

LESSON 25
(1960, 1969)

AMBASSADOR COLLEGE
BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

The River Jordan

About Our Cover ...

Our cover shows a scenic spot along the banks of the River Jordan in which many repentant believers were baptized by John "the Baptist." It was also in this same river that John baptized Jesus Christ. This lesson reveals the plain truth about water baptism. It shows exactly what Jesus, His apostles, and His early New Testament Church taught about this grossly misunderstood step.

an open letter from THE STAFF

MOST professing Christians have never PROVED to themselves whether or not God really exists. They lack FAITH in the realization that God is right now sitting at the CONTROLS of this entire universe.

But for thousands of you students, this Correspondence Course, THE PLAIN TRUTH magazine and THE WORLD TOMORROW broadcast have helped provide the TOOLS, the PROD and the INSPIRATION to do this. You have now proved that THE GOD OF THE BIBLE IS a REAL God. And you have come to understand that God is working out a supreme PURPOSE here below -- dealing DIRECTLY with nations and with individuals.

But many of you have gone about as far as you can go in receiving NEW spiritual understanding, WITHOUT BEING BAPTIZED! The true God will continue to give you more light only as long as YOU WALK IN the light you have already received. You have YOUR PART TO do in this process! And you definitely need God's Holy Spirit to help you.

In this age above all others, you need to check up and be SURE that you have truly been CONVERTED, that you have been PROPERLY BAPTIZED, and that you have God's SPIRIT to guide, bless and protect you. You need to be sure about these most important of all matters!

The religious ideas and teachings of men are varied and confused. Even the great denominations have repeatedly changed their basic doctrines from time to time. But the teachings of the Bible are CONSISTENT and UNCHANGING.

"Thy word is truth," Jesus said (John 17:17). And again He said, "The scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). GOD DOES NOT CONTRADICT HIMSELF IN HIS INSPIRED WORD! We should always bear this in mind when studying the Bible.

Jesus continued to teach the same truths all through His ministry, and the apostles preached the same Gospel. The true servants of God in all ages have written and taught the same basic WAY OF OBEDIENCE to God.

A young man once asked Jesus, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Jesus answered, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS" (Matt. 19:16-17).

This is the WAY Jesus taught would lead to eternal life. He said nothing about a meaningless ceremony of "joining" a church and "accepting" Him as Savior. He taught that if He is to be your Lord you have to OBEY Him.

Did Jesus know what He was talking about?

Many organizations of men seem to think that He didn't, for they have substituted a dead faith and belief in His PERSON, and deny the WAY of salvation which He taught!

The apostles of Christ continued preaching the SAME message Jesus did. Before His ascension to heaven, He commanded them to go forth and instruct all nations, "Teaching them to observe ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER I HAVE COMMANDED YOU" (Matt. 28:19-20).

The Apostle Paul taught the same way of life that Jesus did, and he recognized that way as being what "Christianity" is! He speaks of having formerly persecuted the Christians: "And I persecuted THIS WAY unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (Acts 22:4).

In Paul's day, Christianity was recognized as a way of life. Of exactly what does this way of life consist?

The Apostle Peter answers: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, LEAVING US AN EXAMPLE, THAT YE SHOULD FOLLOW HIS STEPS: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (I Pet. 2:21-22). Jesus gave up His own will and suffered for us. He did no sin. He set us an EXAMPLE that we should follow His steps. This, Peter says, is our "calling."

In Galatians 2:20, Paul explains this even further: "I am crucified with Christ," he writes, "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."

Could anything be plainer?

Paul wrote that he had crucified his own will, and that CHRIST was living in him -- directing his life. He was not only living by faith IN, but by the very faith OF, the Son of God!

But no human being can naturally and normally yield himself to obey God in his own strength. Paul explains why this is impossible: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is NOT SUBJECT to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, HE IS NONE OF HIS" (Rom. 8:7-8).

We must have Christ's Spirit within us -- guiding our thoughts and actions -- to be recognized as His. But how may we receive God's Spirit?

When God's Church first began on the Day of Pentecost, Peter gave the answer to this question. "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 Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

We have to realize our own ways are wrong -- that they have brought on the war, the suffering, and all the human woe and misery we see in this world -- and we must be willing to repent of and completely TURN AWAY from our former ideas and way of life, letting God actually rule and control our daily lives. Then we should BE BAPTIZED, which Paul explains in Romans 6:1-6 is the outward sign of our willingness to completely BURY our old self in a watery grave. Then we are to come up and walk in NEWNESS OF LIFE -- following Jesus' example.

When we do this, we are promised the "gift" of God's Holy Spirit to guide us in following and obeying Jesus Christ -- our

real Lord and Master whom we are to serve and obey in actual fact!

God's Spirit is a part of His very CHARACTER placed within us to enable us to live as we are commanded in the Bible. Paul explains that "the LOVE OF GOD is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5).

There are many human ideas about how we should express this love every Christian must have. Most professing Christians seem to think that it is a sentimental emotion about the person of Christ, or a sanctimonious attitude with lots of religious-sounding talk in front of our fellowmen.

But, in His inspired Word, God tells us what this divine love really is: "For this is the love of God, that we KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS: and his commandments are not grievous" (I John 5:3).

Yes, God's love will always lead us to obey Him, to follow Jesus' literal example, and thus to be a real Christian.

Perhaps the best definition of a "Christian" contained in any one verse of the Bible is found in I John 2:6. The Weymouth Translation makes the intended meaning clearer than the older King James wording. It reads: "He who says that he abides in him is bound to live as He lived."

How many of today's professing "Christians" feel bound to live exactly as Jesus Christ did -- to literally KEEP THE TEN COMMANDMENTS as He did, to refrain from killing, stealing, lying and to KEEP HOLY the same days that Jesus did -- and, through the Holy Spirit, to literally let Him live His life all over in them?

The complete, UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER of one's self to God and to Christ as Savior and Master is the key to real conversion.

If you would really be a Christian -- examine yourself. Have you come to the place where you really BELIEVE in the Creator God and in the Bible as His Word -- His inspired revelation to man? Are you willing to totally SURRENDER your will to OBEY His Word -- to STUDY it HONESTLY, ZEALOUSLY, and to LIVE BY IT?

Are you ready to actually GIVE your life to Christ -- yielding COMPLETELY, WILLINGLY, so that He may LIVE His life in you through the Holy Spirit? Are you willing to let God FASHION AND MOLD YOU after His own divine character -- that He may give you eternal life in the resurrection and a position of rulership over cities and nations under Jesus Christ in the world tomorrow?

Are you willing to quit arguing and reasoning with your Maker and say, "Yes, Lord, THY WILL BE DONE"?

If you sincerely feel this way, you should be baptized -- immersed in water -- as an outward sign of your willingness to completely bury the old self in full surrender to Christ. "Sprinkling" or "pouring" do not picture this burial. Christ taught WATER BAPTISM and so did all the apostles in the inspired New Testament Church. (This lesson will make this point and the MEANING of baptism crystal clear.)

To really be "Christians," we need to study the Bible, noticing especially the example and teaching of Christ. We need to REPENT of our ways and surrender our lives to God in BAPTISM that we may receive His Spirit to guide us in following His way as revealed in His Word.

The UNDERSTANDING of God's Truth is -- in a sense - DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE! For this knowledge carries with it great responsibility. May God grant you the HONESTY and COURAGE to ACT on what you know!

WHY WATER BAPTISM?

WHY be baptized? What is baptism? Is it a religious "rite" --

an INITIATION into some church? Should a person be sprinkled, poured upon, or immersed? What is a valid baptism in God's sight?

Utter Confusion

"Repent!" screamed a panting, perspiring evangelist to a crowd of avid followers in Brooklyn, New York.

It was a hot, steamy, sweltering day. The heat assailed them in waves from the blistering pavement under their feet. Finally, a plea for REPENTANCE was made. Dozens of people stepped forward, tears streaming down their faces.

Having secured permission from the city fire department, the evangelist hooked a hose to a fire hydrant and SPRAYED the whole crowd with water -- "baptizing" them!

Was this baptism valid?

In another ceremony down the street, inside a church building, a pastor graciously SPRINKLED a few drops of water over the head of an infant. Meanwhile, in another church across town, a minister and two candidates for baptism stepped down into a tank of water. The minister then proceeded to completely IMMERSE them under the water.

Were either of these methods of "baptism" VALID in God's sight?

Why such CONFUSION about baptism in the churches today? What IS water baptism all about? And is it really necessary for salvation?

Millions Deceived!

Millions today are worshipping Jesus Christ IN VAIN! Do you believe this astounding statement? Jesus said: "IN VAIN do they WORSHIP me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7).

Yes, MILLIONS have been deceived and misled into thinking they are "saved" when they're not! Most professing Christians have been taught that "Christ completed the plan of salvation on the cross" -- that all they must do is just accept and believe on the NAME of Jesus Christ and they will be saved.

What a lack of Bible understanding!

Just "accepting" Christ and "believing on Him" is NOT ENOUGH -- not according to your own Bible! Which will you believe -- the doctrines and traditions of MEN? Or the very Word of the Creator GOD Himself?

The Bible clearly teaches that God COMMANDS water baptism! Let's begin to understand how vitally important water baptism really is in God's Plan of salvation for mankind.

 PHOTO CAPTION: BAPTISM? -- An evangelist sprays a group of believers with a firehose in a mass "baptismal" ceremony. Is "spraying" a valid form of baptism? Read on in this lesson to learn the truth from your Bible.

Baptism a Required Step

Notice the very beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:14-15). Jesus proclaimed: "REPENT ye, and BELIEVE the Gospel." Here Jesus commanded two prior conditions to becoming a Christian -- repentance and faith.

Repentance is toward God. We know sin is the transgression of

God's Spiritual Law (I John 3:4). Repentance means to QUIT SINNING and begin living according to God's Commandments. Faith is toward Christ. It is our FIRM BELIEF in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our past sins. It is our BELIEF in Him as our personal Savior and coming King.

Jesus also said "believe the GOSPEL." The Gospel is the Good News of the coming Kingdom of God, which is the GOVERNMENT of God. And government involves obedience to LAWS, in this case God's Laws which express the will of God. It is to be government by the WILL OF GOD, no longer by human self-will, for Jesus will then be King of all the earth!

After Jesus had completed His earthly ministry, had paid the penalty for the sins of all mankind, had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit was sent on the Day of Pentecost -- just as Christ had promised.

Thousands were in Jerusalem for this festival. When the Spirit of God came upon -- and INTO -- the disciples that morning, the people came in awe and wonder to see what had occurred. Then Peter preached to the multitude gathered there. Thousands were convicted in their hearts. They realized their lost condition. They realized Christ was indeed the Messiah -- their SAVIOR!

"What shall we do?" they cried out to Peter and the disciples.

Peter was now INSPIRED by the Holy Spirit. The answer came straight and clear.

"REPENT," shouted Peter, "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 Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

This account recorded by Luke emphasized repentance as a condition to becoming a Christian. But they also BELIEVED, since one cannot be baptized EXCEPT he believe in Christ (Acts 8:37). Baptism is a commanded ordinance symbolizing FAITH in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

Once these conditions are complied with, God stands bound by His immutable PROMISE to put within the repentant believer HIS SPIRIT of love, faith, understanding, gentleness and goodness. It is the impregnation and begetting of ETERNAL life! And the Holy Spirit in one is the POWER that enables one to OVERCOME his human nature and OBEY God! "For the PROMISE is unto you, and to your children ... even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39).

Water baptism, then, is a REQUIRED step in God's Plan of salvation!

In this extremely important and revealing lesson, we will come to fully understand exactly what God commands concerning water baptism. We'll learn, from the Bible, what baptism really MEANS to all who want to become true Christians and inheritors of the Kingdom of God.

Are you ready? Do you have your Bible in front of you so you can read each scripture reference given in this lesson? Don't forget to ask God to help you grasp and THOROUGHLY COMPREHEND the vital truth you are about to study. Now let's begin.

LESSON 25

The Flood a Type of Baptism

The Old Testament contains significant types or foreshadows of New Testament water baptism which are important to our understanding of Christ's and the Apostles' teachings concerning baptism. Let's begin with Noah and the Flood.

1. When men began to multiply upon the face of the earth, did

they obey God? Or did they sin grievously against God? Gen. 6:5, 11-12.

2. What did God say He would do to the earth's population as a punishment for sin? Gen. 6:7. By what means of destruction? Verse 17.

COMMENT: God says "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). The evil world of Noah's day was to receive just payment for sin.

3. But who, in that world of rampant sin, found grace in God's sight? Gen. 6:8. Why did God favor Noah? Did he walk with God in obedience to His Laws? Verse 9. Also II Peter 2:5 compared with Psalms 119:172.

COMMENT: Noah preached OBEDIENCE to God's Commandments! But the world would not listen.

4. God told Noah to build an enormous ship so he and his family could escape the great flood He would bring on the wicked and lawless world (Gen. 6:14-16). How did Noah demonstrate his belief -- his FAITH -- in God's promise of salvation from the flood -- the PENALTY of the world's sins? Gen. 6:22 and Heb. 11:7.

 PHOTO CAPTION: NOAH RIDICULED -- Onlookers jeering obedient Noah just before he was sealed within the ark. They didn't have long to laugh.

COMMENT: Many long, arduous and trying years were required to complete the ark. (Compare Gen. 5:32 with Gen. 7:11.) Just imagine all of the RIDICULE Noah must have endured from the people around him. They thought he was a fool! But Noah BELIEVED God. He TRUSTED and OBEYED God. He had SAVING FAITH!

5. Does Noah's escape from the tremendous flood -- a WATERY GRAVE for the sinning world -- typify our deliverance from sin's penalty through the symbolic meaning of water baptism? I Peter 3:20-21.

COMMENT: God provided a WAY for Noah to ESCAPE the old world of sin and the penalty it had incurred for disobedience to God's Laws. Noah BELIEVED God when He warned him of the flood He would send upon the sinning world. And Noah OBEYED God by building the ark. He DEMONSTRATED his faith by his obedience! This is the same kind of ACTIVE faith God expects from us today -- if we want to be saved from the penalty of our sins!

Noah was brought up OUTOF the water that destroyed the sinful world, and was saved physically. Today, we can be saved SPIRITUALLY from the penalty of sin -- if we believe Christ died for our sins and if we symbolically BURY OUR sins in baptism, rising up out of the water to begin living a new SPIRIT-FILLED life of obedience to God. But more about this later.

Israel "Baptized" in the Sea

Let's notice another interesting Old Testament analogy pointing to New Testament baptism. While the children of Israel were in Egypt, they were Pharaoh's slaves -- HELPLESS AND POWERLESS under his taskmasters -- just as a sinner is the slave of the devil and sin (Rom. 6:16).

Egypt is a type of SIN. Pharaoh and his army can be compared to Satan and his demons who strive to bring us into captivity to sin. God commanded Israel to COME OUT of Egypt -- sin. Israel obeyed.

The Israelites began their exodus out of Egypt under Moses

after they applied the blood of the Passover lamb to their doorposts (see Ex 12:1-13). Their departure from Egypt is a type of our departure from sin! The blood of the lamb which protected them from death typifies the blood of Christ -- OUR "Passover lamb" (I Cor. 5:7) -- whose blood was shed for the remission of our sins.

 PHOTO CAPTION: SAVED FROM DEATH -- Only those in the ark were saved from God's punishment for sin -- the rest of mankind perished in the Flood.

 PHOTO CAPTION: ISRAEL DELIVERED -- The Israelites walked across the dry seabed, while on either side the waters of the Red Sea towered hundreds of feet above their heads!

 1. Were the Israelites happy and joyful upon leaving Egypt behind them? Num. 33:3.

COMMENT: "With a high hand" means JOYFULLY. The children of Israel left in GREAT EXALTATION and elation over their deliverance from the bondage (sin) of Egypt.

2. While the Israelites were rejoicing over their newfound freedom, did Pharaoh and his army begin to pursue them? Ex. 14:8-9.

COMMENT: Today, millions of professing Christians unwittingly find themselves in the same position the Israelites were in. Since they have accepted Christ and His blood for the remission of their sins, they THINK they are now FOREVER free from sin, the devil and their own human nature, just as the Israelites thought they were free from the bondage of Egypt -- until Pharaoh began to pursue them!

3. Did God commission Moses to deliver the children of Israel from the clutches of Egyptian bondage? Ex. 3:10 and Acts 7:35.

4. Is Moses therefore referred to as a TYPE of Christ? Acts 7:37. The word "prophet" refers to Christ. Note the words, "Like unto me." Also see Acts 3:20-22. What did God send Jesus Christ to deliver us from? Rom. 3:24-25.

COMMENT: Moses, sent by God to deliver Israel from PHYSICAL bondage, was a TYPE pointing to Christ -- whom God sent to deliver repentant believers from SPIRITUAL bondage!

5. What did Moses say when the Israelites became fearful of Pharaoh's oncoming army? Ex. 14:13-14. Did God tell them to bog down, give up, and QUIT, giving up all hope of escaping the Egyptians? Or to go forward in obedience, TRUSTING Him and His POWER to deliver them? Verses 15-16.

COMMENT: God likewise tells us TO GO FORWARD in OBEDIENCE TO HIM, trusting Him and His Power -- the Holy Spirit -- to deliver us! But the churches of this world believe and practice the very opposite. They teach there is NOTHING more for us to do other than to ACCEPT Christ and BELIEVE in His shed blood for the remission of our sins.

6. What external help did the Israelites receive from God to protect them from Pharaoh and his army? Ex. 14:19-20.

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

True Christians need external help today, too -- and very desperately! What we need is God's Holy Spirit to help us keep ourselves from falling into the clutches of future sins, once our past sins have been forgiven and covered by Christ's blood!

7. When God divided the Red Sea so the children of Israel

could pass through (Ex. 14:21-22), were they FEARFUL? Psalms 78:53. Did they TRUST God to keep the walls of water from crashing down upon them? Heb. 11:29.

8. What happened to the Egyptians who pursued the Israelites? Ex. 14:26-28.

COMMENT: Here we see Pharaoh and his army, who represented the SIN of Egypt in which Israel had lived, buried in a watery grave. How wonderfully this typifies the symbolism of Christian baptism! "Knowing this, that our old man [our old SINFUL carnal self] is crucified [KILLED and buried by baptism] with Him [Christ], that the body of sin might be DESTROYED, that hence forth we should NOT SERVE SIN" (Rom. 6:6).

 PHOTO CAPTION: SIN LEFT BEHIND -- Remains of Pharaoh's army washed on shore after being destroyed and buried by the waters of the Red Sea.

9. Therefore, isn't Israel's deliverance from Egypt (a type of sin) through the WATERS of the Sea clearly a type of Christian baptism today? I Cor. 10:1-2.

COMMENT: God often required many of the Old Testament prophets, including Moses, to ACT out the things that He would bring to pass in the future (see Ezek. 4:1-17; 5:1-4). Likewise, God requires those who now sincerely want to have their past sins blotted out and covered by Christ's blood, to perform the PHYSICAL act of baptism! It impresses the MEANING of baptism upon them, and is an OUTWARD SIGN showing that they have truly repented and believed in Christ's sacrifice for their 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 coming of Christ, and the subsequent arrival of the Holy Spirit, God commissioned John the Baptist to administer a SPECIAL TYPE of baptism -- the "baptism of REPENTANCE." Let's understand why.

1. Was John the Baptist a prophet of God? Luke 1:63, 76. Was he sent to proclaim and PREPARE the way for Jesus Christ? Verse 76 and Matt. 3: 1-3.

2. Was John also sent to BAPTIZE with water? John 1:33.

COMMENT: Remember that baptism symbolizes BURIAL of the old carnal, sinful self. It is the outward expression of INWARD repentance.

3. Who sent John and gave him authority to baptize? Luke 3:2-3 and Matt. 21:25-26.

COMMENT: The chief priests and elders knew John was a prophet sent by God, but would not acknowledge the fact. If they had, they would also have been acknowledging that Christ's authority came from God -- which they REFUSED to do!

4. Just exactly what was the MESSAGE John preached? Mark 1:4-5 and Matt. 3:11.

COMMENT: John's message was the "baptism of REPENTANCE." It was EXACTLY what it implied. Those John baptized had truly REPENTED of their past sins and were actually forgiven by God. But they did not yet receive the Holy Spirit -- the power to overcome sin in

their nature, and to master themselves -- for the Holy Spirit was not made available until AFTER Christ's resurrection (John 7:38:39).

The account in Luke 1:77 clearly states that John the Baptist was sent "To give knowledge of salvation unto His people BY THE REMISSION OF THEIR SINS." John was simply preaching REPENTANCE FROM SIN! His message was preparing a people to receive and obey CHRIST when He came, thus PREPARING the way for His coming.

Baptism a New Testament Command!

Now that this foundation of understanding has been laid, let's learn exactly what Jesus Christ COMMANDS US TODAY concerning water baptism.

1. Did Jesus set an example for us in all things to show us that we should walk -- live -- as He did? I Peter 2:21 and I John 2:6. Was He baptized? Matt. 3:13-16.

COMMENT: Even though Jesus had committed no sins to repent of, He was baptized, SETTING AN EXAMPLE FOR US TO FOLLOW! This was the ONLY purpose for His baptism.

2. After His resurrection, Jesus gave His twelve apostles the final gospel commission for this age. In it, did He COMMAND His disciples to BAPTIZE repentant believers? Matt. 28:19-20 and Mark 16:16. What is the ultimate fate of those who won't believe? Verse 16.

COMMENT: Christ plainly COMMANDED baptism!

3. What was Peter's COMMAND to the repentant believers on the Day of Pentecost? Acts 2:38.

4. Do we find that repentant believers were always baptized? Acts 2:41; 8:5, 12.

5. Ten years after the Apostle Peter preached his first inspired sermon to the Jews in Jerusalem, God sent him to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. He was sent to the house of Cornelius, a very devout Italian. But Cornelius did not have saving knowledge. Peter had to preach the FORGIVENESS OF SINS through Christ to Cornelius and his family (Acts 10:22, 30-33, 43).

Did they receive God's Spirit BEFORE being baptized? Verses 44-45. Was their receiving of the Holy Spirit before baptism a SPECIAL SIGN from God to the apostles? Acts 11:17-18.

COMMENT: God made an exception in this instance. Repentant believers ordinarily have to be baptized FIRST, before they can receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). But since Cornelius and his family were the FIRST GENTILES to be called of God and converted, God gave them the Holy Spirit before baptism as a SPECIAL SIGN to prove to Peter and the other apostles that He had also opened the way of salvation to the GENTILES!

6. Did Peter immediately command that Cornelius and his family be baptized? Acts 10:47-48.

COMMENT: The true Gospel or GOOD NEWS that Christ commanded His Church to preach is not just a message about the PERSON of Christ -- it is the very message HE brought and preached -- the good news of the coming Kingdom or Government of God!

One must hear and BELIEVE the true Gospel before being baptized (Mark 1:14-15). Christ's Gospel includes not only believing on Him as our personal Savior, but also as our coming KING in the Kingdom of God. Those who believe the true Gospel, accept Christ as their Savior, repent of their sins, and are BAPTIZED are the ones who will be SAVED -- born again to inherit the Kingdom of God (Mark 16:15-16).

Obviously baptism is VERY IMPORTANT to God -- else He would not have made it an absolute COMMAND!

Only ONE True "Baptism"

The world today is in great confusion regarding baptism. One panting, perspiring preacher "baptized" by dousing a group with a fire hose! Others "baptize" by sprinkling, and some by pouring water over the heads of new believers.

It is interesting to note that the word "sprinkle" occurs only seven times in the New Testament, and always in connection with the blood of Christ -- NEVER referring to baptism!

The word "pouring" is mentioned several times in the New Testament -- but NOT ONCE as a form of baptism!

Notice what the Catholic Encyclopedia admits regarding baptism: "The most ancient form usually employed was unquestionably immersion ... in the Latin Church immersion seems to have prevailed until the twelfth century. After that time, it is found in some places as late as the 16th century. Infusion and aspersion [pouring and sprinkling] were growing common in the 14th century and gradually prevailed in the Western Church" (article "Baptism").

It is quite plain that sprinkling and pouring were late innovations of mere MEN!

The first recorded case of a professing Christian being sprinkled was that of Novatian, who lived at Rome in the middle of the third century after Christ. Of him even Eusebius, a Catholic historian in the days of Emperor Constantine, wrote: "... And being supposed at the point of death [Novatian] was baptized by sprinkling, in the bed on which he lay; if, indeed it be proper to say that one like him did receive baptism" (Ecclesiastical History, Bk. VI, Chap. 43).

Notice that sprinkling even then was NOT considered a valid form of baptism! The Catholic Church had ruled that "It was unlawful that one who had been sprinkled ... should enter into any order of the clergy ..." (ibid).

The word "baptize" is not an English word. It is a Greek word. The New Testament was written in the Greek language. In translating the Bible into English, the translators left this word untranslated. Literally, in the Greek, the word is "baptizo". The definition is "immerse." It means to "plunge into" or "put into." It DOES NOT MEAN "to sprinkle" or "to pour." The Greek word for "sprinkle" is "rantidzo" and "to pour" is "cheo" in Greek. The Holy Spirit inspired only the use of the word "baptizo", meaning to immerse, when referring to BAPTISM!

Therefore, sprinkling or pouring are NOT forms of BAPTISM! IMMERSION -- being placed completely down under water -- IS! Baptism symbolizes the BURIAL of the old carnal self. Sprinkling or pouring -- or dousing with a fire hose -- are NOT symbolic of a BURIAL BY ANY STRETCH OF THE IMAGINATION!

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

1. Why was John baptizing IN Aenon near Jerusalem? John 3:23.

COMMENT: John would have needed only a cup full 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: Jesus had to be put DOWN INTO the water, for He "went up straightway out of the water" It is ridiculous to think He could have come "up ... out" of a sprinkle or a pour!

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

COMMENT: There was no purpose whatever for Philip to actually go INTO the water, except for the reason there was no other way he could PLUNGE the eunuch INTO the river. Had sprinkling or pouring been the proper method of baptism, Philip would have only needed to bend over and scoop up the water in his hands.

4. How many methods of "baptism" are acceptable to God? Eph. 4:4-6.

COMMENT: The Apostle Paul was inspired to write and explain that there is but "ONE BAPTISM" -- not several different modes which may be practiced. Just ONE! God did not leave it up to men to invent or devise their own modes of baptism, attaching the name of Christ to them. According to the divinely inspired Word of God, there is ONLY ONE proper method or mode of baptism! Any other method devised by man is absolutely CONTRARY to God's Word, and is NOT VALID!

 PHOTO CAPTION: "CHRISTENING" -- This darling Tanzanian baby is oblivious to the ceremony taking place. But was this "baptism" valid in God's sight?

The Bible, the Greek language itself, and the admissions of Catholic historians, all PROVE that complete immersion -- being placed COMPLETELY UNDER WATER -- was the only method of baptism practiced by the original INSPIRED Church of God! Therefore, sprinkling and pouring are COUNTERFEIT modes of baptism!

The Meaning of Baptism

What is the REAL MEANING of baptism -- its true significance? What is its real purpose? Exactly why does God command baptism? Let's understand the answer from your Bible.

1. Did Jesus Christ CONDEMN sin in the flesh by living a SINLESS life? Rom. 8:3-4 and Heb. 4:15. Did He suffer death to pay the penalty OUR SINS have incurred? I Cor. 15:3. Was He buried and then resurrected from the dead? Verse 4 and Rom. 8:11.

COMMENT: Christ DIED for our sins, and was BURIED. After three days He was "quickenened" -- that is, He was "made alive," or "given life" by God's Spirit that dwelt in Him while He was alive.

Christ set us an example by the sinless life which He lived. He "condemned" sin by living sinlessly through the power of the Holy Spirit, thus showing us that we need not sin. His death paid the penalty of sin that we have incurred. And 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 and Rom. 6:2-6. Also read the rest of the verses up to and including verse 13.

COMMENT: Just as Christ was buried, our BAPTISM -- being plunged into a watery "grave" -- is symbolic of the BURIAL of our old sinful life. And as Christ was resurrected in newness of life, our coming up OUT of the water immediately after baptism is symbolic of rising up to live a NEW LIFE free from the shackles of past sins and the death penalty!

Baptism, then, is DUAL. It 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.

Going down into the water pictures the death of Christ and of

our old self. Likewise, being buried in the water pictures the burial of Christ, and of our old sinful life. And coming up out of the water pictures Christ's resurrection, and our coming up to walk henceforth "in newness of life" -- in OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S LAWS! We now reckon ourselves as DEAD, so far as sin is concerned, but ALIVE through God and His Son Jesus Christ! (Rom. 6:11-12.)

After baptism, Christ begins DWELLING WITHIN us by the Holy Spirit which we receive from God (Rom. 8:10). That Spirit enables us, from that time forward, to RESIST the pull of sin in our mortal flesh and to obey God's spiritual laws (verse 13).

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 and acceptance of His death, burial and resurrection. Baptism also SYMBOLICALLY expresses our sincere and TOTAL REPENTANCE of our old sinful life, our burial of that sinful life, and our rising up to a NEW life of spiritual obedience to God.

BAPTISM, then, symbolizes the death and burial of the old self which has been contrary to God and His laws. It symbolizes our faith in, and acceptance of, the literal death of Jesus Christ for our sins. It symbolizes, also, our acceptance of and faith in His resurrection, which our coming up out of the watery "grave" pictures (Rom. 6:5).

Baptism clearly signifies that our selfish, vain and sinful self HAS TO DIE. It shows our realization of our own sins, our vanities, our wretchedness. It is an OUTWARD ACKNOWLEDGEMENT of our realization that the old self must die in order that we might rise again to live -- this time really live -- by God's laws and commandments (verse 6).

Sin is the transgression of God's Law (I John 3:4). Baptism shows our willingness to BURY sin, and the old sinful man, and to walk in NEWNESS of life, obedient to God and His laws through the POWER of God's Spirit which He promises to give us after baptism!

Baptism, in the final analysis, SHOWS OUR TOTAL SURRENDER TO GOD. It symbolizes the complete burial of the old self and our beginning a new life surrendered to the will and authority of God. God demands UNCONDITIONAL surrender to His rule, His authority over our lives. Baptism is the SYMBOL of OUR SURRENDER and desire to OBEY GOD, no matter what He commands!

Have YOU really surrendered your will and your ENTIRE LIFE to God?

"In the NAME of Jesus Christ"

Should a person be baptized "in the NAME of Jesus Christ"? Exactly what does this phrase mean?

1. Did Jesus baptize more disciples than John? John 3:22 and 4:1. But did He actually perform the baptisms Himself? John 4:2. 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 2:37-38, 41.

PHOTO CAPTION: AN UNUSUAL BAPTISM -- This is probably the most

unusual baptism ever pictured. The candidate is lying on the ramp of an LST with a life-line tied to his waist, as he is being immersed. Photo was taken within striking distance of Japan during World War II.

COMMENT: The inspired Greek expression for "in the name of" means "by the AUTHORITY of." If you do anything 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.

3. Are God's true ministers today commanded to do ALL things in the NAME of Christ? Col. 3:17.

COMMENT: Baptism, when performed by God's ministers, is therefore always done "in the NAME of Jesus Christ" -- that is, by His DIVINE AUTHORITY!

Baptized "Into" What?

1. What further instruction does Christ give His ministers concerning baptism? Matt. 28:19.

COMMENT: Many have misunderstood this important scripture. Let's understand exactly what it means.

In Matthew 28:19 the original Greek word translated "in" is "eis", and actually means "into." Therefore, this verse should be translated,

"... baptizing them INTO THE NAME of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

In other words, when a person is baptized and receives God's Spirit, he becomes the begotten SON of God -- God places HIS OWN NAME on the newly baptized believer! He now carries the name of GOD. He belongs to God. He is God's SON!

This scripture simply means we are baptized or immersed INTO the DIVINE FAMILY NAME CALLED "GOD"! And it is done "in the name" -- by the AUTHORITY -- "OF Jesus Christ."

At present, the literal spiritual 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 erroneously assume.

2. Are spirit-begotten Christians plainly called "sons of God" in the Bible? Rom. 8:14 and I John 3:1.

COMMENT: Our receiving of the Holy Spirit following baptism merely BEGETS US as the "sons of God." But we shall ULTIMATELY become God's BORN sons at the resurrection.

A human being is named after his human father -- carries the same SURNAME as his father. If we become begotten children of GOD, we become "God's-sons," SONS OF GOD, though not yet born of Him. We bear the same FAMILY NAME!

Therefore, when we are baptized "into" the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and receive God's Spirit, we automatically become SPIRIT-BEGOTTEN MEMBERS OF THE GOD FAMILY!

Why Baptism Is Necessary

1. Did Jesus promise His disciples the "baptism" of the Holy Spirit? Acts 1:5. When did the Holy Spirit finally come? Acts 2:1, 4.

COMMENT: On this day of Pentecost, 31 A.D., God began His

spiritual Church on earth by putting the Holy Spirit WITHIN His disciples.

2. Is God's true Church actually the "BODY" of Christ? I Cor. 12:12, 27 and Col. 1:18.

3. HOW do we become MEMBERS of that body -- the true Church? Can we join it? Or must we be PUT "into" it by God's Spirit? I Cor. 12:13.

COMMENT: In Romans 8:9, Paul tells us plainly that unless the Spirit of Christ dwells within us, we do not belong to Him. We become Christ's, then, only when the Holy Spirit comes into us!

Each MEMBER of Christ's "body" -- His Church -- is joined to the other by the common bond of God's Holy Spirit residing in them. So when we become Christ's by receiving His Spirit, we are then put "into" His body -- the Church of God -- BY THE HOLY SPIRIT!

Just being physically baptized in water does not put us into God's true Spirit-led Church. You must be put into the Church BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD! God determines who are the true members (those who have truly repented) by placing His Spirit within them. Unless God gives a person His Holy Spirit, he might sit among God's people, BUT WOULD NOT BE ONE OF THE "BODY" OF CHRIST!

Therefore, it is the RECEIVING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT which automatically PLUNGES US -- immerses, "baptizes," or PUTS US -- "into" the true Church of God! This immersion into the Church by the Holy Spirit is termed by the Scriptures, "the baptism WITH," "the baptism BY," or "the baptism of the Holy Spirit."

HAS GOD PUT YOU INTO HIS CHURCH?

Receiving the Holy Spirit

After a person is baptized, does he immediately receive God's Spirit? Or is there something else required first?

Notice what the Scriptures say.

1. Is the "laying on of hands" one of the basic doctrines of God's Word? Hebrews 6:2.

2. Why were Peter and John sent to the new disciples in Samaria? Acts 8:14-16. What did the apostles do so these new converts could receive the Holy Spirit? Verse 17. Did they lay hands on them and PRAY over them? Same verse and verse 15.

3. Did Simon the Magician, called Simon Magus in history, realize that the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands? Verses 18-19.

4. When the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus on his third journey, he found people there who had been baptized by John's baptism only -- the baptism of repentance (Acts 19:1-4). What happened to these believers after they were baptized in the name of Christ, and after Paul laid his hands on them? Acts 19:6.

COMMENT: The Holy Spirit was given to baptized believers when God's servants LAID HANDS ON THEM!

God works in the same way today. God's ministers baptize people who have truly repented of their sins, then lay hands upon them, and pray over them for the receipt of the Holy Spirit. Of course, there were some instances where individuals received the Holy Spirit without the laying on of hands, such as with Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48). But they are the SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS and not the rule!

5. After one receives God's Spirit, does a sensation or "feeling" overwhelm him? Does he tingle with some ecstatic emotion? II Tim. 1:7.

COMMENT: God's Spirit is the spirit of a SOUND MIND. It does not cause an emotional outburst or some "feeling." When a person

receives God's Spirit, it enters the MIND of the individual and begets him spiritually. Of course the newly baptized person feels a certain gratitude, joy, and thankfulness, because of his OWN normal emotions. But there is no special ecstatic "feeling" caused by receiving the Holy Spirit of God.

Salvation Without Baptism?

Since water baptism is commanded by God, what about the thief on the cross? Was he saved without being baptized?

Let's notice the plain truth.

1. Does baptism itself SAVE US? Romans 5:10.

COMMENT: Baptism in water is NOT what saves us, although it is a commanded step in God's Plan of salvation. As explained before, it is merely SYMBOLIC of that which remits our sins -- the DEATH of Christ. It also pictures His resurrection, by which we are finally SAVED.

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

COMMENT: This verse SHOULD read, "Verily I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in Paradise." See the Lamsa translation, as well as others.

Most translations are improperly punctuated in order to make it appear that Jesus and the thief would be in Paradise that very day. However, the Bible shows Jesus did not go to Paradise that day. He went to the GRAVE! (I Cor. 15:3-4; Mark 15:44-46.)

The Companion Bible states, "The interpretation of this verse depends entirely on punctuation, which rests wholly on human authority, the Greek manuscripts having no punctuation of any kind TILL THE NINTH CENTURY, and then it is only a dot (in the middle of the line) separating each word" (Appendix 173).

The truth is that the thief was UNABLE to be baptized. Since baptism is NOT the thing which saves us, or gives us eternal life, he did not lose salvation because of circumstances beyond his control. God makes allowances for such cases. But GOD COMMANDS water baptism for all who are able. If a person deliberately ignores, rejects, defies or refuses this Biblical command, this would be an act of disobedience to God; and unless repented of, would cause loss of salvation.

We need not worry about the thief on the cross, or anyone utterly UNABLE TO be baptized. We do need to be very MUCH concerned, however, about obeying God's plain command when we ARE ABLE!

When to Be Baptized

Many put off baptism. They feel they are too infirm, too old, too weak -- or they feel they are "not ready" yet SPIRITUALLY. Some think they must be PERFECT BEFORE being baptized!

What misunderstanding of the inspired Word of God!

How could a person be "perfect" BEFORE he has received God's Holy Spirit, which helps us to BECOME perfect?

The truth is, NONE of these excuses is any good in God's sight. There is NO EXCUSE! If a person KNOWS enough about God's Plan, KNOWS that God commands baptism, knows that he SHOULD be baptized, and his conscience convicts him -- THEN HE SHOULD BE BAPTIZED!

Old age makes no difference with God. Circumstances make no difference. The truth is, there is NO EXCUSE for not being baptized when a person UNDERSTANDS this vital, urgent spiritual truth.

But WHEN should a person be baptized?

1. When the Ethiopian eunuch learned the truth of God, and came to understand Christ was his Savior, did he hesitate about being baptized? Did he put it off? Acts 8:35-38.

2. When Paul was first converted, and learned CHRIST is the Son of God, whom he had been persecuting, did he procrastinate about being baptized? Acts 9:16-18.

COMMENT: Neither of these men put off water baptism. They saw their own personal need. They knew they NEEDED Christ as their Savior and NEEDED their sins covered by His shed blood. They felt dirty and despicable before God, as long as they stood before Him in their sins. They knew they were the SLAVES of sin, and did not have God's Holy Spirit dwelling within them.

Therefore, AS SOON AS WAS POSSIBLE, THEY WERE BAPTIZED!

Only ONE WAY to Salvation

How clear it is. Mere "acceptance" of Christ is not enough. Mere profession of Him won't save anyone! Merely "believing" on Him, the Scriptures show, won't save you.

Much more is needed! Belief on Christ is only the BEGINNING. One must also believe the gospel message -- the GOOD NEWS of the world to come -- which He preached!

In addition to believing on Christ, and believing the Gospel He brought, one must also come to see his own SINS and his rotten human nature for what they really are. He must cry out to God for forgiveness, REPENTING of his sins and sinful nature.

Then a person is "READY" for baptism.

This is the way to salvation GOD has ordained. THERE IS NO OTHER WAY!

After one is baptized, and has the laying on of hands, he receives the SPIRIT OF GOD which plunges him into the body of Christ -- the true Church of God. He becomes a begotten SON OF GOD, a member of the DIVINE FAMILY of God! He becomes an heir of salvation and a true Christian!

Are You a Christian?

You have PROVEN to yourself from God's own inspired Word that baptism in water is a commanded step in God's Plan of salvation. Christ commanded it. The apostles did it. The early inspired New Testament Church practiced it.

Jesus Christ warned, "He that believeth and is BAPTIZED SHALL BE SAVED; but he that believeth not shall be DAMNED [or, condemned, judged]" (Mark 16:16).

Christ COMMANDED His true followers, "Go you therefore, and TEACH ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM ..." (Matt. 28:19).

Have YOU been baptized? Have you repented of your sins and your evil, filthy, rotten human nature? Have YOU accepted Jesus Christ as your own personal Savior and coming King?

Do YOU DESIRE SALVATION?

Examine yourself!

Perhaps you were "sprinkled" when a child. Or perhaps a man of the cloth "poured" water over your head. If so, then you need to admit that YOU WERE NOT BAPTIZED!

Unless you have been baptized by IMMERSION, after SINCERELY REPENTING of your sins, and have received the gift of God's precious Holy Spirit as a begettal, YOU ARE NOT A CHRISTIAN! SO says your Bible (Rom. 8:9).

The Vital QUESTION

The vital question many of you students face today is: Will you SURRENDER your life to God, and DO as He says? will YOU repent of your sins -- your transgressions of God's Law -- accept Christ as your Savior, and be BAPTIZED?

Only you can make that decision. No one can make it for you. But don't put it off!

If you desire to counsel in person with a true minister of God concerning repentance and baptism, be sure to write Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong immediately. As soon as we receive your letter in the mail, we will put you in contact with the minister of God nearest you.

God's Church has ministers throughout the United States and around the world. They are very happy to be able to counsel with people about baptism, and other spiritual matters. Be sure to contact us if you desire to receive this FREE personal consultation and be baptized the way God has commanded.

Also, if you want more information on this vital subject of baptism, be sure to write for Mr. Armstrong's free booklet entitled "All About Water Baptism". We will rush a free copy to you as soon as your request is received.

In your next lesson, we will answer such questions as: Should infants or children be baptized? Are we to be baptized for the dead? What is the "baptism with fire"? And how can you be sure that your baptism (if you have already been immersed) is VALID in God's sight?

All of these questions, and others, will be thoroughly covered and explained in Lesson 26.