

CHURCH OF GOD

BIBLE COURSE

LESSON NO. 10

SHOULD YOU BE BAPTIZED?

The Apostle Peter commanded the crowd gathered in Jerusalem: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you..... But is this command relevant in the 20th century? Just what IS baptism, and does God require it for salvation?"

The New Testament practice of water baptism seems outdated to many today. There are Christian-professing churches that no longer require baptism, dismissing it as merely an antiquated ceremony of a primitive church.

Can we prove if water baptism is just an old-fashioned idea of men, or a teaching our Savior wants His followers to obey today?

A REQUIRED STEP FOR SALVATION

The most direct biblical passage concerning water baptism is found in Acts 2:36-41. In his inspired sermon on the day of Pentecost, A.D. 31, the Apostle Peter convicted his listeners for their part in having put the Messiah to death. Several thousand became filled with guilt and shame on that memorable day more than 1,900 years ago. Their spontaneous response was: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (verse 37).

A very good question.

When a person comes to recognize, as this first century group did, that he has been in rebellion against the laws and purposes of his Creator, what should he do?

Notice the inspired answer to that question: "And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (verse 38, RSV).

The preceding lesson made crystal clear the necessity of real repentance for salvation. But the very next step, as stated in Acts 2:38, is baptism.

Water baptism, as we shall learn from this study of the Bible, is also required by God for salvation. With the help of this eye-opening lesson, we will come to understand exactly what God commands concerning water baptism. We will begin by learning the symbolic meaning of baptism. Then we'll study the Old Testament events that prefigured New Testament baptism, noticing also the practice of John the Baptist, Jesus' personal example, and the apostolic practice in the first century Church of God.

This lesson will answer such questions as: What is baptism? What is its biblical history? What is its purpose? What is its meaning for us today? Why is it indeed a vital step in becoming a member of the very Family of God?

Let's begin!

THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF BAPTISM

Much symbolism surrounds the subject of baptism. We need to understand that symbolism to know why God requires baptism of those who want to become true Christians-Spirit-begotten children of God.

1 . Did Jesus Christ condemn sin in the flesh? Rom. 8:3-4. How? Heb. 4:15. Why did He die? I Cor. 15:3. What happened to His dead body? Verse 4; Rom. 8:1 1.

COMMENT: Christ "condemned" sin by living sinlessly through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then He died for our sins - His death paid the penalty of sin that we have incurred-and was buried. After three days and three nights He was "quicken" by God's Spirit-that is, made alive and given spirit life. His resurrection shows He triumphed over sin and death.

2. Is baptism symbolic of one's death, burial and resurrection from a "grave"? Col. 2:12-13, Rom. 6:3-6. Also read verses 7-13 of Romans 6.

COMMENT: Just as Christ died for our sins and was buried, our baptism-being plunged into a watery "grave"-is symbolic of the death and burial of our old sinful life. And as Christ was resurrected in newness of life, our coming up out of the waters of baptism is symbolic of our rising up from our "grave" to live a new life free from the guilt of past sins and the death penalty our sins have incurred.

Baptism, as these verses show, pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. It also pictures the death and burial of the sinner and his rising up to begin living a Christian life.

Let's elaborate on the above a little further to be sure we understand the important symbolism of baptism.

Going down into the water clearly pictures the death of Christ, and of our old self. Likewise, being "buried" (immersed) in the water pictures the burial of Christ, and of our sinful life. And coming up out of the water pictures Christ's resurrection and our commitment to walk henceforth "in newness of life"-obedience to God's law. After baptism we reckon ourselves as dead, so far as sin is concerned, but alive through God and His Son Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:11).

After baptism and the "laying on of hands" (which will be discussed later), Christ begins to live within us through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9-10). God's Spirit gives us the spiritual power, as we yield to God, to resist the devil's sinful influence. And it imparts to us the faith and love of God to obey His spiritual law (Rom. 5:5; 13:10).

The Apostle Paul said: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

Water baptism is simply an ordinance of Christ by which we symbolically express our faith in Him as our personal Savior-our belief in His death, burial and resurrection. Baptism is also a symbolic expression of our repentance from sin and desire to totally destroy and "bury" our old sinful life. Baptism clearly shows our realization of our own sins, our vanities, our wretchedness. It is an outward acknowledgment that our selfish, vain and sinful old self must die so that we might rise to live a new life of spiritual obedience to God as made possible through the power of His Holy Spirit.

Baptism shows our total surrender to God. It symbolizes the complete burial of the old sinful self and our beginning a new life surrendered to the will and authority of God.

THE FLOOD A TYPE OF BAPTISM

The Old Testament contains significant types that prefigure New Testament water baptism. These foreshadowing events are important to our understanding of Christ's and the apostles' teachings concerning baptism. We will begin with Noah and the Flood.

1 . Does Noah's escape from the Flood-a watery "grave" for the sinning world-typify our deliverance from sin's penalty through the symbolic meaning of water baptism? I Pet. 3:20-21.

COMMENT: Notice how the Revised Standard Version renders verses 20-21: "...eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ " Let's closely examine how the Flood is a type of baptism.

2. After men had begun to multiply upon the face of the earth, did they sin grievously against God?

Gen. 6:5, 11-12. Just how corrupt had mankind become in God's sight? Same verses.

3. What did God say He would do to the earth's inhabitants as a result of their great wickedness? Verse 7. How would they be destroyed? Verse 17.

COMMENT: Mankind had become so corrupt that the most humane thing God could do was to put the entire human race out of its self-imposed misery-except for one family.

4. Who, in that world of rampant sin, found grace in God's sight? Verse 8. Why did God favor Noah? Verse 9. Also compare 11 Peter 2:5 with Psalm 119:172.

COMMENT: Noah "walked with God." He obeyed God and preached obedience to His commandments. But no one would listen.

5. God told Noah to build an enormous vessel so he, his family and numerous animals could escape the great Flood He would bring on rebellious mankind (Gen. 6:14-17). How did Noah demonstrate his belief-his faith-in God's promise of salvation from the Flood? Gen. 6:22; Heb. 11:7.

COMMENT: Many arduous and trying years were required to complete the ark. The pre Flood world had about a century to repent of their sins before God sent this worldwide deluge. (Compare Genesis 5:32 with Genesis 7:1 1).

God provided a way for Noah and his family to escape the old world of sin and the penalty it had incurred for disobedience to God. Noah believed God when He warned him of the Flood, and Noah obeyed God by building the ark. He demonstrated his faith by his obedience (see James 2:17-26). This is the same kind of active, LIVING faith God requires of us today!

Noah was brought up out of the water that destroyed the sinful world and was saved physically a type of our being saved spiritually from the penalty of sin, eternal death, if we really believe Christ died for our sins and if we symbolically bury them in the waters of baptism.

ISRAEL "BAPTIZED" IN THE RED SEA

Another interesting Old Testament type pointing to New Testament baptism was the escape of Israel from Pharaoh and the bondage of Egypt.

In Egypt, the Israelites were Pharaoh's slaves-helpless and powerless under his taskmasters-just as a sinner is the slave of sin (Rom. 6:16).

Egypt was a symbol of sin (Heb. 11:24-27; Rev. 11:8). Pharaoh and his army can be compared to Satan and his demons, who try to keep us in captivity to sin. And just as God commanded Israel to come out of Egypt, He commands us to come out of sin.

Under the leadership of God, through Moses, the Israelites began their exodus out of Egypt the night after they had applied the blood of the Passover lamb to their doorposts (Ex. 12:1-13; 30-37). Their departure from Egypt is a type of our departure-our repentance-from sin! The blood of the lamb, which protected them from the death angel, is symbolic of the blood of Christ-"our Passover" lamb (I Cor. 5:7; John 1:36)- which was shed for the remission of our sins to save us from the penalty of eternal death.

1. Whom did God commission to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage? Ex. 3:10-12; Acts 7:35. Is Moses therefore referred to as a type or prefigure of Christ? Acts 7:37; 3:20-22. What did God send Jesus Christ to deliver us from? Rom. 3:24-25; 6:23.

COMMENT: Moses, sent by God to deliver Israel from physical bondage, was a forerunner of Christ, whom God would send to deliver repentant believers from the spiritual bondage and penalty of sin.

2. How did the Israelites react as they left Egypt behind them? Num. 33:3.

COMMENT: The Israelites left "triumphantly" (RSV)-with great joy, elated at their deliverance from the bondage (sin) of Egypt.

3. While the Israelites were rejoicing over their newfound freedom, what did Pharaoh and his army do? Ex. 14:9.

COMMENT: The Israelites thought they were completely free from the bondage of Egypt-until Pharaoh began to pursue them! For us, just accepting Christ and His shed blood for the remission of past sins does not make us forever free from sin.

4. What did Moses say when the Israelites became fearful of Pharaoh's oncoming army? Verses 13-14. Did God tell them to go forward in obedience, trusting Him and His power to deliver them? Verses 15-16.

COMMENT: God likewise tells Christians to go forward in obedience to Him, trusting Him and His power-the Holy Spirit-to deliver them from Satan and sin!

5. What help did the Israelites receive from God to protect them from Pharaoh and his army? Verses 19-20.

COMMENT: The angel of the Lord in the cloud had gone before the Israelites to show them the way. Now the angel went behind them-between them and their enemies-to protect them.

We also need help-very desperately! We need God's Holy Spirit to help us resist the sinful influence of Satan after our past sins have been covered by Christ's shed blood and forgiven.

6. When God divided the Red Sea so that the children of Israel could pass through (Ex. 14:21-22), were they fearful? Ps. 78:53. Did they trust God to keep the walls of water from crashing down upon them? Heb. 11:29.

7. But what happened to the Egyptians who were pursuing the Israelites? Ex. 14:26-28; Ps. 106:9-11.
COMMENT: Pharaoh and his army, who represented the sins of Egypt in which Israel had lived, were buried in a watery grave. How wonderfully this typifies the symbolism of baptism! For as Paul said in Romans 6:6: "We know that our old [sinful, carnal] self was crucified [killed and buried by baptism, verses 3-5] with him [Christ] so that the sinful body might be [symbolically] destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin" (RSV).

8. Therefore, isn't Israel's deliverance from Egypt (sin) through the waters of the Red Sea clearly referred to as symbolic of Christian baptism? I Cor. 10:1-2.

COMMENT: God required many of His prophets, including Moses, to act out the things He would bring to pass (see Ezekiel 4:1-17; 5:1-4, 12). Likewise, those who sincerely want to have their past sins blotted out and covered by Christ's blood are required by God to perform the deeply symbolic act of baptism! It impresses the MEANING of baptism upon us, and is an outward sign of our repentance and belief in Christ's sacrifice in payment for our sins.

And so the passing of the Israelites through the Red Sea and the drowning of Pharaoh and his army in a watery "grave" (symbolizing the destruction of our "old man", or past life of sin) clearly typify New Testament water baptism.

JOHN'S BAPTISM

Just before the beginning of Christ's ministry, God commissioned John (known as "the Baptist") to administer the "baptism of repentance." Let's understand what it was, and exactly why it was instituted.

1. Was John clearly a prophet of God? Luke 1:63, 76; Matt. 11:9-11.

2. For whose ministry was John sent to proclaim and prepare the way? Luke 1:76; Matt. 3:1-3; 11:10.

3. Did John baptize with water? John 1:26, 31, 33. Who sent John and gave him authority to baptize? Luke 3:2-3; Matt. 21:23-27.

COMMENT: John was commissioned by God to baptize repentant believers in water. Baptism then, as it is today, was an outward sign of repentance. And it pictured being washed and cleansed from past sins. After Christ's sacrifice, baptism took on even greater symbolic meaning (Rom. 6:3-6; Col. 2:12-13), as explained earlier in this lesson.

4. Exactly what was the message John preached? Mark 1:4-5; Matt. 3:2, 11. What was the purpose of his message? Luke 1:16-17, 77.

COMMENT: John's inspired message was the "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." It was exactly what it implied. Those John baptized had responded to his preaching by repenting of their sins. And they were forgiven by God. But they did not receive the holy Spirit at that time because it was not yet made available (except in a very few cases from the time of Adam, which we'll discuss in Lesson 11) until after Christ's resurrection and ascension to heaven (John 7:38-39).

Luke 1:77 clearly states that John was sent "to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission [forgiveness] of their sins." John was simply preaching repentance from sin. His message was preparing a people to receive and obey Jesus Christ when He began His ministry.

A NEW TESTAMENT COMMAND

Now that this foundation of understanding has been laid, let's learn exactly what Jesus Christ commands us to do concerning water baptism.

1. Did Jesus set an example to show us how we should live? I Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6. Was He baptized? Matt. 3:13-16.

COMMENT: Even though Jesus had no sins to repent of, He was baptized to set an example for us to follow.

2. After his resurrection, Jesus told His apostles (who formed part of the foundation of His Church) what they were to preach to the world. Did He plainly command them to baptize repentant believers? Mark 16:15-16, Matt. 28:19-20. Historical evidence reveals that Matthew 29:19 should read – “Go ye and make disciples of all the nations in my name.” The extra words were added by Catholic believers in the doctrine of the Trinity, introduced only after AD 80, without any biblical authority.

What, exactly then, are they to believe? Mark 1:14-15; Acts 8:12.

COMMENT: The true Gospel ("gospel" is an Old English word meaning "good news:") Christ commands His Church to preach includes more than just the good news that He is our Savior. As we learned in Lesson 1, Christ's Gospel is the message He brought and preached-the good news of the coming Kingdom of God.

One must hear and believe the true Gospel before being baptized. Those who believe the Gospel, accept Christ as their Savior, repent of their sins, are baptized and remain faithful to God, are the ones who will be saved. They will be born of God as spirit beings when Jesus Christ returns, and will inherit the Kingdom of God, having then become members of the divine Family of God!

3. What was Peter's command to believers on the day of Pentecost? Acts 2:38. Were those who repented then baptized? Acts 2:41; 8:12.

4. About 10 years after the Apostle Peter preached his first inspired sermon to the Jewish people in Jerusalem, God sent him to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. He was sent to the house of Cornelius, a very devout Italian (Acts 10). Peter then preached the Gospel to Cornelius, his family and friends (verses 24, 34-43). What did they receive while they were hearing Peter's message-even before they were baptized? Verses 44-45. Was this a special sign from God to the apostles? Acts 11:17-18.

COMMENT: Repentant believers ordinarily must be baptized before they can receive the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38). But God made an exception in the case of Cornelius and his group. Since they were the first Gentiles of the New Testament era to be called by God and converted, God gave them His Spirit before baptism as a special sign to Peter and the other apostles proving that He had also opened the way of salvation to Gentiles.

5. What did Peter immediately command should be done to Cornelius and all who had received the Holy Spirit? Acts 10:47-48.

COMMENT: Peter, following Christ's instructions (Matt. 28:19-20), had Cornelius and all the other repentant believers baptized!

Obviously baptism is very important to God-otherwise He would not have made it a command to be obeyed by those He calls to become Spirit-begotten Christians.

THE CORRECT METHOD

There is great confusion in the religious world regarding the proper method of Christian baptism. Some "baptize" by sprinkling, and others by pouring water over the heads of new converts. Some require complete immersion.

What is the correct method of baptism-or are they all correct?

It is interesting to note that the word "sprinkle" occurs only a few times in the New Testament, always in connection with the blood of Christ, but never referring to baptism. The word "pouring" is also mentioned several times, but not once as a form of baptism!

Notice what the New Catholic Encyclopedia says regarding baptism: "It is evident that baptism in the early church was by immersion. This is implicit in terminology and context.... That baptism took place by immersion is evidenced by Paul's presenting it as "being buried with Christ" (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12)" (article "Baptism," 1967, volume 2, pages 56, 58). The 1907 edition of the Catholic Encyclopedia states: "The most ancient form usually employed was unquestionably immersion In the Latin Church immersion seems to have prevailed until the twelfth century" (article "Baptism," volume 2, pages 261, 262).

In the latter half of the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas wrote: "it is safer to baptize by immersion, because this is the more ordinary fashion Christ's burial is more clearly represented by immersion; wherefore this manner

of baptizing is more frequently in use and more commendable" (Summa Theologiae, part 3, question 66, article 7).

But pouring and sprinkling were growing common in the 14th century and gradually prevailed. It is quite plain that these customs of traditional Christianity are actually innovations of men!

The word "baptize" is not an English word per se. It is derived from the Greek word baptizo. (Recall that the New Testament was originally written in Greek.) In translating the Bible into English, the translators left this word untranslated.

The literal translation of baptizo is "immerse". It means "plunge into" or "put into". It does not mean "sprinkle" or "pour". The Greek word for sprinkle is rantizo and for pour is cheo. God inspired the writers of the New Testament to use only the word baptizo, meaning to immerse, when referring to baptism.

Sprinkling and pouring obviously are not forms of immersion. Therefore, sprinkling and pouring are not forms of baptism. Immersion-being placed completely under water-is the proper biblical method. Baptism symbolizes the burial of the old carnal, sinful self. Only total immersion can properly symbolize death and burial; sprinkling and pouring are not symbols of a burial by any stretch of the imagination!

Notice what A Dictionary of the Bible, edited by James Hastings in 1898, says: "The element was always water, and the mode of using it was commonly immersion. The symbolism of the ordinance required this. It was an act of purification; and hence the need of water. A death to sin was expressed by the plunge beneath the water, and a rising again to a life of righteousness by the return to light and air; and hence the appropriateness of immersion" (volume 1, page 243).

Let's notice what the Bible itself teaches concerning the proper method of baptism.

1 . Why was John baptizing in the area of Aenon? John 3:23.

COMMENT: John would have needed only a cupful of water to sprinkle, or a pitcher-full to pour-but baptizing requires "much water".

2. How does the baptism of Christ prove that He was immersed? Matt. 3:16.

COMMENT: We know Jesus was put down into the water because He "went up straightway out of the water...." He could not have come "up out" of a sprinkle or pour!

3. When Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, did they both go into the water? Acts 8:38.

COMMENT: There would have been no purpose for Philip to go into the water, except there was no other way he could plunge the eunuch into the water. Had sprinkling or pouring been the practice, Philip would have needed only to bend over at the water's edge and scoop up the water in his hands.

The above biblical evidence clearly shows that immersion-being placed completely under water-was the only method of baptism practiced by the New Testament Church of God.

OTHER KINDS OF IMMERSION

Water baptism is an outward sign of repentance. It demonstrates one's willingness to put away permanently his or her old way of life and to walk in God's way of life from that point forward. Its meaning is strictly symbolic in the sense that water baptism itself has no mystical or magical effects on the person who is immersed. Its only physical effect is to get the person thoroughly wet! Nor is the Holy Spirit given by water baptism.

There are several other baptisms or immersions mentioned in the Bible that are important for us to understand. Let's notice what they are.

1 . What baptisms, besides water baptism, did John speak of? Matt. 3:11

COMMENT: John had just been warning the hypocritical religionists to demonstrate some fruits or results of their alleged repentance (verses 5-8). Notice again what he said: "I baptize [immerse] you with water for repentance, but he [Jesus] who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize [immerse] you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (verse 11, RSV). Here John referred to two other kinds of immersion-neither of them in water.

First, let's understand the "baptism with the Holy Spirit ' "

2. Did Jesus promise His disciples the baptism with the Holy Spirit? Acts 1:4-5. When did they receive the Holy Spirit? Acts 2:1-4.

COMMENT: On Pentecost, 50 days after Christ's resurrection, Jesus' promise and John's

prophecy were fulfilled. God began His Church then by putting the Holy Spirit within His disciples and other believers.

3. Is God's Church the "body" of Christ? I Cor. 12: 12, 14, 27; Col. 1:18.

4. How do we become members of that body-the true Church of God? Can we join it? Or must we be "put into" it by God's Spirit? I Cor. 12:13.

COMMENT: Notice that the receiving of the Holy Spirit actually baptizes us into, or puts us into, the spiritual body of Christ-His Church!

So just being baptized in water does not put one into God's Church. One is put into the Church by the Spirit of God. This immersion into the Church of God by the Holy Spirit is termed by the Scriptures "the baptism **with** or " the baptism **by** the Holy Spirit."

This is the same as our immersion into the spiritual "body of Christ," which is God's Spirit-begotten Family.

At present, the divine Family of God consists only of the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ. (The Holy Spirit is the divine nature and power of the God Family-not a "third person," as some teach. The subject of the Holy Spirit will be covered thoroughly in the following lesson.) But at the return of Jesus Christ, when Spirit-begotten Christians are born of God as spirit beings, the God Family will have many thousands of members. And when God's plan is finally complete, there will be thousands of millions of sons of God!

6. Now what about the baptism with fire? Should a Christian seek it? Exactly what did John say concerning baptism "with fire"? Matt. 3:11.

COMMENT: Large crowds came to see John-mostly out of curiosity. But John was speaking to the unrepentant hypocritical religionists, as well as to those who did repent.

Notice that some of those to whom John spoke-those who truly repented-would later be baptized with the Holy Spirit. But some of the others present-hypocritical, unrepentant Pharisees and Sadducees -were going to be baptized with fire-immersed in gehenna fire-unless they repented (verses 7-10). They would be burned up as chaff (verse 12). This fire, as we learned in Lesson 6, is the ultimate fate of all incorrigibly wicked people (Rev. 21:8; Mal. 4:1-3).

One other important point: The baptism with fire is not associated, as some assume, with the "cloven tongues like as of fire" that appeared on each of the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:3). This was a special sign of the first outpouring and receipt of the Holy Spirit. It was manifested only at the beginning of the New Testament Church.

BAPTIZED BY CHRIST'S AUTHORITY

Should a person be baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ"? Exactly what does this phrase mean? Let's notice the simple biblical explanation.

1 . Did Jesus baptize more disciples than John? John 3:22; 4:1. But did He perform the baptisms Himself? Verse 2. Then who did the baptizing? Same verse.

COMMENT: Jesus did not actually do the physical work of baptizing these people. He had His disciples do it for Him-in His stead.

2. Did the apostles baptize repentant believers in Christ's name? Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5.

COMMENT: The Greek expression for "in the name of" means "by the authority of. If you do something in the name of another, you do it with or by that person's authority-by his express permission.

Jesus' disciples did the baptizing in Jesus' name-that is, in His stead, for Him, by His authority-and that was considered just the same as if Jesus had actually done it Himself. And so baptism, when performed by ministers of God's Church today, is always done "in the name of Jesus Christ"-that is, by His divine authority.

THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

1 . Why did Peter and John lay their hands on repentant persons in Samaria after their baptism in water? Acts 8:14-17.

COMMENT: Even though the people had been previously baptized in water, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. This plainly shows that the Holy Spirit is not given at or by water baptism. Yet Acts 2:38 shows that the Holy Spirit will be given after baptism.

The "laying on of hands" (Heb. 6:2) is the key that solves this seeming contradiction. The Bible shows that the Holy Spirit is given to a person as a result of prayer and the laying on of hands of a minister of God following baptism. Notice the sequence: first repentance, then water baptism; next prayer together with the laying on of hands; then the receipt of the Holy Spirit. And as we just learned, the receiving of God's Spirit "immerses" or puts into the Church (the spiritual body of Christ) and into the divine Family of God as His Spirit-begotten child.

God ordained that His Church use the "laying on of hands" as a physical symbol of the authority He gives His ministers. It is after the physical acts of baptism and the laying on of hands, together with prayer, that a repentant believer receives the Holy Spirit.

Millions have been "baptized;" but very few have ever had hands laid on them for the receipt of the Holy Spirit after baptism. And still fewer have had hands laid on them by a person who really had authority from Jesus Christ to do both.

Notice in the example in Acts 8 that the people had been baptized days or even weeks before by Philip, who was a deacon in the Church. But they had not received the Holy Spirit. God did not give His spirit to these Samaritans until the apostles Peter and John prayed for their receipt of the Holy Spirit and laid hands on them, thus upholding the authority He had placed with His apostles at Jerusalem.

Obviously, the physical act of placing one's hands on someone doesn't transmit the Holy Spirit to him. Only God Himself can beget a repentant, baptized person with His Spirit. But God has established this physical ceremony as a symbol of His recognition of the human instruments He has chosen to work through as His true ministers.

(The laying on of hands is also performed when ordaining individuals to offices in God's Church, for the healing of the sick and for blessing little children-see Acts 6:1-6; 13:2-3; Mark 16:18; Matt. 19:13-15.

SALVATION WITHOUT BAPTISM?

Since water baptism is commanded by God for salvation, what about the thief on the cross? Was he saved without being baptized? What about those utterly unable to be baptized?

1. Does baptism itself save us? Romans 5:10.

COMMENT: Baptism in water is not what saves us, although it is a commanded step essential to salvation. As explained before, it is merely symbolic of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. It is Christ's life that saves us.

2. What did the thief on the cross say to Christ? Luke 23:42. And what was Jesus' reply? Verse 43.

COMMENT: Some have assumed that Jesus promised the thief that he would be with Him in paradise that very day. Nothing could be further from the truth!

We learned in Lesson 7 that Jesus' statement in verse 43 should be punctuated as follows: "I say unto thee today, shalt thou [or you shall] be with me in paradise." Jesus was stressing the time of His promise, not when He would be in paradise. Jesus did not go to paradise that day. He went to the grave for three days and three nights!

Obviously, the thief was unable to be baptized. Since baptism is not the thing that saves us, or gives us eternal life, he did not lose salvation because of circumstances beyond his control. God makes allowances in such cases. The time is coming when this man will be resurrected to receive his opportunity for salvation and eventually enter the paradise promised to come to this earth.

We need not worry about the thief on the cross, or anyone utterly unable to be baptized. We do need to be much concerned, however, about obeying God's plain command when we are able.

HOW LONG SHOULD YOU WAIT?

Unfortunately, many put off baptism. They feel they are not yet spiritually ready. Some even think they must be perfect before being baptized. But how could a person be spiritually perfect before he receives God's Holy Spirit, which enables one to grow toward spiritual perfection?

Others hesitate to request baptism because they feel they do not know enough. This fear is usually unfounded.

The truth is that none of the above excuses is acceptable in God's sight. A person can know he has sinned and lived contrary to God's will, though he may not have spiritual understanding of His will. God leads people to and grants repentance before they receive the Holy Spirit. One does not need a great deal of Bible knowledge to

repent and be baptized. The order of events in Jesus' instructions to His apostles was to 1) preach the Gospel, 2) baptize repentant believers, and 3) teach them the commandments (Matt. 28:19-20).

Sincere, heartfelt repentance and belief are the only prior conditions for baptism given in the Bible!

If a person knows that God commands baptism, knows that he should be baptized, and has truly repented, then he should be baptized as soon as a true minister of God is available.

SHOULD CHILDREN BE BAPTIZED?

One should be baptized only upon repentance toward God and faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Only a mature mind, one that understands this and can truly "count the cost" (Luke 14:27-30), as explained in the previous lesson, should consider baptism. Therefore, only mature adults should be baptized.

Even older children have not yet reached the maturity and stability of judgment where they have the self-discipline to truly repent and believe. It is only near and at adulthood that the average person is mature enough to understand the significance of baptism. Only they are most capable of making a meaningful and lasting commitment to Christ.

An immature mind may experience an emotional feeling of temporary remorse. This is sometimes thought to be "repentance," but it is soon forgotten. It is much like the temporary emotional experiences of many teenagers who feel sure they are "in love." They usually outgrow these feelings. So it is with repentance and belief. Experience has shown that most who are baptized prematurely later abandon their "commitment."

Some argue that the infants and children of Cornelius's household were baptized. The Scriptures do not indicate whether or not Cornelius's family included children under adult age. However, based on what we have learned about true repentance and faith, all those baptized in Cornelius's house were mature enough to understand the conditions of salvation, and able to truly repent and believe. The same explanation applies to the baptism of the Philippian jailer's household (Acts 16:31-33).

Jesus set us the example of what His ministers should do regarding infants and young children. But it did not include baptism! There is no record of Jesus ever commanding baptism for children, nor of the apostles performing such baptisms. Nowhere in the Bible is there an example or command for this practice.

The Bible shows that Jesus merely laid His hands on and pronounced blessings on little children (Matt. 19:13; Mark 10:13-16). Today, the ministers of God's Church follow Christ's example by invoking similar blessings upon the little children of its members.

REBAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Have you already been baptized? If so, was it done by immersion as God commands? Had you really repented? Did you know what repentance is? Did you come to feel deeply broken up over and thoroughly abhor your past way of life, which was contrary to God's way?

Did you not only feel this as a deep and very real emotion, but did you thoroughly understand that you are to strive to obey the living God and all of His laws and commandments from that day forward? Had you really come to Jesus Christ in unconditional surrender, admitting your rebellion against God's way? Had you really repented of living by the standards of this world?

If you were baptized by immersion, did you understand, fully, that you were being buried, and that a "new you" was to emerge from the water? Did you have hands laid upon you, and prayer given for the receipt of God's Spirit?

If you did not properly fulfill ALL the requirements for baptism that we have covered in this and the previous lesson, then your baptism was not valid in God's sight!

Many have made a previous decision or commitment to what they then believed to be the truth. Some may have even been baptized or had a "religious experience" of some kind. Now, with the help of this Bible Course, they have come to learn a great deal more about many biblical subjects—for example, the truth about real repentance, baptism and the Holy Spirit.

So the question often arises: "What should I do? Should I be rebaptized?" The New Testament answers that question.

Remember the example of Apollos who lived during the early days of God's Church? (Be sure to read Acts 18:24 through 19:6). He was an enthusiastic and eloquent speaker whose zeal at first exceeded his understanding. He repeated what he had heard concerning Jesus Christ and John the Baptist and about the message they preached. He taught that message and baptized those who believed what he preached.

But when the Apostle Paul came to question the people who had been taught by Apollos, he found a key ingredient missing in their lives-the Holy Spirit of God. Paul not only found that these people had not received God's Spirit, they did not even know what it was. And, as might be expected, there is a large number today who shared a similar lack of knowledge vital to salvation before studying with this course.

Apollos himself also needed further instruction. He received it from a dedicated couple in the Church of God whose names were Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:26). Those individuals to whom Apollos preached received further instruction from Paul, and were afterwards immediately rebaptized.

If you find yourself in a similar position, you need to seriously consider rebaptism.

No matter what your previous religious history and experience has been, check up on yourself to see where you stand with God. Don't delay receiving and putting the power of God's Holy Spirit to work in your life, enabling you to overcome sin and develop the character of God. Then you will be able to look forward to the second Coming of Jesus Christ, when God will use His Spirit to transform you into an eternal member of the powerful and glorious divine Family of God! (Rom. 8:11-23).

IN THE MEANTIME ...

Remember, God wants us all to grow in grace and knowledge (11 Pet. 3:18). One way to grow is by a careful study of the inspired Word of God. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10: 1 7).

Take time to study the Bible daily even if you are busy with many responsibilities. Review this and previous lessons in detail. Be sure you thoroughly understand the meaning of real repentance. Study and think about the points of Christian living that God outlines in His Word.