrection. If the person was righteous, he will wake up in the first resurrection totally transformed, with a new body and a new mind.

When the Bible talks about life and death in the context of conversion and baptism, it uses a parable of a man living, dying, being buried, or being resurrected to help us understand the phases or steps of conversion and baptism. For example, the "old man" was crucified or "I died." These references do not refer to physical life or death, but to a symbolic man representing a life of sin. We will now look at each phase in more detail.

Death

By being baptized, I declare that I have died to the world.

Romans 6:3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

Romans 6:6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

Dying to the world means that I have separated myself from worldly, unclean things. It means that I have abandoned the service of Satan and have become a member of the royal family, a

child of God. It means that my desire for sin has died and I now hate sin.

Baptism is a most solemn renunciation of the world. Those who are baptized in the threefold name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, at the very entrance of their Christian life declare publicly that they have forsaken the service of Satan and have become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King. They have obeyed the command: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, ... and touch not the unclean thing." And to them is fulfilled the promise: "I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18. {CCh 295.3}

Romans 7:7-9 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.

The law of God shows us what sin is and how bad it is. Without the law, a person cannot be truly converted, because it is by the law that he understands how corrupt his own heart is and his need of a Savior. Without the law, the "old man" cannot die because it is through the law that we know sin.

Burial

By being baptized, I declare that the "old me" has been buried.

Romans 6:4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death.

Here, baptism is compared to burial. Think about various burials that you have witnessed in the past. A person is buried after he has died, not while he is still alive. Can you imagine how awful it would be to be buried alive? Would you want to bury your family member before he is dead? No! This is a horrible idea. Before burial, we want to verify that the person is truly dead before we bury them.

In some cultures, a death certificate is issued for a person who has died. This certificate shows how and when a person died, and is legal proof that the person is really dead. The body may be examined for any signs of life including heart beat, breathing, and nerve activity in the brain. A death certificate is issued only when the person is verified to be dead, when it is sure that there are no signs of life.

In a similar way, before baptizing a person, we should investigate whether he is eligible for a spiritual death certificate. Is this person really dead to sin? Has he abandoned his sinful habits or is he still openly transgressing the law of God? Has he ceased serving Satan and committed to serving God? These are the types of questions we should ask before bringing a person to be baptized.

For example, if a person still has two wives, is he eligible for baptism? No, because he has not died to sin. By keeping two wives contrary to God's law, he shows that his loyalty is still on Satan's side. His "old man" has not yet died, and is not eligible for burial. To baptize him would be to bury him alive!

Let's look at a few other examples. Is a person who continues to wear earrings eligible for baptism? What about somebody who continues to eat unclean foods clearly prohibited in Scripture? What about somebody who continues to visit the witch doctor for healing? These are just a few examples of signs of life in the "old man." When there is still life, the "old man" is not dead and is not ready to be buried. Burial is only fitting for those who have "died" to sin, or those who have experienced conviction of sin in their lives.

Not only should the body be dead before burial, it should be buried completely and not partially. When we bury a dead body, we cover the entire body with dirt. We do not leave the ears or the hands or the feet sticking out of the ground. The entire corpse is entirely buried, deep in the ground, completely separated from us. It would seem strange to try to return to touch the corpse or to feed it or to give it water.

Likewise, when a person is baptized, the entire body, including ears and fingers and toes, is submerged in the water. This symbolizes a whole and complete commitment to remaining separated from sin.

Resurrection

Thankfully, the symbol of baptism does not end with burial! The Bible speaks of a wonderful resurrection to a new life. By being baptized, I declare that I am now living a new life. I consecrate myself to the service of God and will live for Him.

Colossians 3:1-2 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Romans 6:4-5 Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.

If I am baptized, I show that my thoughts and desires are for heavenly things. Then, my actions will show that my mind is set on heavenly things. I will not just talk about newness of life but "walk in newness of life."

This newness of life comes from a close connection with Jesus. In the French translation Louis Segond, we see the phrase "united together" translated as "one same plant." This reminds us of Jesus' teaching in John 15 about the vine and the branches. Our newness of life is dependent on a constant and secure connection with Jesus.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

We must understand that baptism is not a magical change of character while we are under the water. It is not the baptism that changes us, but baptism is a symbol of a change that has already occurred. And this change is impossible without the power of

Jesus. Jesus has the power to change our hearts. He can bury the "old man" and resurrect us to new life because He himself was once dead but was resurrected. We are transformed through Jesus' power.

1 Corinthians 15:14, 16-17 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!

Conclusion

Now we have a deeper understanding of the meaning of baptism by immersion. The old me dies and is buried, and the new me springs into new life. Normally when we witness the death and burial of a family member, we experience grief and sadness. But in the context of baptism, death and burial is a joyous occasion. The old life of slavery to sin is no longer appealing and is now crucified. The old life with its old desires and old thoughts are done away with and separated from us by death and burial. We are announcing to others that we have begun a new life with Jesus. And this is reason to celebrate! Now, instead of struggling to find satisfaction and joy in life on my own, I find it with Jesus as my Friend and Guide. This is why baptism is like a joyous funeral.

Abiding in Jesus

A sad story is often repeated. An evangelistic meeting is planned and the Word of God is preached for several weeks. At the end, a number of people are baptized. But within a few weeks, some have slipped away. Within a few months, the majority are no longer at church and have returned to the world. Sometimes by the end of the year, nobody who was baptized has remained faithful.

Why?

In other cases, the people remain as members of the church, but they are not converted. The women take off their earrings to go to church, but as soon as they are home, the earrings reappear. Or some go to church carrying their Bibles, but during the week the Bible is left unused in a corner of the room.

Why?

Perhaps we can try to blame the evangelist or the church members who conducted the evangelistic meetings. Perhaps the people never encountered Jesus in a meaningful way. Perhaps they were in a hurry to baptize the people and get on with their lives. Perhaps there was neither proper preparation nor proper follow-up. All these are contributing problems, but we will leave these to be addressed in Evangelism class.

What we will focus on here is the responsibility of the individual who was baptized. He has made a personal commitment to abandon sin and remain faithful to God. As he has made this solemn promise before God, he is obligated to keep it. He must learn to abide in Jesus and receive strength from Him, because on his own, keeping his commitment is utterly hopeless.

John 15:5,8 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

The only way to maintain our commitment and remain faithful disciples to Jesus is to abide in Jesus. That means to think about Him, study Him, talk with Him throughout each day. When we receive life from Him as the branch receives sap from the vine, we can bear much fruit. But without Jesus, our life quickly becomes dry, fruitless death.

Why do so many people leave the church after baptism? It is not a problem with the truth or a problem with God, because God is all-powerful and not willing that any should perish. People become discouraged and leave the church after baptism simply because they failed to abide in Christ. Learning to abide in Christ is vital to the life of a Christian!

There is a wide difference between a pretended union and a real connection with Christ by faith. A profession of the truth places men in the church, but this does not prove that they have a vital connection with the living Vine. A rule is given by which the true disciple may be distinguished from those who claim to follow Christ but have not faith in Him. The one class are fruit bearing, the other, fruitless. The one are often subjected to the pruning knife of God that they may bring forth more fruit; the other, as withered branches, are ere long to be severed from the living Vine.

The fibers of the branch are almost identical with those of the vine. The communication of life, strength, and fruitfulness from the trunk to the branches is unobstructed and constant. The root sends its nourishment through the branch. Such is the true believer's relation to Christ. He abides in Christ and draws his nourishment from Him. {NL 44}

God has power to keep the soul that is in Christ. A mere profession of godliness is worthless. It is he that abideth in Christ that is a Christian. {OHC 142.2}

Abiding in Christ means a living, earnest, refreshing faith that works by love and purifies the soul. {OFC 124.3}

Abiding in Christ means a constant receiving of His Spirit, a life of unreserved surrender to His service. The channel of communication must be open

continually between man and his God. As the vine branch constantly draws the sap from the living vine, so are we to cling to Jesus, and receive from Him by faith the strength and perfection of His own character. {DA 676.2}

To abide in Christ means that you shall be a partaker of the divine nature. Humanity lays hold upon divinity, and you have divine power. But if you cling to old habits and practises of self-indulgence, and refuse to carry the burden of souls, you will lose your own soul. {GCB, May 17, 1909 par. 20}

When self dies, then Christ lives in the human agent. He abides in Christ, and Christ lives in him. {YRP 62.3}

When the truth is received, it will work radical changes in life and character; for religion means the abiding of Christ in the heart, and where He is, the soul goes on in spiritual activity, ever growing in grace, ever going on to perfection. {AG 324.2}

Your abiding with Christ makes every necessary duty light, for He bears the weight of every burden. {HP 55.2}

Matthew 19:26 With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

1 Thessalonians 5:22-24 Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

Satan is well aware that the weakest soul who abides in Christ is more than a match for the hosts of darkness, and that, should he reveal himself openly, he would be met and resisted. Therefore he seeks to draw away the soldiers of the cross from their strong fortification, while he lies in ambush with his forces, ready to destroy all who venture upon his ground. Only in humble reliance upon God, and obedience to all his commandments, can we be secure. No man is safe for a day or an hour without prayer. Especially should we entreat the Lord for wisdom to understand his Word. Here are revealed the wiles of the tempter, and the means by which he may be successfully resisted. Satan is an expert in quoting Scripture, placing his own interpretation upon passages by which he hopes to cause us to stumble. We should study the Bible with humility of heart, never losing sight of our dependence upon God. While we must constantly guard against the devices of Satan, we should pray in faith continually, "Lead us not into temptation." {GC88 530.1}

Encouraging New Members to Abide in Jesus

Often, people do not abide in Jesus because they do not understand the importance of sharing what they know. Jesus said,

Matthew 5:14 You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

When a person discovers light, the best way to receive more light is to share the light with others. As a newly converted person shares light with others, he will see his need to continue studying for himself.

When souls are converted, set them to work at once. And as they labor according to their ability, they will grow stronger. It is by meeting opposing influences that we become confirmed in the faith. As the light shines into their hearts, let them diffuse its rays. Teach the newly converted that they are to enter into fellowship with Christ, to be His witnesses, and to make Him known unto the world.

None should be forward to enter into controversy, but they should tell the simple story of the love of Jesus. All should constantly search the Scriptures for the reason of their faith, so that, if asked, they may give "a reason of the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear."

The best medicine you can give the church is not preaching or sermonizing, but planning work for them. If set to work, the despondent would soon forget their despondency, the weak would become strong, the ignorant intelligent, and all would be prepared to present the truth as it is in Jesus. They would find an unfailing helper in Him who has promised to save all who come unto Him. {Ev 355-356}

Those who are most actively employed in doing with interested fidelity their work to win souls to Jesus Christ, are the best developed in spirituality and devotion. Their very active working formed the means of their spirituality. There is danger of religion losing in depth that which it gains in breadth. This need not be, if, in the place of long sermons, there is wise education given to those newly come to the faith. Teach them by giving them something to do, in some line of spiritual work, that their first love will not die but increase in fervor. Let them feel that they are not to be carried and to lean for support on

the church; but they are to have root in themselves. They can be in many lines, according to their several abilities, useful in helping the church to come nearer to God, and working in various ways to act upon the elements outside the church which will be a means of acting beneficially upon the church. The wisdom and prosperity of the church casts a telling influence upon her favor. The psalmist prayed for the prosperity of the church, "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us. ... That Thy way may be known upon the earth, Thy saving health among all nations." {Ev 356.3}

A Progressive Work

Like a grafted branch, we do not achieve full strength the first day. But as long as we have the vital connection with Jesus, we gain more strength and wisdom daily. Like a seed that grows to maturity and then bears fruit, we can continue to grow each day to be more like Jesus, as long as we are connected to Him.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.

Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Jude 1:24 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy...

The growth of the soul in grace, in purity, in comeliness, is little by little — a progressive work; but it must go forward unceasingly. The fruit is ever approaching perfection; the Christian is constantly assimilating the ways and will of Christ. But with many who claim to be Christians there is a painful certainty that they are not progressing heavenward, but are swayed by the customs and practices of the world. {CTBH 94.3}

Joining God's Family

Who is God's family? Are you a son or a daughter of God? Are all people children of God or are there conditions to being a child of God?

Members of the Earthly Family

As we look at the genealogy of humanity, we see several common points in the past. Noah and his family were the only humans saved on the ark. Therefore, Noah is the grandfather of everybody who lived after the flood. We are all descendants of Noah. Before him, we understand that Adam is the grandfather of the human race. No matter who you are, Adam is your great great great... grandfather. If we carry this one step further we will notice that we are not only all children of Adam, but we are all children of God! Here is the end of a long list of genealogy calculated backwards:

Luke 3:38 the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

We are all descendants of Adam. Adam was the son of God. Therefore, we are all descendants of God! We are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26).

This is interesting, but we need to understand the limitations of the fact that we are all, in this way, children of God. Being a descendant of Adam does not save us from the sin problem. There are many descendants of Adam who are wicked and will suffer eternal death.

The Jews thought that they had eternal life because they were in Abraham's family. But John the Baptist had a clear message for them:

Luke 3:8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

The Jews felt comfortable with the thought that God would give them special favors based on their heritage. But God wanted them to understand that people are saved from sin on an individual basis, not based on the group or family they belong to. Paul further clarifies this idea in his letter to the people in Rome.

Romans 9:6-8 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

1 John 3:10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

Just because Abraham was a friend of God did not automatically make all of his descendants friends of God. A son of Abraham who is not righteous is not really considered a son of Abraham. Jesus was probably most clear of all when he rebuked the Jews for their hypocrisy. They claimed to be children of Abraham, but had already rejected truth and were trying to kill Jesus.

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

Even though the Jews descended from Abraham, they had chosen the devil as their father by choosing to cultivate the desires of the devil.

- The devil desires murder. The Jews desired to kill Jesus.
- The devil hates truth. The Jews hated truth, especially as exemplified by Jesus.
- The devil is the father of lies. The Jews made and repeated lies.

Members of the Royal Family

How then can one be a true child of God? How can one belong to God's family? The choice belongs to us!

1 John 3:1-2 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

John 1:12-13 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Romans 8:13-16 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Philippians 2:14-15 Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

If we abide in the Vine, we shall bear the fruits of the Spirit. The life of the Vine will manifest itself through the branches. We must have a close and intimate connection with heaven, if we bear the grace of godliness. Jesus must be a guest in our homes, a member of our households, if we reflect His image and show that we are sons and daughters of the Most High. Religion is a beautiful thing in the home. If the Lord abides with us, we shall feel that we

are members of Christ's family in heaven. We shall realize that angels are watching us, and our manners will be gentle and forbearing. We shall be fitting up for an entrance into the courts of heaven, by cultivating courtesy and godliness. Our conversation will be holy, and our thoughts will be upon heavenly things. {PCP 19.3}

Revelation 21:7 *He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.*

Members of the Church Family

Before we are baptized, we become members of the royal family. After we are baptized, we also become members of the church family.

Acts 2:47 *And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*

Very close and sacred is the relation between Christ and His church,—He the bridegroom, and the church the bride; He the head, and the church the body. Connection with Christ, then, involves connection with His church. {Ev 318.1}

Present truth leads onward and upward, gathering in the needy, the oppressed, the suffering, the destitute. All that will come are to be brought into the fold. In their lives there is to take place a reformation that will constitute them members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King. By hearing the message of truth, men and women are led to accept the Sabbath and to unite with the church by baptism. They are to bear God's sign by observing the Sabbath of creation. They are to know for themselves that obedience to God's commandments means eternal life. {CH 355.4}

Hebrews 10:24-25 *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Re-baptism

Some people believe that a person can only be baptized one time in his lifetime. The Bible does not speak much about being re-baptized. However, the one example in the Bible is sufficient for us to know that in some cases, re-baptism is appropriate.

Twelve Men Re-baptized (Acts 18:24 - 19:7)

The story starts with a man named Apollos, who had been instructed about Jesus. He was excited about the truth he had learned and started sharing it with other people in Ephesus. What he taught was accurate, but it was not complete. For example, he only knew about John's baptism, and he didn't know about the Holy Spirit. So when Aquilla and Priscilla heard him, they gave him some more training. From Ephesus, he decided to move on and preach about Jesus in another region.

Apparently, Paul knew about the work of Apollos in Ephesus and the weakness in Apollos' teaching. As Paul was talking with a group of twelve disciples in Ephesus, he asked them about baptism and the Holy Spirit. They responded that they had been baptized into John's baptism and that they did not know about the Holy Spirit. Paul had an opportunity to do more teaching and explained that John's work was to prepare people to believe in Jesus.

As the disciples in Ephesus began to understand truth about Jesus more fully, they were re-baptized in Jesus' name, and afterward received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There are many at the present day who have unwittingly violated one of the precepts of God's law. When the understanding is enlightened, and the claims of the fourth commandment are urged upon the conscience, they see

themselves sinners in the sight of God. "Sin is the transgression of the law" and "he that shall offend on one point is guilty of all."

The honest seeker after truth will not plead ignorance of the law as an excuse for transgression. Light was within his reach. God's Word is plain, and Christ has bidden him search the Scriptures. He reveres God's law as holy, just, and good, and he repents of his transgression. By faith he pleads the atoning blood of Christ, and grasps the promise of pardon. His former baptism does not satisfy him now. He has seen himself a sinner, condemned by the law of God. He has experienced anew a death to sin, and he desires again to be buried with Christ by baptism, that he may rise to walk in newness of life. Such a course is in harmony with the example of Paul in baptizing the Jewish converts. That incident was recorded by the Holy Spirit as an instructive lesson for the church. {Ev 372}

One Baptism (Ephesians 4:5)

Some people object to the idea of being baptized a second time because they feel that the Bible only allows one baptism. Let's take a look at the verse they use:

Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

This passage is emphasizing the importance of choosing the one path of truth. There are many false ways, but only one true way. For example, there are evil spirits and there is the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit is true. There are many gods, but there is only one true God.

In the same sense, there are many ideas about baptism, but only one true baptism. Some people are said to be baptized by a sprinkling of water. Others are said to be baptized by flower petals. But there is only one true baptism, and that is the Biblical baptism by immersion.

When should someone be re-baptized?

To understand when somebody should be re-baptized, we should understand the meaning of baptism. In summary, baptism is a symbol that the person has decided to abandon his life of sin and

to dedicate himself completely to God. Here are a few scenarios of when re-baptism is appropriate:

- **When the previous method of baptism was not Biblical.**
For example, a person who was sprinkled is not really baptized, as the word "baptism" comes from the idea of immersion. The person being baptized needs to be at an appropriate age to understand the significance of his commitment to Jesus.
- **When somebody is reconverted after rebellion.**
For example, a person was a converted Christian and was baptized. But later, he turned away from Jesus and followed the world. By rejecting Jesus and returning to the world, he cancels his former baptism. After some time in the world, he now returns to Jesus and dedicates his life to Jesus again. If he is truly reconverted, it is appropriate at this point to be re-baptized, as baptism is a symbol of conversion. Even a member who is Seventh-day Adventist can be re-baptized in the Seventh-day Adventist church.
- **When a Christian discovers that he is ignorantly disobedient to God's law.**
For example, a person loves God and serves Him, but does not understand the truth about the seventh-day Sabbath. When he discovers this truth, he realizes that he has been transgressing God's law, even though he didn't realize it. It is appropriate to be re-baptized in this case.

Below are a few excerpts from counsel in the book *Evangelism*.

The subject of rebaptism should be handled with the greatest care. After the truth is presented upon the Sabbath question and other important points of our faith, and souls manifest the moral courage to take their position upon the truth, they will see this question in the Bible light if they are fully converted. But by some these questions have been handled unwisely, and God has sent reproof many times on this point. Those who place the subject of rebaptism in the front, making it of as much importance as the Sabbath question, are not leaving the right impression upon the minds and correctly representing the

subject. It requires great discrimination to bring in kindred truths with the Sabbath, rightly dividing the Word, giving to each his portion of meat in due season.

...No one should become a conscience for another or urge and press rebaptism.

...Some will be longer in seeing and understanding some kindred truths than others, especially will this be the case in regard to the subject of rebaptism, but there is a divine hand that is leading them--a divine spirit impressing their hearts, and they will know what they ought to do and do it.

...It is not the work of any of our teachers to urge rebaptism upon anyone. It is their business to lay down the great principles of Bible truths, especially is this the case in regard to rebaptism. Then let God do the work of convicting the mind and heart..

Every honest soul who accepts the Sabbath of the fourth commandment will see and understand his duty in time. {Ev 373-374}

Further Study

Baptism and Salvation

Mark 16:16 *He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*

John 10:27-28 *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.*

Christ has made baptism the sign of entrance to His spiritual kingdom. He has made this a positive condition with which all must comply who wish to be acknowledged as under the authority of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Before man can find a home in the church, before passing the threshold of God's spiritual kingdom, he is to receive the impress of the divine name, "The Lord Our Righteousness." Jeremiah 23:6. {CCh 295.2}

Remission of Sins

Acts 2:38 *Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

Acts 10:43 *To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.*

Matthew 26:28 *For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

Luke 1:77 *To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins.*

Luke 24:46-47 *Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the 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 to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."*

Types of Baptism

Matthew 20:22-23 But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with."

Luke 12:49-50 I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!

Mark 1:5 Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

Mark 1:8-10 (Mark 10:38-39) "I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water...

John 3:22-23 Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.

Mark 1:4 (Luke 3:3) John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

Acts 1:5 For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

Acts 8:14-17 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Acts 11:16 Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

Acts 13:24 after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

Matthew 3:11 (Luke 3:16) I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Bible passages on conversion and baptism

Romans 6:1-23 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were

slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:13-17 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

1 Corinthians 10:1-6 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:12 - 21 For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself

through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

2 Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty." Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Galatians 5:16-26 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the

Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Ephesians 3:14 - 4:3 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height--to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:21-23 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight--if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Colossians 2:11-12 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Colossians 3:1-17 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness,

passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 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. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

1 Peter 3:18-22 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

2 Peter 1:2-11 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things

that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Jude 1:24-25 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.

Spirit of Prophecy passages on conversion and baptism

The first epistle to the Corinthian church was written by the apostle Paul during the latter part of his stay at Ephesus. For no others had he felt a deeper interest or put forth more untiring effort than for the believers in Corinth. For a year and a half he had labored among them, pointing them to a crucified and risen Saviour as the only means of salvation, and urging them to rely implicitly on the transforming power of His grace. Before accepting into church fellowship those who made a profession of Christianity, he had been careful to give them special instruction as to the privileges and duties of the Christian believer, and he had earnestly endeavored to help them to be faithful to their baptismal vows.

Paul had a keen sense of the conflict which every soul must wage with the agencies of evil that are continually seeking to deceive and ensnare, and he had worked untiringly to strengthen and confirm those who were young in the faith. He had entreated them to make an entire surrender to God; for he knew that when the soul fails to make this surrender, then sin is not forsaken, the appetites and passions still strive for the mastery, and temptations confuse the conscience.

The surrender must be complete. Every weak, doubting, struggling soul who yields fully to the Lord is placed in direct touch with agencies that enable him to overcome. Heaven is near to him, and he has the support and help of angels of mercy in every time of trial and need. {AA 298-299}

At the time of their conversion and baptism the Colossian believers pledged themselves to put away beliefs and practices that had hitherto been a part of their lives, and to be true to their allegiance to Christ. In his letter, Paul reminded them of this, and entreated them not to forget that in order to keep their pledge they must put forth constant effort against the evils that would seek for mastery over them. "If ye then be risen with Christ," he said, "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." {AA 475.3}

The world has no right to doubt the truth of Christianity because there are unworthy members in the church, nor should Christians become disheartened because of these false brethren. How was it with the early church? Ananias and Sapphira joined themselves to the disciples. Simon Magus was baptized. Demas, who forsook Paul, had been counted a believer. Judas Iscariot was numbered with the apostles. The Redeemer does not want to lose one soul; His experience with Judas is recorded to show His long patience with perverse human nature; and He bids us bear with it as He has borne. He has said that false brethren will be found in the church till the close of time. ...

Notwithstanding Christ's warning, men have sought to uproot the tares. To punish those who were supposed to be evildoers, the church has had recourse to the civil power. Those who differed from the established doctrines have been imprisoned, put to torture and to death, at the instigation of men who claimed to be acting under the sanction of Christ. But it is the spirit of Satan, not the Spirit of Christ, that inspires such acts. This is Satan's own method of bringing the world under his dominion. God has been misrepresented through the church by this way of dealing with those supposed to be heretics.

Not judgment and condemnation of others, but humility and distrust of self, is the teaching of Christ's parable. Not all that is sown in the field is good grain. The fact that men are in the church does not prove them Christians.

The tares closely resembled the wheat while the blades were green; but when the field was white for the harvest, the worthless weeds bore no likeness to the wheat that bowed under the weight of its full, ripe heads. Sinners who make a pretension of piety mingle for a time with the true followers of Christ, and the semblance of Christianity is calculated to deceive many; but in the harvest of

the world there will be no likeness between good and evil. Then those who have joined the church, but who have not joined Christ, will be manifest. {COL 72-74}

Parents whose children desire to be baptized have a work to do, both in self-examination and in giving faithful instruction to their children. Baptism is a most sacred and important ordinance, and there should be a thorough understanding as to its meaning. It means repentance for sin, and the entrance upon a new life in Christ Jesus. There should be no undue haste to receive the ordinance. Let both parents and children count the cost. In consenting to baptism of their children, parents sacredly pledge themselves to be faithful stewards over these children, to guide them in their character building. They pledge themselves to guard with special interest these lambs of the flock, that they may not dishonor the faith they profess. {CG 499.3}

When the happiest period of their life has come, and they in their hearts love Jesus and wish to be baptized, then deal faithfully with them. Before they receive the ordinance, ask them if it is to be their first purpose in life to work for God. Then tell them how to begin. It is the first lessons that mean so much. In simplicity teach them how to do their first service for God. Make the work as easy to be understood as possible. Explain what it means to give up self to the Lord, to do just as His Word directs, under the counsel of Christian parents. {CG 500.1}



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