

# ACTS 2:38

Ours is the age that produced the H-bomb, germ warfare and the ever-increasing threat of human annihilation. Ours is the age of airport bombings, X-rated movies and incredible political skullduggery.

We have so scarred and seared our collective conscience that we would undoubtedly—as a people—kill Jesus Christ should He appear in the human flesh and indict us for our sins.

Listen! Over 1900 years ago a generation very similar to ours had literally done this very thing. But through logical, powerful and heartfelt preaching—and through direct miracles—thousands began to realize the wretchedness of their lives.

They began to see that their “establishment”—religious and political—their society, their grown-up “playhouse” was a sick and wretched thing, and that it had infected them personally and individually.

For their generation had killed the promised Messiah!

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly,” Peter said, “that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

Several thousand people of that generation were intellectually and spiritually honest. They were willing to face the fact that they, personally, had become callous and sinful and guilty before their God. They

needed help and *forgiveness* even as we now do in this generation.

Those people were “pricked in their heart, and said . . . Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Verse 37.)

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

This scripture sums up in one verse just exactly what steps a sinner has to take to become reconciled to His Creator.

An in-depth explanation into the profound meaning of Acts 2:38—phrase by phrase—is contained in the following articles.

## “REPENT”

The nations of the Western world are *religious*—at least according to statistics. Many people profess a deep interest in Christianity. Religion has even become fashionable for many people in America and Britain. And with the advent of the “Jesus movement” a few years ago, many young people are showing an interest in religion—perhaps for the first time.

Yet our “Christian” societies are bearing *dubious* fruit! Do you know why?

Why with all this interest in religion isn't our society becoming more law-abiding? Why aren't good fruits being borne of our religious beliefs?

Part of the answer was revealed a few years ago in a surprising report in the Los Angeles *Times*: “But increasingly people are becoming disillusioned with churches—so many

conflicting, confusing denominations. *Religion seems so unrelated to real life.* Today many people are disillusioned because they can't see the difference between the churchgoer and nonchurchgoer; between the believer and the nonbeliever” (emphasis ours throughout article).

Man wants religion, but he wants it *his way*. He doesn't want to give up the way he lives. At the same time he doesn't want to pay the penalty for living that way. As a result, people by the millions pour into their churches each week, donating time to help in worthy causes in the vain hope that God will accept their “good deeds” in place of their obedience to Him. Yet for the most part their way of living doesn't change.

For some, church attendance is actually a means of “making up” for their shortcomings and sins. It is something they do without chang-

ing. It is an act of penance rather than repentance.

Simple religious interest doesn't seem to have made any difference in our way of life. What possible good does it do to belong *to any* denomination if no one can tell the difference between the actions or fruits of a churchgoer and an agnostic?

Jesus Christ said: “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16). The Bible speaks of a true Christian as being a light to the world. Apparently modern-day “Christianity,” like so many of our cities, is suffering a power shortage. The result is the same—a “brown-out”! The light has grown so dim as to be barely able to be seen.

It has been reported that 40% of United States' adults can be found in church every weekend. Yet, in spite of church membership figures, crime since 1960 has jumped nearly

175%, while the population has increased by only 11%. The annual cost of crime in the United States is now conservatively estimated to be over 30 billion dollars.

Today's religious interest doesn't go very deep. It doesn't affect the way most people live.

Why?

**What Is The Answer?** What do religions have to do with the way you live? For many it means very little.

Listen to this: "During the years of our greatest growth we produced a generation of anemic Christians, brought up on a few gospel truths captured in platitudes, slogans and shallow Bible study, in an atmosphere where we left the impression that dedication could be measured by the extent of activity in a marathon of somewhat meaningless meetings" (Los Angeles Times, April 20, 1969).

Christianity is distant and out of touch with the perplexing and knotty problems of our modern society. The distance between professed faith and daily performance is astronomical.

Today's religious interest is reflected largely on paper. It only shines out from the church roll books. It doesn't show its light as it should in human lives.

The problem lies with the people themselves. Jesus Christ said—in speaking of the religious leaders and people of His day: "... This people honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit *in vain* do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:6-7).

People attend evangelistic campaigns and talk of all uniting in the brotherhood of Christianity. But very few seem to want to *live* the way Jesus Christ commanded. Most are willing to honor Him with their lips, but they don't want to do the things He taught.

The worldwide interest in religion is too often a cheap, shabby facade which serves to disguise a lack of personal integrity and morality. The basic problem is that as nations, and all too frequently even as individuals, there is a lack of genuine deep repentance!

If an increase in the interest in religion around the world doesn't

show repentance, what does? If the great evangelistic campaigns aren't producing it, where does it come from? What does it mean?

The dictionary definition of repentance is: "To feel self-reproach, compunction or contrition for past conduct, to feel such sorrow for sin or fault as to be disposed to change one's life for the better" (*The American College Dictionary*).

The Bible definition means all of that *and much more!*

Godly repentance means to stop sinning, to turn and go the other way—to change your way of life. It's not always easy to say, "I'm sorry." But it's even harder to mean it. Godly repentance has to come from the heart.

In speaking of Ephraim (identified as modern Britain), God says: "And they have not cried unto me *with their heart*, when they howled upon their beds . . . they rebel against me. Though I have bound and strengthened their arms, yet do they imagine mischief against me. They return, *but not to the most High . . .*" (Hosea 7:14-16).

Your Bible says people have made an *outward* show of returning to Him or repenting, but they haven't done it with their hearts. Ephraim's repentance, and for that matter that of the rest of the world, is the outward, superficial, worldly repentance with no real sincerity or deep feeling.

**Repent of What?** What is it you should repent *of* or feel sorrow *for*? To some it is one thing and to others—from another society or religion—it is something altogether different. But what does GOD say we should repent of?

It is *sin* we are commanded to repent of (Luke 24:47).

And what is sin?

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the *law: for sin is the transgression of the law*" (I John 3:4).

Sin is breaking God's law—not human customs!

Any time you break or disobey any one of the holy, righteous commandments of God, you have sinned. You must repent. No one is excluded. No man, woman or child has ever lived who hasn't disobeyed and broken God's law (Rom.

3:10, 23). Therefore every one of us needs to repent deeply and bitterly with all his heart. We all need to turn to God for forgiveness. We need to obey Him and keep His commandments—all His commandments—with zeal. "He that saith, I know him [who says, 'I am a Christian'], and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (I John 2:4).

We can't just drum up the deep feeling of abhorrence for our sins and our own utter wretchedness. It has to come *from God*. God grants repentance!

"Or despiseth thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the *goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*" (Rom. 2:4.)

II Timothy 2:25 tells us, "... *if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.*"

It is God who helps us to see our own wretchedness and shortcomings. He opens our minds and starts us on the way toward repentance.

There are definite steps to take you sincerely desire to repent and serve God. They are simple steps. Anyone who will follow them can be guaranteed he will find the true God and the deep repentance that God requires.

Your Bible names dozens of men who are going to be in the Kingdom of God. Such men as David, Daniel and other prophets of God are guaranteed salvation and a place in His Kingdom. They found how to reach the Creator of the universe. Their example will help us to see how we might attain the same goal.

They all had one very essential thing in common. As soon as they realized God was displeased with them or their nation's ways, they set out to correct it. But how can you know when the Father in heaven is displeased? How do you know when any father, who really loves his children and has their welfare at heart, is displeased?

"Chastise your son, while there is still hope of him, and do not let him run to ruin" (Prov. 19:18, Moffatt translation).

Our heavenly Father many times begins to deal with us and bring us

to repentance through chastening. Often He allows financial problems, family problems, sickness, or other serious situations to develop in our lives which will force us to realize our need of Him. These very things have occurred in your life, but chances are you didn't appreciate them.

These trials are proof of the Father's love for each one of us. Notice Hebrews 12:6-8: "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"

**Seeking God.** Instead of fighting these problems in our own strength, we need to learn the lesson God is teaching us. We need to begin to seek Him. He doesn't need us. We do need Him!

Daniel was inspired to record his own reactions in such a case as this for our instruction. "And I set my face unto the Eternal God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes" (Dan. 9:3).

Nehemiah's example is also recorded for us. When he found that his nation which had returned to the Holy Land was in affliction and reproach, here's what he did: "And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven" (Neh. 1:4). He immediately set out to draw close to God. He didn't do it in a halfhearted, lackadaisical, matter-of-fact way. He set himself to find God and His will by prayer and fasting. These men earnestly desired to find God's will. They were desirous of doing whatever was required to draw close to Him and receive His forgiveness. They were even willing to do without food and water to demonstrate their sincere desire to know God's way.

Hard as it is to say, "I'm sorry," it is even more difficult to mean it with all your heart. The earnest supplication of God through prayer and fasting shows Him you mean business.

He doesn't want a temporary, fleeting repentance which is brought

about by an emotional appeal or due to the pressures of those around you. Salvation is a personal matter between you and your God. *But it has to be on His terms.*

In the days of ancient Israel, God told King Solomon exactly what steps to follow if he found God's displeasure on his nation. These same steps apply to us today and forever (Heb. 13:8). He doesn't change. So if we will apply these steps in our everyday lives, He will answer just as He told Solomon He would.

Read these steps, this formula for repentance, for yourself in II Chronicles 7:12-14. "And the Eternal appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice. If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; if my people, which are called by my name, shall *humble themselves*, and *pray*, and *seek my face*, and *turn from their wicked ways*; then will I hear from heaven, and will *forgive their sin*, and will heal their land."

The steps are so simple, so clear and plain.

What does it mean to humble yourself! How do you go about it? Exactly the same way Daniel and Nehemiah did. David explains in Psalm 35:13 how to humble yourself. "But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I *humbled* my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom."

Occasional fasting shows our earnestness and sincerity in seeking God and adds impetus to the prayers we raise to Him.

Prayer and fasting aren't the only requirements in seeking God. If you will read back over the examples of Daniel and Nehemiah as well as many of the other prophets of God, you will notice that in every case they freely acknowledged their own sins and shortcomings. It takes a deeply sincere man to say, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23-24).

If we are earnestly seeking God and His way, this is the attitude we will be reflecting. We will freely admit our own sins and shortcomings and be earnestly importuning God to show us the right way. Jeremiah said: "O Lord, I know that *the way of man is not in himself*: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing" (Jer. 10:23-24).

We as individuals do not know how to live. Once we begin to learn that lesson, and look to God to show us how to live and how to change our lives, we are on our way to real repentance.

The steps are simple. Yet it is not easy to completely give of yourself, to admit your own faults and sincerely ask for God's forgiveness.

The people of this world outwardly follow many of these steps and yet fall short in the final, most important of all the steps—*turning from their wicked ways*.

So many people of this day and age profess to be repentant—profess Christianity—and yet still live in all the wretchedness of their sinful ways. So, finally, one of the most important of all the steps in coming to true repentance is to *stop sinning!*

All too often our repentance is the worldly repentance spoken of in II Corinthians 7:10. What we really need to come to see and understand is the kind of repentance God desires "... turn ye even to me *with all your heart*, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and *rend your heart*, and not your garments, and turn to the Eternal your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil" (Joel 2:12-13).

No, God doesn't want the worldly kind of repentance which is manifested by a trip down the sawdust trail. No, He doesn't just want your name on the membership rolls of some church. What God wants and what you should come to deeply desire is to sincerely acknowledge your sins and ask for forgiveness. God wants you to say, "I'm sorry"—and mean it! He wants you to repent of breaking, and to begin obeying, His law.

# “BE BAPTIZED”

**S**treaking through the upper atmosphere at 600 miles per hour, our Boeing 747 was bound for London. Incredibly powerful jet engines enabled this huge plane to carry some 340 passengers plus luggage—payload of about 710,000 pounds. A remarkable accomplishment of modern avionics.

Lunch was about to be served. Sipping on their preluncheon martinis, some of the passengers were visibly amused at two elderly ladies making their way down the aisle. These women wore a kind of austere religious garb that seemed, somehow, utterly and totally incongruous with this modern jet-set atmosphere.

It was true. They just didn't fit. They looked and felt out of place.

But how can you *know* whether any costume or custom is just a “carry-over” of old-fashioned human ideas or whether it is, in fact, what the Creator of heaven and earth truly wants His followers to practice?

Many of you readers have proved for yourselves that there is a great God working out a purpose here below. The Apostle Paul mused: “For in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

God *should* be the “be all” and “end all” of our lives—the reason and ultimate *authority* for how we live.

Jesus Christ stated: “It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but *by every word of God*” (Luke 4:4).

Again, speaking of the Bible, Jesus said: “The scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

The ultimate criterion, then, for determining the importance and validity of *anything* pertaining to God or salvation is the Holy Bible.

Water baptism may seem old-fashioned or an anachronism to some. Part of this feeling may come because baptism is sometimes associated with very sentimental or

emotional people—and often those lacking in this world's culture and education. Frankly, though, most of this feeling is probably due primarily to simple *ignorance* of what the Bible actually teaches.

Ignorance?

That's right. Because most people *assume* they know what the Bible teaches, yet very few bother to really study God's Word to see what it *does* say on any given subject!

Let's all make sure we have the intellectual and spiritual courage to *study* what God's Word says—and then *do it*: “But be ye *doers* of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22).

Are you willing to obey this inspired scripture?

Notice in your Bible the most direct and vital of all passages concerning baptism. Study carefully Acts 2:36-42. In his inspired sermon on this momentous Day of Pentecost, Peter indicted his listeners for their part in *murdering the Messiah!*

Many were cut to the heart with guilt and shame, and they asked: “Men and brethren, *what shall we do?*”

A good question.

What do you do when you, individually, come to recognize that you have been in rebellion against the laws and purposes of your Creator? What does He tell you to do as a sign that you are willing to surrender your life to Him and seek His help and forgiveness?

What is the inspired answer to this question? Notice the clear biblical command: “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 [Spirit].”

The preceding article covered the subject of repentance. But the next step is to “be baptized.”

That's what God specifically says to DO.

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (verse 41). These thousands were “glad,” it says, for the opportunity to be *forgiven* and to be *reconciled* to their God.

Later, we find the Evangelist Philip preaching about the Kingdom of God and baptizing quite a number of men and women (Acts 8:12). Still later, the Apostle Paul visited certain believers at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7) who had been instructed in “the way of the Lord” (Acts 18:25), but were baptized with the baptism of John.

However, the correct understanding and meaning of baptism—and obviously baptism itself—was so important that the Apostle Paul *again* baptized these people—this time in the name of Jesus.

Jesus Christ Himself set us an *example* that we should follow in His steps (I Pet. 2:21). Following Jesus—*imitating* Jesus—indeed, having Him live *His life* in us through the Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:20)—this is the very essence of true Christianity!

Was Jesus, then, baptized?

He certainly was. Notice the account in Matthew 3:13-17. Although Jesus was totally sinless and did not need to repent, yet even He—the Son of God—was baptized in water “to fulfill all righteousness” (verse 15). He did this to set us an example to follow! There was no other purpose for His baptism.

As He sent forth His disciples to all nations after His resurrection, Jesus commanded: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, *baptizing them* in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).

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

The above are explicit *commands* for Christian baptism.

Normally, baptism is the outward sign by which we acknowledge our surrender to God *prior* to receiving the Holy Spirit. But there is at least one exception mentioned in the New Testament. Notice the account in Acts 10. Cornelius, a most dedicated man, was chosen by God to be the first completely Gentile convert to Christianity. While the Apostle Peter spoke the gospel to Cornelius's household, the Holy Spirit was immediately poured out on them. Yet, even here, Peter "COMMANDED them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (verse 48).

Without question baptism is a vital ordinance in the eyes of the God and the Christ revealed in your Bible.

What is the true *form* of baptism? Although various denominations and sects practice differing forms of baptism, there is only *one* form which is biblical. When you understand the *meaning* of baptism, the true form should become obvious.

The very word "baptize" comes from the original Greek *baptizo*, which means to "immerse," to "plunge into" or to "put into." There are different and distinct words for "pour" (*cheo*) and for "sprinkle" (*rantidzo*) in the Greek language.

So the word "baptize" has *nothing* directly to do with sprinkling or pouring. As we have said, baptism pictures the *burial* of the old self. You do not "sprinkle" or "pour" earth on a dead corpse—you com-

pletely cover it with earth (or with water if burial is at sea)!

Notice John 3:23. Here John was baptizing "because there was *much water* there." He certainly wouldn't have needed "much water" if sprinkling or pouring were considered baptism.

Again, in Matthew 3:16: "Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway *out of the water* . . ." He must have been down *in* the water to be baptized!

When Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, "they went *down both into the water*" (Acts 8:38).

The Apostle Paul was inspired to write that there is "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5)—not many different approaches to God and *differing* modes of baptism.

Many attempt to "reason around" every plain command and clear statement or example given in the Bible. But if anyone is looking for *truth*, the correct form and meaning of baptism is made unmistakably clear in the teaching of Scripture and in the *inspired example* of Jesus Christ—the Author of true Christianity.

What is the meaning of baptism? As we have stated, baptism pictures the *burial* of our old self. Notice Romans 6:3-6.

It states we are baptized into Christ's *death*. "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. For if we have been *planted together in the likeness of his death*, we shall be also in the *like-*

*ness of his resurrection*" (verses 4-5).

Hence baptism pictures the old self dying, being buried in a watery grave, and being resurrected to live a new and God-centered life.

Baptism also pictures, in symbolism, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Baptism requires a total *surrender*. After heartfelt repentance and recognition that we are worthy of death because of our sins, the ordinance of baptism is an outward manifestation to God and to His human servants that we sincerely intend to *bury* the old self. It shows we intend to come up out of that watery grave "to walk in newness of life"—to obey God's law and yield ourselves willingly to God's guidance and His rule in our lives. Baptism also expresses our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, and our acceptance of His death, burial and resurrection on our behalf.

Again: "*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" (Col. 2:12). So baptism signifies that our natures must *die*. It is an outward acknowledgment of our total and unconditional surrender to God.

Our willingness to humble ourselves and *do* what Jesus did in the ordinance of baptism is vital. "He that believeth and is *baptized* shall be saved" (Mark 16:16).

May God grant you the understanding, the faith, the humility to do what He commands for your good.

# "IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST"

Is salvation possible through any "savior" other than Christ Jesus? What does the Word of God say?

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is *none other name* under heaven given among men, where-by we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

But how does one receive salvation through the name of Jesus Christ?

First, it is necessary to understand the importance which God attaches to a name—and to the *meaning* of a name.

God originated the practice of naming things. When God created the first man, He named him "Adam" (Hebrew, "man"). God let Adam name his wife: "And Adam called his wife's name Eve [Hebrew, 'life' or 'living']; because she was [to

become] the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20).

God also named the angels, and assigned a name to every star (Ps. 147:4).

But what is the most important name ever borne by any human or angel? The one name which stands out supremely eminent above every other is *Jesus Christ* of Nazareth!

“... God also hath highly exalted him [Christ], and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that *Jesus Christ is Lord*” (Phil. 2:9-11).

Does Christ have a better name than the mighty, glorious angels of God? “God... in these last days [has] spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds... Being made *so much better than the angels*, as he hath by inheritance obtained a *more excellent name* than they” (Heb. 1:1-4).

How does the Father look upon the name of His Son Jesus Christ? The Father not only raised Jesus from the dead, but He also “set him at his own right hand [symbolizing Christ’s preeminent position—right next to the Father in authority over the entire universe] in the heavenly places, *far above* all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and *every name that is named*, not only in this world [Greek, ‘age’], but also in that which is to come” (Eph. 1:20, 21).

Down through the ages many men have been named “Jesus,” but there has only been one “Jesus Christ.”

**What Does the Name “Jesus” Mean?** This is explained in Matthew 1:20-21 by an angel of God which suddenly appeared to Joseph (before Jesus’ birth) and said: “... Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:20, 21).

This miraculously conceived child

was to be called “Jesus” because that name signifies “savior.” He was to become the Savior of all mankind.

This child was to be the Son of God and also the Son of man—both human and divine—having a human mother, but God as His father.

Next, let’s consider what the word “Christ” means. The Greek word *Christos* (Christ) means the same as the Hebrew word *Messiah*. Both mean “anointed” and refer to “the Anointed One.”

But why was Jesus also to be called “Christ” or “the Anointed One”?

Though Jesus was “conceived of the Holy Spirit” from the moment of His conception, His real *anointing* of the Spirit of God did not occur until after His baptism (see Matt. 3:16, 17).

Shortly after His baptism with water, and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him, He went to Nazareth and preached in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He said: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath *anointed me* to preach the gospel...” (Luke 4:18).

The apostles recognized that the “rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ [Greek, ‘anointed’]. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed... the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together” (Acts 4:26, 27).

Later, in Acts 10:38, the Apostle Peter told Cornelius and all those gathered at his house that “*God anointed Jesus* [Christ—verse 36] of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost [Spirit] and with power.”

“**In the Name of...**” What is God’s command for all human beings? “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 [Spirit]” (Acts 2:38).

But just before Jesus Christ ascended to heaven, He commanded His apostles: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them *in* [Greek, *eis*] *the name of the Father*, and of the *Son*, and of the *Holy Ghost* [Spirit]” (Matt. 28:19).

Then is there a contradiction be-

tween Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:38 (which *only* mentions being baptized “in [Greek, *en*] the name of Jesus Christ”)?

Scholars have long debated the differences in wording between these two scriptures. Some have pointed out that the two prepositions (*eis* and *en*) are often used interchangeably in Hellenistic Greek, even though kept separate in classical Greek.

However, the key does not lie in the use of two different prepositions—since prepositions are notorious for their wide range of meanings and uses. The key lies rather in the two different phrases. The expression *eis to onoma* (the phrase in Matthew 28:19) in the contemporary language was used in reference to *paying into an account*: “The phrase *eis (to) onoma tinos* is frequent in the papyri with reference to payments made ‘to the account of any one’... The usage is of interest in connection with Matthew 28:19, where the meaning would seem to be ‘baptized into the possession of the Father, etc.’” (Moulton-Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, p. 451).

The authoritative *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* by Arndt, Gingrich and Bauer further states: “Through baptism *eis (to) on[oma] t[inos]* the one who is baptized becomes the possession of and comes under the protection of the one whose name he bears” (see article, “Onoma”).

By contrast, to do something *en to onomati* means to do it *by the authority* of the one named. It would be similar to a public official in England doing something “in the name of the Queen.” One could even compare the old cliché, “Stop in the name of the law.” To do something in the name of the Queen or in the name of the law is to do it with the authority of that individual or institution.

When God’s ministers baptize in the name of Jesus Christ, the baptismal candidate is not baptized into any humanly devised denomination, but into the very *God family*, into the *name* of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

**Members of the God Family.** How does one become a member of the God family? Few professing Christians comprehend that one must first be *begotten*, then *born* into the family of God.

In fact, we are *now* God's children—though only begotten, still subject to the possibility of a spiritual miscarriage. "Beloved, *now* are we the *sons of God* . . . we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:2).

In the case of a physical birth, there is first a begetting, then a development period of about nine months, and finally birth. So it is with the *spiritual* birth. There is first a spiritual begetting; then, nurtured by the Spirit of God, a period of spiritual *growth* and development in the "womb" of the Church; and, finally, the wondrous result of immortal, glorified, spirit-composed sons and daughters of God at Christ's second coming.

When we repent of our sins, accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and are baptized, our sins are totally forgiven. Then we receive the Holy Spirit by the "laying on of hands." Once we receive God's Spirit we are *God's children*—members of His divine family!

The Apostle Paul spoke of this great divine family: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom *the whole family* in heaven and earth is named" (Eph. 3:14, 15).

Just before His crucifixion, Jesus Christ prayed: ". . . Holy Father, *keep through thine own name* those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are" (John 17:11).

And the apostles of Christ did just that. They kept the believers together in God's name—the "*Church of God*"! This is why we read of the "church [singular] of God" in *eight* places in the New Testament (see Acts 20:28; I Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; II Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:13; I Tim. 3:5.)

And the "churches [plural] of God" are mentioned in three places (I Cor. 11:16; I Thess. 2:14; II Thess. 1:4). The New Testament congregations are referred to as the

"churches of Christ" once (Rom. 16:16).

What does the Bible mean when it commands us to be baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ"? It simply means the minister is to perform the baptism in the name or *by the authority* of Jesus Christ.

We are commanded: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain . . ." (Ex. 20:7). Our attitude toward God's name should be that of *reverence*—"Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9).

But there are those who take, use, or appropriate the name of Jesus Christ—yet are not *authorized* to do so. "For many shall come *in my name*, saying [or admitting that], I am Christ; and shall deceive many," said Jesus (Matt. 24:5).

It is true that Jesus Christ intended His true disciples and His ministers to be able to use His name freely.

Christ promised certain *signs* to those who rightly used His name: "And these *signs* shall follow them that believe; *In my name* shall they cast out devils [demons]; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:17, 18).

When Jesus sent out the seventy disciples, He told them to heal the sick, raise the dead and cast out devils (demons). "And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us *through thy name*" (Luke 10:17).

There is tremendous *power* in the name of Jesus Christ—when that name is rightly used by one properly authorized.

Even during the ministry of Jesus, one man was using Christ's name to cast out demons. The disciples supposed he was *unauthorized* to do so, but the context implies otherwise.

"And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils [demons] *in thy name*, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle *in my name*, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not

against us is on our part" (Mark 9:38-40).

**The Greatest Miracle.** But the greatest miracle which occurs in the name of Christ is the miracle of having one's sins forgiven by and through faith in that *name*. Jesus Christ's propitiatory death was for all humankind.

But how could one's sins be forgiven through the death of a *man*? Christ was not just a mere man. He was both *man* and *God*! Since the Father "created all things by Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:9), His life was—and is—of more value than all human lives put together.

Therefore, His substitutionary, or vicarious, *death* on the cross is sufficient to pay the penalty for all the sins of all human beings throughout all ages!

The Gentile Samaritans recognized the necessity of being "baptized *in the name* of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:16). And Cornelius and all those in his house heard Peter preaching about this remarkable person called *Christ*: "To him give all the prophets witness, that *through his name* whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

"And he [Peter] commanded them to be baptized *in the name of the Lord* . . ." (verse 48).

The apostles realized the power that believers have when using the precious "name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (Acts 3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 12, 18, 30; 5:28, 40; 19:13). They went out everywhere teaching, preaching and baptizing in that name. And they got results.

Thousands were converted (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 16:5); their lives were changed; and they started on the way of life that leads to an eternal crown in the Kingdom of God. They were baptized "into" the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit—thereby becoming sons and daughters in the very family of God—the true destiny of all human beings.

God wants you also to repent of your sins, be baptized *in the name of Jesus Christ* and receive His Holy Spirit. Then you, too, will be progressing toward a permanent place in God's perfect, happy, wise, powerful, universe-ruling family—for all eternity!

# “FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS”

It was July 1942. Thousands of Jews were beginning to arrive at the German concentration camp at Auschwitz. Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler had arrived to inspect the operation.

Himmler was not happy with what he saw in Auschwitz. “To a former teacher of mathematics,” wrote Rudolph Vrba, who was one of the prisoners, “the whole business was just too haphazard for words.”

In the wake of his visit, Himmler “gave orders for the greatest, most efficient extermination factory the world has ever known. For the modern concrete gas chambers and the vast crematoria that could absorb as many as 12,000 bodies in twenty-four hours, and, in fact, did so. For the machinery that sucked in 2,500,000 men, women and children in three years and puffed them out in harmless black smoke” (*I Cannot Forgive*, pp. 9-10).

Just six months later, Himmler again visited Auschwitz. A special consignment of 3,000 Polish Jews had been brought in for the occasion. It was the inauguration of new mass-extermination gas chambers and ovens, Auschwitz’s contribution to the “Final Solution.”

Vrba discribed Himmler’s reaction to what he saw: “Having waited for a while so that the poison would have circulated properly, Hoess courteously invited his guest to have another peep through the observation window. For some minutes, Himmler peered into the death chamber, obviously impressed, and then turned with new interest to his Commandant . . . What he had seen seemed to have satisfied him and put him in good humour.”

Himmler was just one of thousands who were responsible for the most organized atrocities that history has ever witnessed. He was one

of many who lost no sleep over the monstrous murdering of millions of helpless victims!

A lifetime will never erase the understandable bitterness toward these men—human forgiveness is impossible.

And yet so great is the mercy of God that even *these* men, whom many *cannot forgive*, could have received absolute pardon from their Creator!

Does that seem unbelievable! Is it beyond our ability to comprehend! What about the words of Isaiah who reports God as saying, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool”! (Isa. 1:18.) Does this include the sins of these men?

Sin is the transgression of God’s righteous law (I John 3:4). The Bible reveals that the entire human race has sinned, and that every human being who has ever lived has come under the penalty of sin—*death* (Rom. 3:23; 6:23).

Perhaps we may not consider that we have done very much wrong during our lifetime. Certainly we couldn’t be classed with war criminals like Himmler! Why, haven’t we always lived a basically “good” life?

But “good” as we might think we are, if only one of us ever lived—if there had been no other members of the human race—Jesus Christ would *still* have had to die for our salvation to be possible!

Human beings classify and categorize sin. What Himmler did was unbelievably evil. We can all recognize that. But somehow what many of us have done doesn’t seem as serious.

But the same penalty must be exacted for *our* sins as must be exacted for the sins of those who were responsible for the deaths of

millions under Nazi Germany. Any sin required the death of our Maker if there is to be forgiveness. Sin is *just that serious!*

God says that if we have broken one of His laws, as far as the forfeiting of eternal life goes, we may as well have broken them all. “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is *guilty of all*,” the Apostle James tells us (James 2:10).

Can we begin to understand why *no sin* is beyond the realm of God’s power to forgive? We look upon *some* sins as “unforgivable” because we don’t grasp the enormity of *any* degree of sin.

One evening centuries ago, a king took a walk on the roof of his palace. He saw a very beautiful woman, and subsequently succumbed to heavy temptation.

To cover up his sin of adultery, King David of Israel stooped to cold-blooded, plotted murder! He purposely arranged for the death of the woman’s husband in battle.

What David did angered God—especially Uriah’s murder, for David had “*despised* the commandment of the Lord.” It wasn’t done in temporary weakness under great temptation. It was *deliberate* sin.

When the Prophet Nathan came to David to deliver God’s judgment, David’s heart smote him. “And David said unto Nathan, *I have sinned* against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath *put away* thy sin; thou shalt not die” (II Sam. 12:13).

David’s repentance is recorded in Psalm 51. He saw what he had done as a crime against the great God and came to bitterly *loathe* himself for his sin. And when he repented, God *forgave*.

But in God’s forgiveness of David’s sin we learn a tremendous



lesson. God didn't "forgive" in the way that we humans so often do. He didn't begrudgingly *allow* David's life to be spared. David didn't get off by the "skin of his teeth," barely remaining alive. No, God forgave to the extent that David not only continued in office as a physical king, but he actually qualified to be king over all Israel in the coming Kingdom of God (Ezek. 37:24).

Little wonder that David later wrote in the 103rd Psalm that God "hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For *as the heaven is high above the earth*, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. *As far as the east is from the west*, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (verses 10-12).

When God forgives sin, it is *total* forgiveness. He puts sin so far from us that it in no way limits our future potential. We may carry scars and reap temporary penalties to remind us of the awesomeness of sin, but God never again brings that sin up. So complete is His forgiveness that David is even called a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22).

**The Greatness of God's Forgiveness.** Too many, not understanding the extent of God's forgiveness, continue to feel guilty for sins committed even *years* earlier, instead of allowing God to remove them and put them away forever.

Consider. If God can forgive even the most heinous sins, can he not forgive *you*? If mercy is available to war criminals with countless human murders on their hands, isn't it also available to you?

The very gospel Christ came to proclaim to the world has to do with the "remission of sins." It was at the heart and core of the preaching of John the Baptist and Christ Himself (Mark 1:4; Luke 1:77; 24:47).

The Greek word translated "remission" in these passages means literally "to dismiss, to release." Christ came proclaiming a *release* from sin. Even as the prophecy of Isaiah had predicted centuries earlier, He came "to preach *deliverance to the captives*, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at *liberty* them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18; see also Isa. 61:1).

The Bible pictures us as captives

to sin, the servants of lawlessness. We are chained in bondage to the way of life to which Satan has held this entire world. But Christ said that the message He brought will make a person *free* (John 8:32).

Remission of sins does not mean simply the forgiveness of past sins and deliverance from the death penalty we have incurred, though this is a vital part of it. But it involves our release from bondage—the termination of our slavery as servants of a wrong way of life! As the Apostle Paul explained: "Being then made *FREE* from sin"—having our sins *remitted*—"ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:16, 18).

When God grants us remission of sins, we are freed to begin walking *His* way, keeping His law.

The Apostle Paul explained the full ramification of the remission of sin in Hebrews 10:12-22. Speaking of Christ, he said: "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God . . . For by one offering he hath *perfected for ever* them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Spirit also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my *laws* into their *hearts*, and in their *minds* will I write them; and *their sins and iniquities will I remember no more*. Now where *remission* of these is, there is no more offering for sin."

Remission of sin includes forgiveness *and* turning to righteousness—obedience to God's law! Christ died to free us from bondage to the *way* of sin, and He remits our sins so that we can now walk in His law.

Notice that where there is remission of sin, "there is *no more* offering for sin." This doesn't take place immediately—it's a lifelong *process*. Once we have finally been liberated from sin, so that we no longer sin, there will no longer be a need for forgiveness. Christ's sacrifice not only blots out past sins, but *continues* to clean us up as we stumble along the way, until finally we are perfect (I John 1:7-9). Not until then is the "remission of sin" complete.

God promises that He will remember our sins no more. "Having therefore [because God no longer

remembers our sins], brethren, *boldness* to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus," Paul continues, ". . . Let us draw near with a true heart in *full assurance of faith*, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:19, 22).

Faith is absolute *confidence* in God's promises. When we have this faith—this assurance—we no longer bear feelings of guilt. We don't allow mistakes, even terrible sins, of the past to encumber us. We put all of that behind us.

There's no room for doubt in faith. "Now faith is the *assurance* of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen," Paul explains in Hebrews 11:1 (RSV). You don't go around with a guilty conscience about past sin. You *know* you have been forgiven. You are *confident* Christ's sacrifice was big enough to forgive *every* sin.

In this same 10th chapter of Hebrews, Paul explains further this confidence we can have once we have been forgiven. "Cast not away therefore your confidence," he urges. "Now the just [those who are obeying God] shall live by FAITH: But if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (verses 35-39).

Those who are fearful, who carry their past sins with them, will not have the faith to live God's way wholly. But those who have really grasped how total God's forgiveness is, and who are *confident* in that remission, will press forward boldly in God's way of life. Paul said he was of those who *believe* to the inheriting of eternal life. God help us to have *confidence* in His ability to grant the remission of our sins!

The account of the forgiveness of the most evil king who ever lived highlights God's ability to blot out even the most heinous sins.

Manasseh, king of Judah, led the nation into utter idolatry. He caused the people of Judah to commit greater evil than the heathen whom God had earlier removed from the land so Israel could possess it. We read that he "shed innocent blood

very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another" (II Kings 21:16). He even sacrificed his own son to a pagan god (verse 6). Because he did more evil than anyone before him, God actually caused him to be taken captive to Babylon.

But "when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and *humbled himself greatly* before the

God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and he was *entreated* of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom" (II Chron. 33:12-13).

Even after Manasseh had actually been taken captive, God reversed the penalty of his sin and set him back in his kingdom. All of his murders, his idolatry, and even his black magic were put behind him. He was

given a *fresh start*. God heard Manasseh's prayer of repentance and forgave all his sin! No amount of evil is too great for God to forgive.

If God could forgive Manasseh, he will certainly forgive us. When we recognize our need for God's mercy as did Manasseh, our entire past can be wiped away. God stands ready to offer every one of us the *total* remission of our sins!

# "RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT"

It's both basic and awesome at the same time: Acts 2:38 explains how God makes it possible for man to achieve his purpose in life. This is because Acts 2:38 explains how individual human beings can receive the Spirit of God—and it is only through the Spirit of God that we can understand the reason why God created us, and then fulfill this purpose by growing to think, act and become more like our Creator Father.

Why go through the mental strain of repentance? Why make the effort to be baptized? Why even bother with understanding the name of Jesus Christ? Why seek the remission of sins?

There is in fact one simple answer to all of these questions—one basic reason for all of these "why's"—that we may qualify to receive the gift of God's Holy Spirit.

Nothing could be more spectacular. Nothing more all-encompassing. Nothing more awesome.

We start with a basic definition of God's Holy Spirit: It is His *power*—the power of the Almighty Creator.

Acts 1:8 gives the actual historical promise which Christ gave to His disciples: "But ye shall receive *power*, after that the Holy Ghost [Spirit] is come upon you." Here is the great promise of God's Holy Spirit. *Power*.

Power can be simply defined as

"the ability to act"—or, more technically, as "the capacity to do *work*." This most certainly applies to the power of God's Holy Spirit. By His Spirit God *created* the entire universe in Genesis 1:1. And it is also by the power of His Spirit that God has continued to *sustain* the universe from that time until this time.

In another sense, the Holy Spirit is the essence of the mind of God—the power by which God begets His sons and enables them to keep His law. A basic definition of this aspect of God's Holy Spirit would be "the love of God fulfilling the law of God."

And this brings us directly to the point of this article, which is the climax of Acts 2:38.

If we had to list biblical verses in the order of their relative importance, Genesis 1:26 would surely be placed near the top. Here God states the reason why He created man: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

Man was designed with a physical human body resembling God's body and a human mind resembling God's mind—much as our shadows resemble our bodies. But this was just a start. Man, every man individually, would have to spiritually grow in order to attain "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

And the way to spiritually grow? There's only one way: living the law of God.

In Exodus 19:5-6 God made a covenant with His people. He told them that they could become a treasure unto Him, "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." All they would have to do would be to "obey my voice" and "keep my covenant"—in other words, follow the law of God. And Israel sincerely *wanted* to obey. "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient" (Ex. 24:7).

But neither ancient Israel nor Judah *ever* kept God's laws and commandments consistently. And as a *direct* result both were exiled (II Kings 17:6-23 for the House of Israel, II Kings 25:1-17 for the House of Judah).

Why? Why were God's physical people unable to keep God's law and fulfill their part of the covenant?

The answer is given in Hebrews 8. After raising the question as to why the first covenant had to be superseded by the second covenant (verse 7), Paul answers: "For finding fault with *them* . . ." In other words, there was nothing at all wrong with the law. It was the *people* who were at fault; it was *Israel*, not God, who was responsible for the failure of the first covenant.

But this is not the end of the story—it is not even the end of the

eighth verse of Hebrews 8. Read this section in its entirety: “For finding fault with *them*, he [God] saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when *I will make a new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” For further details, go on to verse 10: “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; *I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts*: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.”

**The New Covenant.** *How* can God put His laws into our minds and write them in our hearts? In precisely the same way that God can be our Father and we can be His sons! Through God’s Holy Spirit!

This is the essential ingredient of the New Covenant. This is why the New Covenant can offer “better promises” (Heb. 8:6).

Without God’s Spirit, the human mind is carnally minded—which means that it is “enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7).

With God’s Spirit, the human mind is spiritually minded—it is a converted mind—which means that it is no longer enmity against God. Rather, the individual whose mind is filled with God’s Holy Spirit minds “the things of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:5), he has “life and peace” (Rom. 8:6), and in him “the righteousness of the law is fulfilled” (Rom. 8:4).

In one short sentence, God’s Spirit gives a man the *power* to obey God’s laws. Many are the false teachers who proclaim that human beings *cannot* keep God’s commandments. Now, humanly speaking, that’s true—we can’t. Yet we *must*. Because God will not allow anybody in His Kingdom if He cannot rule that person. So we have a problem. But God solves it: He supplies the *power* to obey Him—which is God’s Spirit.

Recall the definition of power—“the capacity to do work.” Now it must certainly be considered “work” to reorient and lead a human mind in the direction of obedience to God—because this is exactly the *opposite* direction from the human

mind. Hence the necessity of a *power* to do this “work,” a power which God’s Spirit supplies.

Putting the whole story together, we find that the individual filled with God’s Spirit is well on his or her way to fulfill and accomplish the ultimate purpose in life—the very reason why he or she was born! This is why the crucial presence or absence of God’s Holy Spirit is the only valid determination of whether or not the individual is, in reality, a real Christian (Rom. 8:9).

In the physical realm, obedience to God makes possible a more abundant physical life. In fact, one of the reasons Christ came in the flesh was to make this more abundant life possible (John 10:10).

Even more important, God’s Holy Spirit increases the capacity of your mind to know and to comprehend spiritual things. The addition of God’s Spirit elevates a human mind onto a new plane. I Corinthians 2:9-14 tells this remarkable story. Now verse 9 is often used alone by those who wish to show that God hides His truth from man: “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him”—and there the quote usually ends. But why isn’t the next verse quoted? “But God hath *revealed them* unto us *by his Spirit*: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”

God reveals His most profound truths through His Holy Spirit. Of course! God’s Spirit is a part of His actual mind. And it can be implanted in our own human minds! So it makes perfect sense that God’s Holy Spirit will lead the converted individual “into *all truth*” and will enable him to understand “things to come” (John 16:13).

God’s Spirit also generates the *hope* of God—the quiet confidence of the certainty of the resurrection which makes a human life happy and successful (Romans 15:13).

In fact, the Holy Spirit brings a whole list of the attributes of God into our lives. Read them in Galatians 5:22. The fruits of the Spirit are these: “Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness,

faith, meekness, temperance.”

And there you have it. So simple. Yet so profound.

Jesus Christ stated, “It is the spirit that quickeneth [makes alive]” (John 6:63)—or, as a modern translation puts it: “It is the Spirit that gives life” (*The Twentieth Century New Testament*).

How does this occur? How does God’s Spirit “give life”?

When an individual receives the Holy Spirit, he then, for the first time, has a begetting of inherent life—self-existent life—life within himself. Christ said of the man who would have God’s Spirit in him, “Out of his belly shall flow rivers of *living water*. (But this spake he of *the Spirit*, which they that believe on him should receive)” (John 7:38, 39).

What is the end result of this? We read about it in I Corinthians 15:50-54. At the resurrection, at the last trump, both the dead and the living in Christ—those who died with God’s Spirit and those who will be living with God’s Spirit—shall have their mortal, corruptible, physical existence exchanged instantly for an immortal, incorruptible, spiritual existence.

**How Do We Qualify for God’s Spirit?**

First of all, the Holy Spirit is a *gift* from our Father and Creator. Acts 2:38 makes this quite clear. But God will not give us something we don’t want. Certainly not His Holy Spirit—the most precious commodity in the universe.

We must fervently want it. And we must demonstrate this by asking for it.

Speaking to His disciples, Jesus said: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that *ask* him?” (Luke 11:13.)

It’s a breathtaking promise. Do you want God’s Holy Spirit? Then ask your heavenly Father. (Of course, we should realize that even our desire to ask for God’s Spirit must originate from God Himself: “For it is God which worketh in you both *to will* [to desire] and to do of his good pleasure” [Phil. 2:13].)

Now it is rather simple to realize

that God's Spirit is a gift and that we must ask for it. And so if these were the only conditions, the unlimited power of God's Spirit would be proliferated to anybody and everybody—and thereby disastrously misused.

Therefore, in order to build harmony, order and control into His overall system, God added another condition—obedience. God will give His Holy Spirit—with all the powers, abilities and capacities involved—only to those who have demonstrated by both attitude and actions that they want to obey God and His laws. God first demands this wholehearted, wholly sincere desire to obey His laws; then, and only then, will He give us the power to actually obey these laws.

Peter told his persecutors: "We are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that *obey* him" (Acts 5:32). Now some might misinterpret this statement and claim that Peter taught "salvation by works"—that he was a "legalist." This would be a most hasty conclusion. Throughout the Bible, God plainly shows that we can never "earn" "the right" to have the Holy Spirit. It is unquestionably a free gift from God, a gift which we do not and cannot ever deserve. But this has nothing to do with whether or not we must first want to obey God's laws. It is a mystery how anybody could even suggest that God would not require us to have an attitude of perfect obedience to His law before He would give us His Holy Spirit. How could God allow even the possibility for some "misguided souls" to abuse such massive power?

**How Do You Receive God's Holy Spirit?** Just follow the simple, straightforward directions of Acts

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2:38: one, "repent"—and that naturally includes "obey"—and two, "be baptized."

When you have repented and have been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, then you *shall* receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when God's ministers lay their hands on you after the actual baptism (Acts 8:17). And there are no "perhaps's" or "probably's." You *shall* receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is an absolute promise of God. It is sure.

There is a concrete act that you must do. You cannot baptize yourself. You *must be* baptized. And by whom better than by a true minister of Jesus Christ?

How can you arrange this? As many of our readers already know, God has His ministers within easy reach of all areas of the United States, British Commonwealth, Western Europe and many other parts of the world.

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This is all *you* have to do. Then it becomes our responsibility to arrange the most convenient time and place.

In this regard, there is a question that many readers have considered well worth asking. Many of you have been baptized in the past, or have had a "religious experience," or have made a previous decision or commitment to what you then believed to be the truth of God. Now, perhaps you have come to learn a great deal more about many things—such as, for example, the Holy Spirit. So the puzzling question arises: "What should I do? Should I be rebaptized?"

The answer is found in the book of Acts. The story is short: from 18:24 to 19:6. It concerns Apollos, who was teaching what he knew

from the ministry of John the Baptist.

Now when Apollos baptized people, they did *not* receive the Holy Spirit. Upon meeting some of these, the Apostle Paul immediately asked them: "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" These people told Paul not only that they hadn't received it, but that they didn't even know what the Holy Spirit was!

But then, hearing the additional truth regarding Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, etc., Apollos' followers were immediately rebaptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them." So it was only after rebaptism that these people did receive the Holy Spirit which they, though sincere, had never actually qualified to receive before.

If this be your situation, then you should consider this outstanding example and likewise be baptized into "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Indeed, you *must* be so baptized. No matter what your previous religious history has been, don't worry about it. Start afresh. Become a "new man."

This is what Acts 2:38 is all about. Begin to put the power of God's Holy Spirit to work in your life. And begin to look forward to the day when this same Holy Spirit will transform you into a Spirit Being—an eternal member of the God family!

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