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I. The Obligation to be Baptized

First, Jesus clearly gave the commandment to his disciples that they should preach the gospel to all nations, and for those that accept it, the disciples should baptize them.

Matthew 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Mark 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Even though baptism is not necessary in order to be saved, nevertheless in obedience to Christ, every believer should be baptized as soon as possible after accepting Jesus as his personal Savior.

Second, Jesus our example in all conduct, was baptized (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11) as an example for us.

Thirdly, more than just being baptized himself by John the Baptist, Jesus, by means of his disciples, practiced the baptism of the new converts after they believed in Jesus as their personal Savior (John 4:1-2 apparently they did it immediately). The apostles and disciples taught and practiced baptism according to the example of Jesus (Acts 2:38,41,42; 8:12,13,36,38; 9:18; 10:47,48; 16:14,33; 18:8; 19:5).

Fourthly, God demands that a true Christian identifies with Christ as one of the redeemed in order to be saved. Nobody is saved by accident. There is no such thing as a "secret Christian".

Baptism is a public identification with and confession of Christ

Romans 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. 10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Paul explained that there are two elements of the true salvation, the believing in your heart that Jesus raised from the dead for your sins, and the public confession

Baptism is not necessary
in order to be saved

- (1) The thief on the cross was not baptized, but had the promise of Christ to be that very same day in paradise with Jesus.
- (2) 1 Peter 3:21 – baptism is one way to express a good conscience towards God.
- (3) Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;
- (4) Romans 4:5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

of that same thing, that you have made Jesus your Lord of your life (the person who commands, this is your Savior).

Matthew 10:32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. 33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

Jesus himself has put the lack of public confession of Christ as being somebody who Christ himself will not recognize on judgment day before God the Father. If that is so, then how do we confess Christ? How do we publicly confess Christ as our Savior? The simplest thing is to say so when somebody asks us, in other words, we are always in a disposition to advise the world of our salvation in Christ. Apart from just verbally confessing Christ, God has designed water baptism to be THE public testimony or official confession of Christ as your Savior. A person does not need to be baptized to be saved, but baptism is THE opportunity to give that public confession that is the most important in your life. It is always very close to the time of salvation, usually immediately after salvation.

Membership in a Biblical Church

If Jesus Christ himself urged us to identify ourselves with Christ as part of the redeemed, then another way of doing that is by identifying with the redeemed in a good local church. It is not enough to be as one of the unsaved that only attend the services of a church without becoming a member. You should seek to become a member of that church and participate completely with it in all its affairs. (See Part VI. of this booklet, "Marks of a Biblical Church")

In the case of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch, the Eunuch had some understanding about the need of being baptized in order to confess Christ. It is possible that he already knew beforehand, but by any means, Philip put importance on it when he testified to him, and he conceded the Eunuch to be baptized. Therefore we conclude that during our witnessing (telling people how to be saved), we should always include an explanation of being baptized as a public testimony to Jesus Christ as your Savior.

YOUR BAPTISM IS A PUBLIC TESTIMONY

If the whole matter of being baptized is to give a public testimony of your new faith in Jesus Christ, then it is important that you treat it this way. To hide the matter from family and friends is an embarrassment to Christ. The whole point is that it is public. You should advise and invite your family and friends to your baptism. If they do not want to come, okay, but at least you have tried to make it a public event as much as you can. You have not hidden it from your family and friends as though it was shameful.

II. When should you be baptized?

It is important to see that your baptism is a step of obedience as a believer. It is voluntary, and the person himself should seek it from their local church, the same

as the multitudes sought it from John the Baptist (Matthew 3:5) or those that sought it from Jesus. Acts 22:16 literally says, "Why are you always at the point of doing it? Rise and be baptized! Invoking his name, wash your sins!"

Philip and the Eunuch did it in the moments after Philip showed the Eunuch verses about how to be saved. Then we also should conclude that biblical baptism is as soon as possible after salvation (to believe and receive Jesus as your personal Savior). This is the biblical example. At times churches today have preparations that they have to do before baptizing somebody. In some cases, the church demands that the person understand salvation very well before being saved (which is absolutely essential). This period of waiting is a good custom really. Part VII. of this book is a profound explanation of salvation so that you well understand salvation before you are baptized.

The point is that after you accept the Lord, you should be baptized with a few weeks or at most a few months.

III. What are the requirements for baptism?

Two clear passages indicate that the only biblical requirements for baptism are:

Acts 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Acts 8:36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

There is a reception of the word of God or in other words, the gospel is preached and heard (the good news that Jesus is the Savior, the Christ or Messiah, the Son of God). Philip put the only formal requirement¹ on the

Eunuch, that if he believes with all his heart (sincerely) in Jesus, that he is the Christ. The Eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ (Jesus is the Christ) the Son of God". This is the only formal requirement (to have received and believe in

The Significance of Baptism
Baptism is a picture of the Christian life and his salvation. The candidate is put into (below) a tank of water, and this represents that he is buried with Christ. This also represents that he as a Christian is dying to the power and influence of sin in his life. Later the candidate is raised up out of the water which represents resurrection to a new life (and one day physical and bodily resurrection to new life).

Baptism is a memorial
For you, your baptism should be considered a memorial of your salvation experience and of your new life in Christ that you now have. It should remind you of the power of God over sin in your life.

¹ We may put an informal requirement that the person has to have heard and understood the gospel. If he has not heard the gospel, he cannot possibly have understood it. A person cannot profess to believe something that he does not know anything about nor understand even the basics of the thing.

the gospel), but one cannot actually be baptized in a biblical manner without water and somebody to do the baptizing.

First, you need sufficient water in order to baptize biblically. We will study the mode of baptism a little further on in this book.

Second, you need the right "somebody" to baptize you. Baptism was given to the church (the disciples and apostles of Christ organized as a local church) as a practice for them to follow. For this reason, baptism should only be done by the church where you are going to be a member. It is very important that you study the official doctrines of that church before you join with them, and this ought to be done before you are baptized, because many churches use the act of baptism as a recognition or the method of a person joining that church like the New Testament teaches. Since you should not want to be a member of a church that has doctrines or practices that are not biblical, you should study the doctrines and practices of a church beforehand. We outline the essential doctrines that a good church should have in chapter VI. The Marks of a Biblical Church on page 17. Remember, on minor points, even good men differ. Although it is important to not get involved with a church that believes heresy or refuses biblical doctrine, or that has practices that are not biblical, we do need to remember that the unspiritual church of Corinth in 1 Corinthians 1 fought over who actually did the baptizing, and Paul rebuked them for their constant desire for divisions and group clichés.

Thirdly, the person ought to be saved. Even though Christians grow continually in their understandings of their own salvation for all of their Christian life, they ought to have an understanding of the basics of salvation from the beginning.

REPENTANCE AND BAPTISM

It should be clear that no person can believe in Jesus Christ without repentance² that is also essential to be saved (Luke 13:3,5). This is in agreement with the significance of baptism, that one died with Christ to the power and influence of sin making himself "dead", and then he lives again by the power and influence of God (Romans 6). To be baptized in Christ is to accept what he taught and put one's self under His commandments and teachings (to do the will of God the Father³ and to take up our cross and follow Christ being his disciple). Salvation in the Bible is more than just belief, it encompasses a way of life. It bound up in discipleship, or walking in the lifestyle of the master, Jesus Christ. If

² Some people understand repentance as a work of going forward to an altar and crying. It is not. Repentance is to turn from a sinful practice, rejecting it in the process, and to turn from that and to something that replaces it (righteousness). Repentance is seen in specific cases of sin, but repentance is something underneath "that outward action". It is a dealing with God. A release from trying to live a good life, and a trusting in God and God's way to clean him and give him power over sin.

³ Jesus did not come to earth to impose his own will, but to complete the will of God the Father, thus we also are obligated to do the same (Hebrews 10:7,9).

you believe in the Master, you model your life after the master's life. This was done with Socrates, and other great wisdom teachers of the time. When Jesus called people to salvation, it meant leaving family, friends, and their former life. Salvation is the rejection of sin and that sinful lifestyle that comes from sin. You cannot reject something as integral to our lives as sin, without replacing it with something else. That thing is righteousness. In Luke 7:30 for example, we see that the Pharisees and Scribes understood this because they refused to be baptized by John because they were not in agreement with his teachings and lifestyle.

BAPTISM IS ENTRANCE INTO A LOCAL CHURCH – We should not forget that in the Bible, (especially in Acts 2:41, 46-47; 5:14; 11:24), that when a person received Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, they were baptized and included “in the number”, or in other words, they were counted within the number of people in that local church. Baptism in water really is (or should be considered) an incorporation into a local church. For this reason, the local church at times will want to verify that the person is truly saved and repentant of his sins, and that this person is in agreement with their beliefs. It is the practice of many churches that the candidate for baptism gives his testimony to the brethren of that church before being baptized. This is a good practice. In some cases, the church may be aware of grave sins in the life of that person that would cause doubt as to whether that person is sincerely repentant. In these cases the church may want to see evidences of repentance and public renouncing of those grave public sins (such as homosexuality, prostitution, or murder) before accepting the person.

CHANGING CHURCH MEMBERSHIP – Another aspect of this is that once a person has been saved and has joined a local church, and then moves to another city, he will immediately want to join another biblical church. When he finds a church with those biblical beliefs and practices that he is looking for, then he will want to join with them. Baptism is not necessary a second time. Usually a letter from the new church requesting a statement of the baptism and transferring of their membership is all that is needed. What is critical here though is that your salvation was before your baptism, and that the doctrine of the church where he was saved has a clear salvation by faith doctrine. Although most biblical churches differ on minor points, the most important point is salvation. If the understanding of salvation is not that of the Bible, then you will need to talk with the pastor of the new church to see if they will want you to be baptized again.

IV. The Significance and Mode of Baptism

Perhaps the most argued point in baptism is the mode of being baptized. Basically there are three forms of being baptized: by sprinkling, by pouring, by immersion. It is correct at this point to again note that in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17, Paul exhorted that baptism not be a stumbling block in causing divisions between the brethren. Even though the church at Corinth made divisions among themselves over who had

baptized them, the principle of not allowing baptism to be a point of contention is very strong.

A. The Significance of Baptism

There are some who would make the word "baptize" to be equivalent with the word "dunk", which means to put below the water, or immerse. In reality, a study over the word "baptize" in Greek shows that it comes from a compound of two words "bapto" + "izo". The first part is "bapto" (another form "embapto") which signifies to wet thoroughly, to saturate. The ending "izo" in Greek signifies "to cause an action to occur", and the action here is the verb "bapto". Then "baptize" by its etymology means to cause to be wet or saturated. Unfortunately, the etymology is not always reliable, because the use of a word at times is different from its etymology.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WORD

"Baptize" - "Baptism"

"Baptize" means to be impregnated or saturated completely with the holiness of God. The only symbolic form of doing this is by immersion. Even though the biblical mode can only be immersion, the idea of the word is something spiritual, a declaration of the person that he is renouncing his sins for the path of God. For the church of the New Testament, baptism in water is the initiation of that person's ministry before the Lord, and the beginning of his membership locally with the redeemed where he is attending.

The use of the word "baptize" came to mean "to dye cloth" in Bible times. The idea behind this is that of wetting or saturating a piece of cloth so that the dye will impregnate that cloth permanently. The idea of dunking is very prominent, but the focus is not on submersion, as much as on the action of transferring the colorant to the cloth permanently. This is always done to "virgin" cloth (cloth that has not been used for anything else yet since its creation), and it is done before that piece of clothing is put to use in its created purpose. The ideas of initiation and incorporation into something for functioning and use also come in here.

Of all of this, we conclude that the word "baptize" does not indicate exactly immersion, but means the initiation for use, and that it is to be saturated with a characteristic. In the case of the Christian, Jesus baptizes the believer with or in the Spirit of Holiness. The Christian is baptized spiritually at the moment of being saved that results in that Christian's dedication and use for the purposes of God, carrying the characteristic of holiness, and being called "holy one" or "saint"⁴ after his salvation. Baptism in water is a confession of your saving faith in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and at the same time, it is your incorporation and initiation into the Church of Jesus Christ which begins your life of service and devotion to God.

⁴ Catholics call some people "saints". But the Bible refers to every Christian as a "saint" in God's eyes.

The biblical focus and idea above all in water baptism is that the person is publicly confessing that he is saved, a redeemed, a "saint" (because God does not see his sins any more Romans 8:1). So above all, baptism is a testimony of your vow with God, and announcement of your aspiration or hope that Jesus will carry you to heaven, and you are carrying the emblem of God which is holiness as a soldier carrying a flag in war to identify the group.

A study of various passages reveal that baptism reflects what has happened spiritually at the moment of salvation, Christ baptized us in His Holy Spirit, and so we do the memorial, water baptism, that represents this spiritual deed. Because one represents the other, at times in the Bible it seems that water baptism is almost the same as being saved.⁵

BAPTISM PASSAGES – WE RENOUNCE OUR SIN

Galatians 3:26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 2:9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. 10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: 11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: 12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened (given life) together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses

Romans 6:2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? 3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: 6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. 7 For he that is dead is freed from sin. 8 Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: 9 Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth

⁵ The problem is that the Bible makes no distinction in its use of the word when it is talking about spiritual baptism (which is what God did in the actual act of salvation) Christ baptizing us in or with the Holy Spirit to make us part of the body of Christ, and water baptism (which is just an action we do after being saved to show our new faith by publicly professing it through this act of being immersed).

no more; death hath no more dominion over him. 10 For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

The Christian does not live in a vacuum. He has his sinful nature (from Adam) and the attacks of Satan to conquer. This victory is not automatic, but rather revolves around the Christian denouncing his fleshly desires and resisting the temptations of the Devil and pressing his life into the mold of holiness and righteousness that we see in Jesus Christ our example. God gives the believer the power to do this. Baptism affirms that the person now is a "saint" because he is born anew with eternal life (by means of faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ), but he also affirms the death of that power of his sinful nature within him. The Christian has dethroned his sinful nature and will as the king of his life, and he is putting in its place the will of God the Father. This is what happened at the time of his salvation, and because of this, his "spiritual baptism", he has entered the Church⁶. Baptism in water is simply the affirming (or confessing) publicly of what has happened spiritually (Christ baptizing him into the body of Christ in the act of his salvation).

B. The mode of Baptism

Unfortunately, nobody can be baptized without using some mode or method. Speaking from the symbolism in Romans 6, the idea of being submerged under the ground (with ground below, on all sides, and especially over the person, totally encasing him in dirt) would indicate the mode of immersion. Also the symbolism of being totally saturated with the Holy Spirit corresponds more to immersion than sprinkling or pouring (which does not easily saturate). In all the passages that speak of baptism, the person is always put into the medium (water), and never is the medium (water) put onto the person.

Even though the Bible does not clearly state what mode of baptism to use, one can clearly discern that baptism is always by immersion. In Mark 1:10 in the baptism of Jesus, Mark used the words, "coming up out of the water" which signifies that he came up out of the water after being submerged in the water. Also the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:38-39, says clearly that the two of them "went down both into the water" and "came up out of the water". John chose a river to baptize in (John 10:40) and frequented places where there "was much

⁶ Even though we can refer to all the Christians in this age as "the Church", we should be very clear that the only instrument that God has ever ordained to do his work in the New Testament dispensation is obedient Christians organized into local churches. God never gave his authorization nor authority to any religious organization or group or similar thing, but gave it exclusively to the church, which God designed how He wanted, and God has established it, and God is building it as He wills. Those that do the work of God without being a part of a local church and working under the supervision and authority of a single local church (which has the administration and oversight of their ministry) have no approval of God. They have refused the design of God, which is the local church, and gone about to establish something of their own design and fabrication which is not the will of God.

water" (John 3:23). If John the Baptist sprinkled or poured water on top of people, then he would not have needed so much water, just a few water pots, like the woman at the well used, would have sufficed. With a few gallons of water, he can pour water on hundreds of person and sprinkle up to thousands of people. These passages of Scripture do not seem to be in accordance with any kind of mode of sprinkling or pouring.

In the Old Testament, there are some cases of pouring or anointing of oil on the head of somebody or to sprinkle somebody or something with blood, but that is never used in the context of baptism in the New Testament. The idea of saturation does not agree with sprinkling nor pouring, but only with submerging.

It is significant that those that practice baptism of infants (for their salvation usually days after birth) are the strongest opponents of immersion, and those who fight strongest for sprinkling usually. Is it any wonder that they object to submersing infants preferring sprinkling considering their beliefs? It is practically impossible to completely submerge an infant without it being an extremely unpleasant experience for all, so they dogmatically open the mode of baptism to something else besides the biblical mode of immersion. Since their belief is that salvation is granted to them at sprinkling a few days old, and "confirmation" happens later on when they are old enough to understand the gospel and accept it, then they have a defective view of salvation which is another gospel, and they cannot be accepted as brethren unless at some later date they have accepted the gospel in full knowledge and understanding.

C. Objections to the mode of Immersion

If you talk with religious groups that do not use the mode of immersion, they will have certain arguments using verses from the Bible and their explanations. So, it is important that we know these passages and that we know their arguments and why they do not indicate another mode of baptism.

1. Philippian Jailer in Acts 16:33

The objection is made that it is improbable that the jailer was baptized by immersion if it was late at night and very suddenly and without warning. According to this objection, there was not time nor opportunity to go to a place where there was sufficient water (such as to leave the jail with prisoners, which granted is very improbable), and that there was not sufficient water available in the jail because there was no baptistery of course in a jail.

We simply answer that all the houses and buildings of the ancient world had cisterns and systems of collecting rainwater from the infrequent rains (Fred H. Wight in his book about "Customs and Manners of Biblical Countries" on page 282-284). 2 Kings 18:31 mentions every Israelite had their own cistern. In 2 Samuel 17:18-19, the man Bahurim hid two men in his well, (literally "cistern"). If two men

can hide in one of these cisterns, then it is possible that they were of the size that one man can baptize another in it. Moreover it is not logical that a jail with at times many prisoners would not have a cistern as a water reserve in order to give the prisoners water.

2. Cornelius in Acts 10:47

This objection is that they brought water to the room to baptize Cornelius, then it could not be by immersion. It is important to be precise, the text does not say that they brought water, but rather they asked "can any man forbid water." This makes more sense if we understand that this happened in the house of strangers. The servant girls or female daughters probably had the responsibility to fill the family cistern every day, and after two men were to enter the family cistern or water reserve, then one submerging the other, they would dirty up the water. The question is in essence "if those that are going to have to empty, clean, and afterward fill again the cistern with clean water, do they have objection to the baptism?"

3. Baptisms in Acts 2:41

This objection is that it is impossible to procure so enough water to baptize three thousand person by immersion, and that they could not baptize all of them in one day even if they used all the city reserves in whole city of Jerusalem. The conclusion therefore is that they used the mode of sprinkling. Today in any church that practices immersion, if they are to have 3,000 baptisms in one day, and only one baptistery, are they able to do it? Yes easily. But the amount of water needed is not increased for more people being baptized in the same day. Neither is there a problem baptizing 3,000 people in a single day when we remember that there most probably was not special baptisteries made, but rather they used existing cisterns. Baptisms today are normally no longer that a minute per person, and if each of the twelve baptized simultaneously, they would need only 250 minutes (4 hours). If there was sufficient space and water (they could have used various nearby houses simultaneously), and all 120 of the disciples on that occasion baptized, then they would need only 23 minutes, and it would not have been a problem. Moreover, there were plenty of water tanks within the city of Jerusalem (John 5:2,4,7) that were big enough for people to enter, such as the tank of Siloh (John 9:7,11).

4. The Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:36.

This objection is made that it is improbable that they could find sufficient water to baptize somebody in a desert. To say that the entire middle east is desert is not true. Even though there is very little water that falls on this part of the world, there are showers at times (1 Kings 18:44). For the type of land that it is, there are hills and valleys that in a matter of minutes can be filled with swift moving water. They empty very quickly, but they leave puddles and small ponds of water all over. People often make water collection systems on their houses so that they can collect the scarce rainfall. These ravines would probably have small dams that would

collect some water after a sudden rainstorm. The fact that the Eunuch saw water in the way should have indicated that there was some kind of pond of water. Moreover, the Eunuch was a functionary of the Egyptian government with a driver, then it was very probable that he had a canteen or container of water with him for his journey. If the baptism was by sprinkling or pouring, then why didn't he use this water? The passage clearly says that "they went down both in the water" and "when they were come up out of the water" (Acts 8:38-39). This baptism was clearly by immersion.

D. The Formula for Baptism.

The formula that they used in baptizing is at times a point of discussion. Jesus clearly said the formula in Matthew 28:19-20 "in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." We also see that the Trinity⁷ is seen in the baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:21-22). But contrast this with the examples of people baptized calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16; 1 Corinthians 1:13,16). It is something unexplainable that God himself can act in a united form but at the same time individually. Compare this in baptism with the Bible statements on the resurrection of Jesus. The Bible affirms in various places that each one of the Trinity raised Jesus from the dead as though that person of the Trinity acted alone, and he was the only one that raised Jesus. Nonetheless it is true that God did it, corporately and individually. Study John 2:19,21, 1 Peter 3:18, Romans 8:11, and Acts 3:26.

What should it tell you about a group that complains about using the Trinitarian formula? Normally, it needs to be investigated if they deny the existence of one of the members of the Trinity. This tells me that by any means, even if they verbally accept each member of the Trinity, they do not hold and teach the Trinity very forcefully. You should be very careful if you receive this complaint, because the Trinity is a very clear basic doctrine of the Bible, and all churches of good doctrine will accept it without discussion.

V. Examples of Biblical Baptisms

It is very informative to study the passages that deal with baptism in the Bible. It is very important to study the circumstances of these examples.

A. The Baptism of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23 – His baptism was in water by immersion "went up straightway out of the water" ("coming up out of the water" Mark 1:10). Jesus saw baptism as necessary for him "to complete all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15 with Luke 7:29 "they justified God, being baptism"). This

⁷ See the discussion on the Trinity on page 22.

reinforces the point that baptism is not necessary for salvation (Jesus had no need to be saved), but rather baptism was done in order to complete all obedience and for the formal initiation of his life of service before God. Baptism is the mark of a son of God available to serve God according to the will of God (marking the dedication of that person for the purposes of God). Jesus began his ministry with his baptism Luke 3:23. It is important to understand that every Christian under the New Covenant is a priest before God (1 Peter 2:4,9, Revelation 1:5, 5:10, 20:6 compare Hebrews 10:19-25) and has spiritual offerings and service to offer God (Hebrews 13:15-16, 21; Philippians 4:14-18). Your baptism is your dedication to God (separation from the common of the world to be special before God), the formal beginning of your ministry before God.

B. The Baptism by the disciples of Jesus Christ

John 3:22; 4:1-2 – The custom of Jesus was to baptize in water those that were converted, believing in Him as the Messiah. Jesus himself did not baptize, but left his disciples to do the actual baptizing. The order is “Jesus makes and baptizes ... disciples⁸” (4:2) putting the conversion of the person before his baptism. It is important to see that in this passage it seems that they baptized at the same time (or very close in time to it) that the people confessed Jesus as their personal Savior.

C. The Baptism on the Day of Pentecost.

Acts 2:37-41 – It is very important to see the harmony of all that the Bible teaches about a matter, and not to take a verse that is not very clear to disrupt the harmony of other verses that are very clear about the matter. Here, after the sermon of Peter in which he presented the gospel, Peter exhorted the multitude of Jews of different nations, that they should (1) repent, (2) be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and (3) receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). (Baptism as public confession of salvation was part of the early believer's soul winning verses and presentation of the gospel.) Here the baptism in water is so close to the hour of salvation that it appears to be part of salvation itself. Of this point, some groups think that baptismal regeneration (water baptism makes one saved, and therefore without it, one cannot be saved) is biblical. But see our part VIII. The Heresy of Baptismal Regeneration for a refutation of this. Later the same day, says Acts 2:41, “they that gladly received his word were baptized”. Here we see again that baptism follows almost immediately after the believing and accepting of Jesus as your personal Savior. Baptism in water is a decision of obedience of the individual because he has already accepted Jesus Christ as His Savior, and the newly converted are commanded to be baptized (Paul in Acts 22:10, and Cornelius in Acts

⁸ Again we see the close connection between salvation of a person's soul from the sin and sinful lifestyle to replace it with being a disciple of Christ.

10:47), and we also see at times a personal desire of the new believer to WANT TO BE BAPTIZED as in the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:36.

In biblical times, the system of invitation as we now have it today did not exist. For us, a person is saved when they get up from their seats and go forward in order to say to all that they have accepted Jesus as their Savior, or they go forward so that a counselor can explain how to do it, and usually in that same service or in the next service that person publicly gives a profession or confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

In biblical times, in place of telling everyone at that time, they gave testimony through the medium of being baptized, at times on the same day that they accepted Jesus Christ. (For this reason, today some confuse responding to an invitation after a service with being saved, because of the close proximity of one to the other. Salvation is by accepting and believing in Jesus as Savior, especially applying that to oneself.) Baptism then is a form of confessing or professing publicly that Jesus is your personal Savior.

D. The Baptism of Paul

Acts 9:1-19; 22:6-16, 26 – After confronting Jesus in the road (Acts 9:4), Paul was of the disposition to obey God in whatever he may ask him (9:6). Ananias identified Paul as “brother” (9:17) on first seeing him, and he came to heal Paul of his vision and so that Paul could be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17), which is different than the Holy Spirit indwelling within somebody. Paul immediately started his ministry by preaching Christ (Acts 9:20), (although not every Christian has to become a professional preacher, every Christian will tell the unsaved of the gospel, which is that Jesus is the Savior). So we can see that when a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, that person normally “speaks” as a result of that filling. It is an error to associate this desire to tell others of salvation with speaking in tongues, because the important part of this is not the ecstatic (non-understandable) speech of tongues, but the preaching and teaching of Christ in a language that those you are speaking to clearly understand. This is the example of Acts 2 and Pentecost. It names the languages. This filling of the Holy Spirit is a requirement for those who preach and testify of Christ.

The only reliable mark of a spirit filled Christian is ALWAYS THAT HE IS HOLY, that he stops sinning and lives a life of righteousness. If you fill a clear balloon with milk, what is the apparent mark (white milk coloring). With Coke? The color of Coke. So when the Holy Spirit fills a Christian, what is the obvious mark? Holiness and piety. It should be very apparent from revelations of “spirit filled” tongues speaking preachers that are living in adultery and other things, that they were filled with some other spirit, but not the spirit of holiness, the Spirit of God. For a discussion of why modern tongues is not and has never been a part of the Christian experience but rather is a manifestation of the spirit of a demon, see our footnote on page 21.

E. Philip baptizing.

Acts 8:26-40 – Philip was chosen to be a deacon in the church at Jerusalem because he was full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5). Later we see Philip as an evangelist (Acts 21:8) and specifically in Samaria (Acts 8:4-5), and his ministry was to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God and to baptize men and women (Acts 8:12). We see that everybody in the local church had their own service and ministry before God.

F. The Baptism of Simon the Sorcerer

Acts 8:9-25 – Simon practiced sorcery (8:9) in Samaria, but when he heard the gospel (8:5) from Philip and saw the power that Philip manifested in those signs and miracles (8:13), and the exorcisms and healings (8:6-7), Simon the sorcerer “believed” (8:13), and was baptized. The biblical order is always the same, (1) the preaching of the gospel, (2) the person receiving or accepting the gospel (“when they believed Philip preaching ...” 8:12), then (3) later they are baptized in water as a testimony of their belief in Jesus as their Savior.

G. The Baptism of Ethiopian Eunuch.

Acts 8:26-40 – We always see that the gospel is preached before baptism (8:35), and that the candidate for baptism **ABSOLUTELY HAS TO BELIEVE** with all his heart that Jesus is the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of God (8:37). The candidate for baptism also has the desire to be baptized (8:36). One needs water and somebody to do the baptizing in order to be baptized (8:36). When you are baptized, you go down into the water, and then you come up out of the water (8:38-39) which indicates that the method or mode of baptism is only by immersion.

H. The Baptism of Cornelius

Acts 11:4-14 – Cornelius enjoined his relatives and closest friends (10:24) and when “many were come together” (10:27), they baptized him. God directed Cornelius that Peter “shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:14). Later Peter in the Jerusalem Council said “God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith ... but we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:7-11). Salvation is always associated directly with believing faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Lord. In the New Testament baptism is always closely connected in time, immediately AFTER believing faith.

I. Baptism of Lydia.

Acts 16:14-15 – The purpose of Paul and Silas in traveling was to announce the gospel. Lydia “whose heart, the Lord opened” “worshipped God,” so we can conclude that she had accepted the Lord, that she was a believer. The purpose of Paul to mention her was that she obligated them to stay with her as per Christ’s command to stay with worthy people when traveling giving the gospel (Matthew 10:11). Note that she was immediately baptized after Paul told her gospel.

J. The Baptism of the Philippian Jailer

Acts 16:23-34 – The desire of the jailer was to be saved. “They spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house” (16:32). The jailer “was baptized, he and all his, straightway” (16:33). It is certain that the jailer and all his house was baptized, but it is important to note that all of his house also clearly heard and understood the word of God (16:32), and all were baptized after their conversion “believing in God with all his house” (16:33), and all rejoiced together (16:34). This implies that if there were children in his house, they were of an age that they understood the gospel, believed it, accepted it, and of course were proper candidates for baptism because they were truly saved.

K. The Baptism of the disciples at Ephesus

Acts 18:24-28; 19:1-5 – They were baptized only in the baptism of John, which was a formal (public) recognition of repentance of their sins and hope in the Messiah. Paul told them who this Messiah was, Jesus of Nazareth. Immediately, they were baptized “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (19:5). This would teach rebaptism if the person did not know and believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior before their baptism.

VI. Marks of a Biblical Church

Among “good churches”, there are many differences and in itself, there is nothing wrong with that. But the great number of these churches are not biblical churches, and as a new Christian, it is difficult to discern which is a good church that is biblical. There are three principal matters that we are going to see are key in discerning a biblical church, (1) its doctrine, (2) the practice of the church, and (3) the leadership within that church. Also God helps us by showing us some good churches in the Bible, how they were, and for us, how we as a “good, biblical church” should be. Even though there is no one “perfect church”, we ought to see that at least the standards and goals of your church should be set to be what the Bible sets for all biblical churches.

A. Contrasting good and bad ministries.

1 Thessalonians 5:12 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; 13 And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.

1) Spiritual Watch Care of a Biblical Church

Hebrews 13:7 Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. 17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

Proverbs 27:23 Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.

The Bible presents the picture that each Christian is a member of a local church. Within this relationship of the local church, this church, especially the pastor, has the charge of spiritual watch care (oversight, the word for "bishop", overseer) over the members of that church. Because of this, we should be subject to our church and specifically our pastor. It is very important that the church and pastor where you put your obedience and membership is following the Bible (it is biblical).

Notice well that the pastor of the church where you congregate is a spiritual example (1 Peter 5:1-6 "ensamples to the flock"), such that you can pattern your life after his. There are churches that seem to be good but are really cults with false doctrine. False doctrine and a sinful lifestyle often go hand in hand. Be wary if the personal life of the leaders is not according to what God clearly says in the Bible, and is not much like the life of Christ.

2) Marks of Evil Ministers

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 – those evil workers disguise themselves as ministers of God, "whose end is according to their works"

Matthew 24:24 – the evil workers call attention to their "great signs and wonders"⁹ in order to deceive

Matthew 23:2-4 – The Pharisees and Scribes, even though they said the right things, had a double standard, one for everybody else, and another one for themselves. Their vision was to weigh down everybody else with heavy and difficult things to be borne, but not really help them bear those burdens. They had no compassion.

⁹ We should reject the searching for miracles and manifestations of supernatural powers as an objective in discerning what is "a biblical church". The magicians that opposed Moses matched his supernatural powers, signs, and displays one for one, but the source of their power was not of God. The only supernatural element that should really make us stand up and take notice is the life of a holy man of God, free from sin, humble and meek.

Matthew 7:15-24 – These evil workers are difficult to distinguish, but by their fruits, you shall know them. Even though they may say things biblically correct, that is not to say that they are saved. Those that are good ministers proclaim the Word of God, and they themselves show how to live it by the example of their own lives.

Acts 20:28-30 – These wicked ministers work to make disciples to themselves, but the man of God is preoccupied with his own testimony and in making his charge grow spiritually (this is the work of spiritual pastor, oversight), disciples of and devoted to Christ.

2 Peter 2:1-3 – The wicked introduce heresies by which is brought evil notoriety against the name and testimony of the Lord, and they use people for their own lucrative purposes (bringing money into their own pockets or under their control).

Jeremiah 23:1-4 – They destroy and disperse the sheep of the flock of God, they disturb or scare them, and they do not care for them, so that they are gathered and multiply.

3) Marks of a Good Minister.

1 Peter 5:1-5 – They feed the flock of God, not for dishonest gain (but they are to receive just recompense for their services 1 Cor. 9:6-14), by being living examples.

Jeremiah 3:15 – I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding 23:4 I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them 23:16 they will make the people of God hear the words of God, and turn from their evil ways and works (Zech 1:4) 23:28 “he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully”.

Ezekiel 34:2-24 – They feed the sheep with justice in place of stealing from them, they strengthen the weak, they cure the sick (spiritually those that have problems that weaken their lives), they bind up the broken (those that have suffered spiritual tragedies and crises), they return the lost to the flock when they are scattered abroad, they look for the lost asking for them, they do not lord over the flock with cruelty and violence, but protect it from enemies and spiritual predators, freeing them from spiritual dangers and traps.

Ephesians 4:11-12 – Pastors that perfect (make mature) the saints so that the saints can do the work of the ministry.

Acts 20:28 – Pastors, take heed to yourselves and to the whole flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (bishop or spiritually caring for in a position of authority), to feed the church of God.

B. Fundamental Doctrines of Biblical Churches.

Even though we believe that we should believe everything that the Bible teaches, there are some “fundamental” doctrines or doctrines that are essential for our Christian faith. Men set against God have attacked these fundamentals more than other teachings of the Bible. You should study these fundamentals in depth, but note that we are not trying to be all inclusive in this list.

The term "Fundamentalist" is somebody who takes the Bible literally, because God has given us His word faithfully, and God has made sure even the very words of the Bible (inspiration), so that the Bible is what God has wanted us to have. He believes that what the Bible says is certain. He judges all things by the criteria of the Bible, and allows the only valid criteria that judges him is the Bible¹⁰. He is faithful to the Christian faith, practicing it in his own life, always presenting it to unbelievers. He contends for the faith once delivered to the saints. He separates from (yet still trying to reach them with the gospel) all those who deny this his faith, and also from those that make friendship with, have fellowship with, or work in spiritual contexts with those who deny the faith.

Only by this mindset can we really understand what God wants to tell us in the Bible. Only with this mindset can we refute false doctrine and incorrect conduct.

1) The Inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures (the Bible).

The sixty six books of the Bible are the very word of God, faithful, and without error. Holy men of God wrote the books as God moved them giving them the very words of God. This refutes those who say that the Bible has error mixed with the truth, or that it is true and certain in spiritual things, but can be mistaken in details of history, science, etc.

2) The Deity of Jesus Christ (including his birth by a Virgin).

The death of Jesus had no importance in saving us IF JESUS WAS A COMMON MAN, GOOD BUT SINFUL!!! We believe that Jesus is completely God, completely a man like any man, but without sin. Involved in this, we see that God has designated Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior of the souls of men. This refutes those that say that Jesus was a normal man with sin, and that his conception and birth was like any other person. They attack the prophecies of the virgin having a child. By removing the deity from Jesus, the value of his death is null in an eternal sense, and his death is only useful as many other martyrs of the Christian faith, an example of being faithful under persecution.

3) Atoning¹¹ death of Christ in our substitution.

It is not sufficient that Christ died only as a good example, but that he died in full conscience that his death was in substitution to pay the price that God dictated was for our sins. His death was designed by God to be this way, Jesus understood it this way, and we (the redeemed) also affirm that it is this way. The death of Jesus is the only thing that can redeem man from his sin. This refutes those that say that the death of Christ was not in substitution for us, but was just a good example.

¹⁰ Nothing is as important in deciding the actions and character of his life as the Bible.

¹¹ "Atonement" or "propitiation" means to appease the wrath of God, whose anger is over our sins.

4) The literal resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Jesus in reality did die (that his soul separated from his body, and his body ceased to function as a living body does). Jesus then resurrected after the resurrection, and ascended into heaven 50 days later, and he is now reigning in heaven at the right hand of God the Father. This refutes those who say that Jesus just fainted and then was revived in the tomb.

5) The literal imminent return of Jesus Christ.

Just as Jesus left in the clouds (Acts 1), so shall he return one day, imminently or very soon, to take us from this world, and carry us to heaven. This also refutes those that say that Jesus will not return to redeem us.

Others have added to these fundamentals (because of fights with heretics and heresies) the following fundamentals:

6) The Personality, office, and work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is a person, the third person of the Trinity, and his office is that of rebuking men of sin and bringing them to the Savior. His work is in submission to the will of God, and he never works outside of the will of God. Note that groups that teach tongues teach that the Holy Spirit is working in them and their churches when clearly what is happening is not according to God's will recorded in 1 Cor. 14 and elsewhere¹².

¹² When tongues did happen in a New Testament church, the following rules outlined the will of God. (1) Tongues is speaking in a known foreign language to the hearers that don't understand that language, for the purpose of giving them the gospel and the word of God – Acts 1, 1 Cor 14:21, or a preacher is preaching in his own language, and an interpreter interprets that foreign language into the language of the congregation 1 Cor 14:28. The objective of tongues is the transmission of the truth of God to the understanding of others, i.e. teaching or preaching. God prohibits people speaking in language or words not understandable to the audience, except when there is an interpretation or interpreter. (2) God's will is that only 2 or 3 "speak" (preach or teach) in a service (one at a time), and the others willingly sit and hear him, judging if his words are biblical, see 1 Cor 14:29. Because "spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" 14:32, we discern that any manifestation of supernatural work in which a person loses control of himself is not of the Holy Spirit, but is some other spirit of error and deceiving. Charismatic teaching is directly opposite of this, asserting that the true gift of tongues is when the person loses control of himself because the "Holy Spirit" enters him at this person's invitation. If so, then who is disregarding God's will? The person that just surrenders (losing personal control) to the spirit or the Holy Spirit? (we conclude it is some other spirit). A study of demonic activity in the New Testament shows that demons work by taking control like this, but nowhere in the Bible do we ever see God doing that. God always tells us His will, and allows us in our will to decide to do it or not. (3) God's will is that women are prohibited from speaking (teaching or preaching) because they are under submission to their husband. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Gen 3:16. Women preachers and teachers over men cannot be God's will if it is prohibited by God's word.

7) The need of repentance and faith for salvation.

Salvation is by the grace of God, and this is by means of faith in Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior. The only way to be saved is to personally admit that one is a sinner (repenting of that), and accept in faith the work of Jesus Christ on the cross as being what gives you salvation. Salvation includes the regeneration of the Christian by means of the power of God, which means that God is effective in cleansing your life from sin through the confrontation of the Word of God, slowly but surely. The central focus of church services is this teaching and preaching of the very words of the Word of God so that sin is discovered, God's will is understood, and the confrontation of the two can happen.

8) The reality of hell (a place of eternal punishment) and heaven (a place of eternal bliss for the saved, and the home of God).

Without a literal place of heaven and hell, then everything else does not matter. If there is no life after death, then all the Bible is a lie. Even though there is life after death, there has to be a place of bliss for the redeemed (heaven) as a reward or fulfillment of their faith and hope. And if there is no place of punishment (hell), then there isn't a reason in obeying God, because there is no judgment. God has to be able to punish those who disobey Him, and there has to be a place of eternal punishment, just as much as a place for eternal bliss.

9) God is one, but exists in a Trinity.

The word "Trinity" and "Triune God" mean that God is one, existing in three persons. The Bible presents that there is only one single God (Deuteronomy 6:4; 4:35; Isaiah 44:6,7; 45:5-6; Mark 12:29,32; John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; 1 Timothy 2:5), but that single God exists in three persons. This is a mystery, and we cannot understand it very well¹³ even though it is true and certain.

Each person of the Trinity is totally God independent of the other three. One person in the Trinity is not "part of God", but fully, completely God in Himself. There are various evidences of the Trinity in the Bible: (1) the use of the plural and singular referring to God in Gen. 1:25-27; 3:22, 11:7; Isa. 6:8. (2) The three persons are clearly seen in Zech. 12:10. (3) In the incarnation of Jesus Luke 1:35. (4) In the baptism of Jesus Luke 3:21-22. (5) In the teachings of Jesus Christ John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26. (6) In the epistles of Paul 2 Cor. 13:14; Col. 2:9; Phil. 2:10/Isa. 45:23. (7) In the commission that Jesus gave to his disciples Mat. 28:18-20. (8) In creation Gen. 1:2; Heb. 1:2; Col. 1:16; Acts 17:24-25.

¹³ The Bible refers to marriage in the form of two people who will become one flesh (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6; Mark 10:8; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31). Also the spies of Israel returned speaking of "one grape" which was one clump of grapes, which took their life from one vine (Numbers 13:23).

C. Biblical Practices of Biblical Churches

1 Corinthians 16:15 I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.) 16 That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth. 18 For they have refreshed my spirit and yours: therefore acknowledge ye them that are such.

1) Involved in the Work of the Lord.

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

A biblical church is involved in the work of the Lord. But what exactly is the work of the Lord? We have to focus in that. DEFINITION OF THE GOSPEL: We should be going to the lost, giving them the gospel, which is that Jesus is God, who came in the form of a man and as the Christ, the Messiah, or the specially God appointed Savior of men from their sins, that he died on the cross for us in substitution for our sins, to save us from our sins, and resurrected from the dead on the third day. Believing in that gospel brings about eternal life, which is publicly confessed, and that first and most important confession was baptism (immersion in water). We then make them into disciples of Christ through teaching the Bible. So the Bible's highest priority is in the preaching and teaching of the word of God, focusing on the gospel, and the life of a disciple afterwards.

2) Focus on the authority of God's Word.

Acts 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Understanding the Bible is of supreme importance for us. We have to actually read what it says, and then explain it word for word, and then make people understand how this affects our lives (called application). Compare Nehemiah 8:8. Catholics, Mormons, and Jehovah Witnesses hold the church as their supreme authority, and Pentecostal-Charismatics hold their own supernatural experiences as their authority. A biblical church holds the Word of God as their supreme authority. The character of Sunday reunions is one of correction of the members' sinful lifestyles through teaching, preaching, and exhorting through exposition of the Word of God. They reverence and honor God, and everything in the local church service reflects the dignity that God deserves, and our supreme respect for God. Church services are not an entertainment event, but a learning and changing event.

3) The Relationship between the people of God.

We (the church of God) are a community, and we ought to have a relationship between us as a family, walking in love one with another¹⁴, giving exhortation and counsel among ourselves¹⁵ when necessary, and carrying one another's burdens (especially those burdens that a person cannot carry alone which is seen most commonly in our prayers for our brethren).¹⁶ We also practice hospitality between us 1 Peter 4:9. If the church does not have these principles that define the church atmosphere as biblical goals that they are seriously trying to achieve among themselves, then it is not a biblical church.

4) Church Discipline of erring members.

If the church is good then it is seeking to do the work of God and to promote Christian faith, and they should be emphasizing the standards and doctrines of God. When there is somebody within the same church that pretends to be a brother but lives in open sin without repentance (without remorse nor trying to stop sinning nor fight against that sin in his life), then the church has an obligation to discipline him (that is to rebuke him for that sin) then exhort him and help him to correct his life, and if he does not do so nor want to do so nor seriously attempt to do so, then the church must cut this person's membership (separate from him) and their association with the church (that is to cease to treat him as a member of the church, remove any privileges of membership such as voting), and to treat him as an unsaved person. See 1 Corinthians 5 for an example of this.

VII. Salvation

(this section explains salvation in depth)

It is very important to see that salvation is a step of faith that begins a relationship between that person and God. "A step" means to say that it is an action, a decision, or something that is very decisive. A person is not born saved, but is born being a sinner, on the path to hell and eternal punishment, (Romans 3:10-12,23). For those who are saved, it is a point in time, when all of this changes. This moment is the moment of salvation for us.

FOUR MAIN POINTS OF SALVTION – There are four points about salvation that you need to really dominate in order to be saved: (1) Recognize that you are a sinner. (2) Repent of your sins. (3) Believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for sin. (4) Accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

ILLUSTRATION OF A LIFE GUARD: Salvation is a rescue from sin. Think of it in this way, if you go to the beach, and you are in the water up to your neck, and all

¹⁴ Love one another - John 13:34,35; 15:12,17; Rom. 13:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Titus 3:3; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11; 3:23; 4:7; 4:11; 4:12; 2 John 1:5; Roman 12:10; Galatians 5:15; 5:26; Ephesians 4:32.

¹⁵ Rom. 15:14; Luke 24:32; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 4:18, 5:11; 2 Thess. 2:17; Heb. 3:13, 10:25.

¹⁶ James 5:16; Galatians 6:2-5; Roman 15:1-5.

of a sudden, your foot gets tangled in a submerged cable in the sand so that you are trapped. It is low tide, but in a few hours the tide will come in and the high tide will drown you. In no way can you escape this death trap by yourself. You see on the beach a convention of life guards, doing their practices and classes for life guards. What will you do?

First, if you do not recognize that you are in danger, then you will die. Denial of danger does not make it go away. You will eventually come to the point where you will be under water and unable to yell for help. (God gives us the opportunity to be saved until we die, but after, there is no more opportunity Hebrews 9:27.) It is very important that you alert one of the life guards before you get to the point that you cannot yell for help. You will most probably yell like crazy. The life guard will come, and he will get you out of that death trap.

When the TV news reporters come, they will ask you "Who saved you?" Did you save yourself, or did the lifeguard do it? Well, the lifeguard did it, didn't he? But if you were to deny your need of help, and if you did not yell for help from the life guard, then you would not have been rescued. The rescue came totally of the lifeguard, but you had to seek it, asking for it, receiving it, or die. This is the same with salvation for each of us. Then when somebody asks you, "what did you do in order to be saved?" You will tell them that you did nothing, or that you simply asked God to save you. It is not a "work" or thing that you do, but what God does to you and for you, it is totally the work of God. This illustration deals with a danger of losing life, but there is a danger even worse than that, which is to lose your soul in hell.

Luke 12:4 And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. 5 But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell: yea, I say unto you, Fear him. 8 Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: 9 But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.

Our real danger is in dying in our sins without Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

Some will be thrown into hell after death because of not being saved, and hell is such a place, that if you knew how it is, that you would do anything possible to avoid it no matter how radical it is. Jesus taught us a lot about hell. Study Luke 16:19-31 where Jesus tells the story of Lazarus and the rich man. Jesus never used actual names in parables, so this is a true story, not a parable.

Notice that the rich man had a conscience immediately after dying. In hell, he had all of his senses, and he was in torment. He had recognition and memory of his actions in this life, and that his actions were going to cause more people to go to

hell, and eventually making his situation worse yet. Jesus also taught what it is like in hell.

Mark 9:43 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: 44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. 45 And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

What Jesus is saying here is that if you actually knew the torments in hell, that you would do whatever in order to avoid it, even to the extent of cutting off a member of your body to be saved from hell. For example, in Matthew 5:29, Jesus repeats these verses from Mark almost verbatim, but the context is that a man sees a woman to lust after her, which is a sin. Jesus is teaching that you do not need to even touch a woman in order to sin sexually with her, but by just thinking it in your mind, you are sinning just the same. If it was for your enjoyment of this lusting that you do not accept salvation, it would be better to go to heaven blind than having two eyes to go to hell.

A. Recognizing that you are a sinner.

Matthew 9:12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. 13 But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

If you do not recognize that you are a sinner, then Jesus cannot save you. Salvation first depends on a recognition that you are in a situation that is impossible for you to save yourself.

1 Timothy 1:15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

Luke 18:13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Part of being saved is humbling yourself. Imagine that if an Olympic swimmer was the person who got his foot trapped in something under the water, then how embarrassing it would be for him to call for help, yet without humbling himself, he would perish. The first step in being saved is to say, "I cannot save myself from my problem of my sin." This is to humble one's self, and to not be arrogant.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite

and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Isaiah 66:2 For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

Psalms 138:6 Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.

Psalms 34:18 The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

Then we should note that the greatest obstacle to salvation is one's own self, that is, your hard, stubborn, and arrogant will in refusing to admit that you have done something wrong before God and that you cannot fix it yourself in your own way in your self. The person who cannot say, "my way of doing things does not work, I am evil and wicked before the eyes of God," cannot be saved.

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Galatians 3:22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

The whole world is under the curse of sin.

B. Repent of your sins.

Luke 13:5 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

More than just recognizing that you are a sinner, you need to have the proper attitude towards these sins, which is repentance from your sins. This is a feeling of remorse for having done them, and not wanting to do them again. To hate them. To just hate the punishment without hating the cause of the punishment is not enough. Many prisoners in jails hate having been caught, but are not repentant about having broken the law. They feel that they would have rather done the same thing in a better way so as not to get caught, and seldom do they want to have never had done the thing.

Actually to seek God for salvation is to say that YOU ARE NOT SEEKING TO CONTINUE IN WHAT YOU WERE DOING BEFORE! Your form of reaching heaven, or the form of men in seeking heaven is just not sufficient, and you reject that in order to do and embrace what God says about the thing.

Mark 1:14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

In the Bible, the idea of accepting the gospel (believing it, embracing it) is the same as repenting from your sins. To turn your back on one is to turn TO THE OTHER.

We should see that accepting salvation is to turn your back on sin. If Jesus is the remedy for sin, then which do you want? The remedy or the sickness?

Ezekiel 18:23 Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.

We should understand that God puts the decision and the responsibility for making this decision squarely on the shoulders of each individual person. It is a decision that each person himself must make. Sin is something that we do naturally from our childhood, but in order to be saved, it is a voluntary decision to leave our own paths to go down the paths of God.

In the Bible, the concept of salvation is much more than just going to heaven some day in place of going to hell. It is a way to live life on this side of death. Salvation is a remedy for sin, and this is for actual sin now in this life as much as it is for eternity.

C. Believe Jesus Christ died on the cross for sin.

1 Corinthians 15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; 2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. 3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures; 5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: 6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. 7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

Paul gives us a simple definition of the gospel in these verses. It has four parts:

DEFINITION OF THE GOSPEL

- (1) Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures.
- (2) Christ was buried.
- (3) Christ arose the third day.
- (4) Christ appeared to his disciples and apostles afterward.

If you confess this gospel (confess is to say the same thing that God says about it, to say it as your own belief) then you are saved. This is to say, if you confess this belief as your own belief, that you believe it and **ACCEPT IT AS YOUR OWN.**

Isaiah 53:5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

1 Peter 2:24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

Romans 4:25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

To say that you believe the gospel, is to say that you understand that your sin was put on Jesus the Christ (the Messiah, or the specially anointed one of God, who was appointed to bring salvation into the world for sinful men), and that Jesus paid the price of God's punishment that was meant for me personally. My particular sins, Jesus took upon himself on the cross for me.

THINGS THAT DO NOT SAVE

It is just as important in understanding what saves us, to understand what does not save us.

THERE IS NO SALVATION IN GOOD WORKS

Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

Galatians 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

In other words, our good works do not "justify"¹⁷ us before God. Salvation has many different facets, and justification is one referring to the legal aspect. God examines us in order to see if we are guilty or not of disobedience to God (sin). This is as a

¹⁷ "Justify" means to make innocent again, "just as if I had never sinned". "Justify" refers to the legal aspect of salvation like going before a judge with the accusation of a crime against you. You can only be "guilty" or "innocent", depending on the trial and evidence and decision of the judge. God sees all of our sins, and in the issue of deciding salvation for you, just like a criminal with an accusation of a crime against him, good works do not procure release from the charge of a crime. Only by Jesus Christ's blood "blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Col. 2:14) can all evidence against us be eliminated, so that we are "justified".

court of law which is convened to see if a person is a criminal or not. When you are accused before a court for a crime, how does your good works of charity affect your case? It doesn't. The matter is not whether you are good or not, but rather if you are guilty or not of breaking the law. God will examine each person one day in respect to sin and salvation. Only those who are redeemed by the blood of Jesus will enjoy Jesus Christ erasing every one of their sins from the sight of God.

Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. 43:25 I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.

Palms 51:9 Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

Acts 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

Colossians 2:13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross:

THERE IS NO SALVATION THROUGH OTHER INTERMEDIATORS

We should also notice that there is no salvation in anybody else, only in Jesus the Christ. God has put Jesus as the only person or thing that can save us.

Matthew 1:21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Acts 10:43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; 6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

This is the method of salvation, to believe in the name of Jesus, the Christ. No other mediator can help you be saved. This means that not Mary, nor the "saints"¹⁸, nor

¹⁸ Roman Catholics believe that some Christians are more special than others, and being "holier" than common Christians, and that these "saints" (literally "holy ones") can intercede and procure things (even salvation) for those who pray to them. But the New Testament calls all Christians "saints" in God's view (1 Cor. 1:2; Rom. 3:22; 2 Tim. 1:9). Moreover in the Old Testament, God specifically forbids prayer to or contacting the dead (Deu. 18:9-12; Ex. 2:18; Lev. 20:6; Isa. 8:19-20) associating it with witchcraft and other demonic craft. It is of value for those Christians who are alive to join in praying with you for issues and matters of this life (2 Thess. 3:1; 1 Thess 5:25; Col. 4:3), but they are not to be worshipped or revered in exchange for their prayers for you.

any other person can give you salvation. Jesus is the pivotal person of salvation, not even God the Father (John 14:6) nor the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 9:8) are set apart as objects through which one is saved. Those who approach God the Father or the Holy Spirit will come and are directed to come to Jesus first.

This also means that membership in a particular church does not give us salvation. Only faith in Jesus Christ. It is important to see that there are religions that have a different "Jesus" than he who appears in the Bible.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES – They believe that Jesus did in fact exist, but he was only a prophet sent from God, just like John the Baptist, or any other prophet in the Bible. But they deny that Jesus is very God, so then his death is nothing more than an inspiration for us to serve God, but it is not an actual payment for our sins. In other words, for them the death of Jesus is not in my place, Jesus taking upon himself my punishment which God dictated was for my sins. Also the Muslims see Jesus in this way. If you do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God (of the very essence and being of God, "very God") then Jesus' death has no power in itself to save men's souls.

MORMONS – The Mormons take another perspective towards Jesus. They believe that God the Father is father of two sons, Jesus and Lucifer, which are equals in power and being. Their concept of God is that the god of this world now (God the Father), was at one time a human being like you and me, and because he followed the Mormon teachings, he was promoted after death to be "god" (God the Father) of his own world, our present world. Good people in this life (for the Mormons, those following the teachings of the Mormons) will become gods of other worlds, like God the Father ascended to be the God of our world, and that a person's present sons in this world now, will become the Jesus' and Lucifer's of that world.

This lowers God from the place of being God to being something less. Jesus is the only Savior period. God does not talk of parallel worlds, or of a chain of world after world. His words would be lies because in each world, things could be different. A Jesus would have to die in each world to provide salvation. They destroy the biblical concept of God, and embrace a Hindi concept of reincarnation of people as gods. This also lowers Jesus Christ to be equal in power with Satan, as well as removes the uniqueness of Jesus as the only Savior. It also contradicts the Bible's teaching on the Trinity, God as the only God (Deu. 4:39; Isa. 44:8; 45:6; 46:9), and creation.

THERE IS NO SALVATION IN RELIGION

We should add that the exercise of religion can not save a person either. The principle priests and elders of the Jews had a very formal religion, and they supposedly believed God, but they did not believe in Jesus Christ (they did not accept Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah), and he assured them that the publicans and the prostitutes that "believed him" would enter into heaven before they would (Mat. 21:23,31) and as for their beliefs about God and their hollow religion, it would

not get them to heaven. The idea that conversion or repentance is also there, "when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him" (Mat. 21:32).

THERE IS NO SALVATION IN MIRACLES

For many, their faith is based in something supernatural that they personally have witnessed, a miracle. Without seeing these miracles, they cannot have faith. Jesus also rebuked this type of person, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (John 4:48; compare with 6:30). But even though they saw miracles, they did not believe in Jesus for the salvation of their souls John 12:37. Their salvation experience is based on their supernatural experiences¹⁹, but not in putting complete confidence in Jesus as the Savior and only mediator in order to obtain salvation.

NOT EVERY "BELIEF" ABOUT GOD SAVES

There are many people that have faith in many different beliefs, but the most part of these people do not go to heaven. We should clarify that not every kind of "belief" or "faith" will save a person, but faith of a particular type and in a particular object is what saves. Note that the demons believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, but their "faith" was more of an understanding and not an accepting of that belief. Their "faith" or "belief" only produces fear and trembling, because they understood it to represent their future judgment and punishment.

James 2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

Matthew 8:29 And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? Mark 1:24

D. Accepting Jesus as your personal Savior.

Hebrews 3:7 Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, 8 Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness:

2 Corinthians 6:2 (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)

Proverbs 27:1 Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

¹⁹ It should be well noted that in Moses' challenge with the magicians of Egypt, that false prophets of false gods can easily use supernatural powers as equally convincing as God's prophet. The issue is not in the fact that you experience something supernaturally, but rather in the fact that God has spoken through his word (the Bible).

Today, right now, immediately is the time of salvation. We should not wait not even one minute to fix this situation. We need to understand what it means when we say that we receive or accept Jesus as our personal Savior. The Bible speaks very specifically that our salvation does not rest on some work that we ourselves do. So then we have to be very careful to understand that receiving Jesus is not a work, nor is accepting him, and he saving us is not our work, but rather it is simple faith in Jesus as the Christ (Savior) that saves us.

But nonetheless it is something that each and every person must personally attend to or not be saved. The person who hears the word of God, the gospel, and does not receive it (believe it, appropriating it to himself), in this, a person refuses to believe in Jesus Christ and is lost eternally.

Mark 4:20 And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

In this parable, we see that salvation depends on the person who hears the word of God (the gospel) and then "receives it", and then this "seed" gives forth the fruit of salvation. The word of God has to enter into a person, and give its fruit of salvation, and that is something that is tangible in the life of that saved person.

Salvation does not rest in a prayer or personal action (going forward or raising a hand after a service), but in faith in Jesus as your Christ (Messiah, or Savior) who died on the cross for sinners, and "I myself am one of them", and "I participate in being or I am one of the redeemed by the blood of the Savior." Study Luke 18:9-14, where it says, "the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner". That is to say, he said, "God reconcile me to you", or "you make the reconciliation for me".

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF SALVATION

Even though salvation is something spiritual, and because of that, it is difficult for human beings to understand it well the Bible does use some common life examples in which we normally and without reservation confide in another person so that we can understand how we can easily believe and confide in Christ.

CONFIDENCE IN AN EXPERT LAWYER

If you had committed a serious crime, and you were in jail, probably the first thing that you would do is to call some lawyer of confidence and give your case over to him for your defense. Before God, you are really a criminal, under the condemnation of the law of God, and under the harsh wrath of the just Judge. But God has made provision for your defense, an expert lawyer who will defend all sinners that come before the tribunal of God. This is Jesus Christ our Lawyer, and you only have to

call for his help, and he will defend you. But no lawyer will defend a client if that client refuses his professional services.

1 John 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate (lawyer) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Confidently then you can seek Jesus Christ to intercede in your case before God, in order that Jesus can procure your pardon before the throne of God. So why don't you simply confide in this great lawyer? He is better than any other lawyer, because he has personally paid the price of your punishment, cleaning the slate of all the accusations against you. His services are free, but if you wish to get his services on the basis of some kind of payment on your end then he will refuse, because Jesus does not permit that you do anything in order to get salvation, except simply accept it, believe it. He has done all on the cross of Calvary. Simply believe in him, accept him with faith without regard to your own works.

When you accept a lawyer to defend you in court, you do not confide in your own knowledge and abilities in law do you? Don't you confide in the knowledge, skill, and years of preparation of the one you have made your lawyer? Your hope is in your lawyer that he can free you. But once you have a good lawyer, you listen to your lawyer's instructions, change what you are doing so that you no longer breaks the law and complicates your case.

A NEW BIRTH

John 1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: 13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

The Bible also uses the illustration of the birth of a baby in order to communicate to us that salvation totally changes our lives, and that salvation is a decisive thing, a decision, like going through a door. One is either in or out. Also a child does not form in the matter of a day, but is nine months in forming and growing until the moment of his birth. Likewise in spiritual birth God works in our hearts and lives before we come to grips with birth. God uses events, people, and His word in various ways and over time to guide a person to an understanding that results in his spiritual birth. This process is your testimony.

But any child has to be born. Birth is the moment to mark that beginning of his new life. Also in salvation, although a person may have a thirst for the things of God and investigate them, but without the decision and the act of accepting Jesus Christ, he is not born spiritually. Christ told us very clearly, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" John 3:3. When you accept this, you are at the

point of being spiritually born. It is absolutely necessary that a person be born again in order to be saved and enter heaven and escape hell.

Note well, the Bible speaks very clearly that the only thing that a person has or does in order to go to heaven, have salvation, and escape the punishment of hell, is that that person believes Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. The Bible does not mention membership in a church, nor good works, nor being baptized, in order to be saved.

Jesus explained to Nicodemus, that Jesus himself had to die and be raised from the cross so "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" John 3:15-18, 36. The refusing to believe in Jesus Christ is what will condemn you to punishment in hell for all eternity.

People who accept Jesus Christ, "have him" just as a father "has a son", or a woman "has a husband", in other words, you have entered into a personal relationship with him.

1 John 5:11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. 13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

There is no work or thing that you can do to be saved, except to accept what Jesus Christ has already done for you on the cross. It is not what you do, but rather what Jesus has already done that saves you. You simply accept it, what somebody else has done, is doing, and will do for you. Just as there are great changes after a person's birth, likewise there are changes after a person is saved. A fetus within his mother does not breathe air, neither does he eat food. But once born, the baby is in grave danger if he does not breathe and eat. Being saved is by simple faith in Jesus Christ but the procuring of blessings, growth and maturity depends on how one obeys God. In other words, there is or should be great changes between before and after one's birth, whether it is your physical birth, or your spiritual birth.

A MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

When a young woman decides to marry a young man, she submits herself to her promised. Really she does not know how he will treat her, nor how their life together will be, but the love between them is what gives confidence to the bride to

take this step. Submitting herself to her husband, she enters a relationship of faith and confidence in her promised. The good husband will always treat his wife as a fragile vessel (1 Peter 3:7), giving her more honor and taking more tender care of her than other things. He wants the best life possible for her even to the point of sacrificing his own life for her. Paul said:

Ephesians 5:24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. 25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Thus God also calls us to submit ourselves to God, who loves us greatly. Deciding to submit ourselves to Christ, we can confide in the goodness and good character of God, even though we do not know everything that lies ahead of us. Whatever thing that God asks us to abandon (sin) or to do (works of righteousness), with joy, the true Christian will comply with them because he loves God. Why don't you stop worrying about everything that causes doubt and turn you heart over to Christ today?

VIII. The Heresy of Baptismal Regeneration

Before we leave the subject of salvation and its relationship with baptism in water, there is a doctrine of some groups which is called "baptismal regeneration" that we need to deal with. This doctrine says that when an unsaved person is baptized in water, he is actually saved the moment of being baptized in water, because the baptism of this religious group is what automatically saves them (usually they reject baptisms done by people believing different from them). In other words the deed or act or work of baptism is what saved the person. Some emphasize that the parents should be believers for their babies. Many of these groups like to compare New Testament baptism with the Old Testament circumcision of infants to defend their doctrine. They say as in Israel, the babies were circumcised without consciousness of what happened, and that they entered into a relationship with God (a covenant) because of their believing parents. But in the Old Testament, Israel was a holy nation, and circumcision was the mark that a child was an Israelite, and not all of these circumcised Israelites were saved. People who believe in baptismal regeneration confuse the fact that faithful Israelites dedicated their child to God (but not making them saved) in order to commit to bring them up in the Jewish faith. It was as today when Christian parents want to dedicate their babies before the Lord some days after birth. It does not save the child, but is a declaration of the parents of their desire to train up the child in the faith that the parents have.

If salvation was so simple as circumcision, then all of Israel would be saved, and then why did Jesus, John the Baptist, Paul, and the rest of the New Testament disciples have to preach the gospel to this nation? Their circumcision did not insure their salvation!

A. The Doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration

This doctrine ignores that salvation is dependent on the faith of the candidate (Romans 4:6; Titus 3:5; Ephesians 2:8-9) and not on the works of the candidate and even less on the works of other people. The thief on the cross beside Jesus had the promise of Jesus Christ, the Savior, that the thief had salvation that day without being baptized in water (Luke 23:43). A little time before this, the thief was an unsaved man casting ridicule in the face of Jesus (Matthew 27:44).

The Bible always presents the same order of events, (1) hear the gospel, (2) believe that Jesus Christ is your personal Savior, or having faith in Him, and then (3) to be baptized as a public declaration of that salvation he has already received (Acts 2:41; 10:47; 8:36; 11:17-18). In comparison with preaching the gospel, baptism is of minor importance. Jesus did not baptize anybody, but let his disciples do it (John 4:2). Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:17 "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." If salvation was dependent on water baptism, then Paul would never have said this, and Jesus would have baptized people himself since he is the Savior. There are four passages that consider special individual treatment and explanation: Acts 22:16, Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38,41; 1 Peter 3:21.

B. Acts 22:16

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

A literal translation of this would be "Why are you always just at the point of doing it? Be baptized and wash your sins, invoking his name". This is like the exhortation at the end of an evangelistic service, when the preacher exhorts the unsaved to get up, come forward, and publicly make a profession of faith and be saved. Even though getting up and going forward does not save you, it is so connected with salvation in our minds, that at times the preacher exhorts, "don't grab the back of the pew in front of you, but come". There is a strong argument according to Matthew 10:32-33, Luke 9:27; 12:9; 2Timothy 2:12, and 1 John 2:23 that if a person does not publicly confess Christ, then Christ will deny this person before God the Father. Today in Christianity we have changed the public confession of Christ as Savior from the biblical baptism to the announcing before the church of salvation after a service or an invitation. In the case of the baptism of Paul, the Lord commanded that Ananias restore his sight and baptize him (Acts 9:12). Paul is an exemplary case of how a person should respond when he is sincere with the Lord. Immediately after recognizing the Lord Jesus as his Savior, "He trembling and

astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Acts 9:6. In Acts 9, where Luke tells us of the salvation of Paul and his calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles, Luke doesn't even mention that Paul was baptized (very strange if baptism saves). In Acts 21-22, Paul was accused of contaminating the temple with Gentiles (Acts 21:23-25). His defense to his Jewish accusers included a retelling of his salvation and entrance into this ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 22:1-17). In this passage, Paul explains how he persecuted the church before being saved, and that after he was chosen, called, and purified in order to be used of the Lord in His missionary work to the Gentiles. But Paul does not retell his baptism in these occasions of his salvation because his baptism was not what saved him but rather his faith in Jesus.

C. Mark 16:15-16

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

In Mark 16:16 it is important to note the order of things, that first the preaching of the gospel, then faith, then baptism, and then you will be saved. Baptism is the formal public profession of your faith. Just like some who go forward in a service, they say the words that the pastor wants to hear, but they are not sincere with God, and they are not saved by going forward nor by baptism. Others who are sincere, recognize that they are saved in the moment that they "take Christ as their Savior, and confess him before men". To confess Christ without being sincere is hollow and does nothing in respect of salvation or eternal life. The same with baptism which is NOT PRECEDED with saving faith before the act. The person must already be saved before he is baptized. Notice also that it says "he that believeth not shall be damned." Nobody will ever be condemned to hell for not having been baptized, neither for not having gone forward in a church service, or even never having entered a church, but people ARE condemned to hell for not believing in Jesus Christ. When there is a biblical church somewhere in your area that you can go to, and you refuse to congregate with them and be a part of them, that would have the significance of denying Christ and not identifying with the redeemed. This would seem to indicate that your faith is insincere before God.

D. Acts 2:38,41

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. 41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

In Acts 2:38, Peter almost makes baptism the equivalent with salvation.²⁰ But we remember that this is the same Peter that wrote 1 Peter 3:21, which says that baptism is NOT what saves us, but is the hope of a good conscience before God. It is important to see that in Acts 2:41 that those that “received his word” (the gospel message which was presented in his sermon in 2:15-36) “were baptized”. The requirement for baptism is always the same, the person must already be saved, having accepted the gospel message before they can be baptized. We cannot separate repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Later in Acts 3:19, it says “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” and there is no mention of baptism here in getting saved. The outward action of being baptized is because the person has repented and is believing in Jesus Christ within. The idea that a Christian can go through life without being baptized is just non-existent in the New Testament. First you hear the gospel, then you believe in Jesus Christ, and always the same place in the order, you are then after these two things baptized as a testimony of your salvation.

E. 1 Peter 3:21

1 Peter 3:21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

In 1 Peter 3:21, Peter is obviously referring to baptism in water, using the comparison of baptism to that “dunking” that Noah received when he was “baptized” (completely covered by water) and was saved from the punishment of God on all humanity of his day. We should remember that in Noah’s case, those that got wet (baptized) were the unsaved, and those that got baptized technically without getting wet (Noah and those in the ark) were the ones saved, the true believers. Technically, Noah did not go down into the water and come up. He was upon the water, and had it sprinkled and poured on top of him. Those that were saved were those that were in the ark, a type or picture of Jesus Christ. Likewise this same picture, baptism saves nobody today, but being in Christ does save a person. This (baptism in water) does not speak of the salvation of a person’s soul, “putting away of the filth of the flesh but the answer of a good conscience toward God”. In other words, baptism in water is an open declaration of men of their hope that they are putting in Christ as their personal Savior.

²⁰ One of the principles of interpreting the Bible is that we should take every passage of scripture in light of the harmony of the entire word of God. God does not contradict Himself, so His word is consistent within itself. Therefore, we go to the clearest declarations of an issue, discern what is obvious from that, and then we go to the unclear, not easy to understand passages, and interpret them so that they are in harmony with what is very clear elsewhere.

IX. Writing Your Testimony

It is a good thing to always be ready to give your testimony to those that ask of you a reason for why you do what you do, or your hope of heaven, so you should have your testimony always ready to give.

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING YOUR TESTIMONY: Include the things that God used in your life to call attention to your heart of your unsaved state and the grace of God. Because the unsaved can be listening, it is good to include some biblical points of what exactly a person needs to believe in order to be saved. Also, so that you do not cause others to trip up into sinful thoughts or resentments, it is best to only speak in generalities about your sinful lifestyle before being saved, and never brag about your sins. If there are people you have wronged or had problems with before (such as a divorced spouse), do not say things that would offend them, or reveal details that would embarrass anybody. Sinners act like sinners, and there is nothing new in that. Don't take personal offense at them acting according to their nature. What you want to communicate is the wonderful grace of God in your life.

Write below your testimony of your salvation.

Write about your previous life. (you may use another piece of paper instead)

What things did God use to bring the gospel to your attention?

I saw and understood the grace of God towards me through these verses . . .

Write here the place, time, date, and person leading you to the Lord.

X. QUESTIONS BEFORE BEING BAPTIZED

1. Why should I be baptized? (What does it mean to me to be baptized?)

2. What is the Christian's obligation to be baptized?

3. What is the biblical mode or manner of being baptized, and why this mode? (sprinkling, immersion, or pouring)

4. Why should I become a member of a local church and congregate with them?

5. What are the marks of a biblical church?

6. DATE, PLACE, AND PERSON/CHURCH BAPTIZING ME:
