



Baptism and Church Membership

So then, those who had received his word were baptized;
and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Acts 2:41



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*To Mac,
Beloved Brother in Christ,
Courageous Fellow Soldier,
Faithful Deacon,
Fellow Pastor.
Soli Deo Gloria*

May 31, 2020.

INTRODUCTION.

This booklet specifically addresses those who:

1. Completed the previous booklet: **The Biblical Plan of Salvation**
2. Trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation in Him.

While the target audience for this study is the new convert to Christ, all Christians could remind themselves of these Biblical truths.

The Outline of this Study is as follows:

- What has God done in saving you
- Baptism.
- Church Membership and its Responsibilities.

WHAT GOD HAS DONE IN SAVING YOU.

Salvation is God's Work in You.

Psa.3:8 says, "Salvation belongs to the LORD." *Jonah 2:9* says, "Salvation is from the LORD." *Isa.45:17* makes an amazing statement that is very applicable to the Christian : "Israel has been saved by the LORD With an eternal salvation; You will not be put to shame or humiliated, To all eternity." Jesus said in *Jn.6:44 & 65*, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.... No one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

The work of salvation is a work of God in you. God began this work of salvation in you in eternity past and God will complete it at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. *Phil.1:6* assures us, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." The verb "I am confident" speaks of an assured and unbreakable certainty. (See this same verb in *Rom.8:38* "convinced", and *2Tim.1:12* "convinced".)

The following points are important to bear in mind as you think through *Phil.1:6* :

- "He" refers to God.
- "Began" is past tense and points to something God began in you, in the past.
- "A good work" is the good work of new creation or salvation in you. Note the emphasis on the word "good".
- "Will perfect" means God will carry this good work towards completion and finally complete it.
- "The day of Christ" is the day of Christ's return.

Rom. 8:28-30 says, “And we know that God works all things together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.”

Eph. 1:3-6 says, “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”

You would note in these two passages God is the subject and the One taking the stated actions. The emphasis is on God and what God has done in saving you. Salvation in Christ is rooted in the eternal purposes and love of God. This saving purpose of God began in eternity with election. In love (cf. *Jer. 31:3*) God chose (*elect*) you in Christ. In love God predestined you to adoption as sons of God and to be conformed to the image of His Son. Those whom God foreknew (*foreloved*), chose and predestined, He effectually (*irresistibly*) called through the preaching of the gospel. Those whom He called, He saved and in saving them He justified them. And those whom He justified He glorified. Note carefully the inexorable movement in *vss. 29-30* : foreloved – predestined – called – justified – glorified.

Two points to note :

1. In *Rom.8:30* Paul's four verbs are in the Greek aorist (*past*) tense. Paul is saying to you that God's work of salvation in you, which began in eternity and will end with glorification, is a completed work. And so, Paul did not say, "He will glorify you." From God's standpoint your glorification has already taken place. For this reason Paul said "He also glorified [you]." Your final glorification in Christ is as certain as morning follows evening.

2. Note these emphases in *Eph.1:3-6*.

- *Firstly*, God saving you is "according to the kind intention (or *good pleasure*) of His will." The focus here is on God's delight and joy in that which He willed – His election and predestination of you in Christ.
- *Secondly*, the Greek verb "freely bestowed" comes from the Greek noun for "grace". It emphasizes the generous nature of the Giver (*God*) and the abundance of God's gift of salvation freely given to the elect.
- *Thirdly*, note *vs.11*. It reaffirms that God works everything "after the counsel of His will." In other words, God's election and predestination of you is based solely on the counsel of His will and not on anything He may have seen in you.
- *Fourthly*, God does everything "to the praise of the glory of His name." "To the praise of His glory" is repeated in *vs.12 & 14*. All the glory belongs to God. All the glory must go to God. God will not share His glory (*Isa.42:8*).

God Must Save the Sinner.

The second point I want you to note is that God must save the sinner. And if God does not save the sinner, the sinner will never be saved. We saw in **“The Biblical Plan of Salvation”** that the sinner is spiritually dead and cannot respond to the things of God. Jesus said in *Jn.5:40* “you are unwilling (lit. “*you do not will*”) to come to Me so that you may have life.” You do not will because you cannot will. You are spiritually dead. Furthermore, your will is held captive by the devil to do his will (*2Tim.2:26*). There is no resistance here to the devil because as the devil’s captive you will one will with the devil’s will. “Held captive” means you are held securely by the devil. For you to be saved God must intervene and rescue you from the devil (cf. *Col.1:13*). God’s intervention and rescue will make you willing to come to Christ to receive eternal life. How did God intervene? What did God do? God intervened with the new birth.

The New Birth.

The sinner is spiritually dead. The sinner cannot respond to the things of God (cf. *1Cor.2:14*). What the dead sinner needs is life, spiritual life. God's first action is to make the dead sinner spiritually alive. This is also called the new birth or regeneration.

In *John chap.3* Nicodemus, a highly religious Pharisee (*vs.1*) and "the teacher of Israel" (*vs.10*) came to Jesus during the night for an undisturbed religious discussion. After Nicodemus' opening statement commending Jesus (*vs.2*), Jesus came right to the point in *vs.3* and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he **cannot** see the kingdom of God." In *vs.5* Jesus added, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he **cannot** enter the kingdom of God." Finally, in *vs.7* Jesus said, "Do not be amazed that I said to you, "You **must** be born again"."

"Truly, truly" is literally "Amen, Amen" and means "I tell you the solemn truth." When a statement was prefaced by the solemn formula "truly, truly", this signalled to the hearer that something very important was about to be said. So pay attention! All three verses are making the same important point : unless you are born again (or *born from above*) you cannot see and cannot enter the kingdom of God. "**Cannot**" points to that which is impossible. "See" also means perceive, understand, experience, participate in. If you cannot "see" the kingdom of God, you certainly cannot "enter" it.

Vs.7 says, "Do not be amazed" (*do not be surprised or astonished*) that I said to you, "You must be born again". The word "must" is a Greek verb that emphasizes divine necessity. This is the unchangeable requirement God has set, "You **must** be born again" in

order to understand and enter the kingdom of God. There are no alternatives here. “Must” means “must”.

The verb “born again” (*born from above*) is a passive verb and NOT a command. To be born again (also called *the new birth*) is not a command you have to obey. To be born again is not something you can do for yourself. To be born again is something that must be done to you. You are the passive recipient. How is a spiritually dead sinner born again or made spiritually alive?

Vs.6 tells us that to be born again is to be born of the Spirit. And vs.8 explains, “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Simply put, like the blowing of the wind, the new birth is a mysterious work of the Holy Spirit in you. By natural birth you were born into this world. By the new birth you are born again into the kingdom of God. You will know the new birth has happened but you will not know how it happened. You will know it has happened because you will begin to experience the change that has taken place in you, a change that has given to you the ability to “see” and “enter” the kingdom of God.

Eph.2:1, 4-5 teach the same truth. *Vs.1* says, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.” *Vss.4-5* say, “**But God**, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).” Note carefully again that the emphasis is on God as the primary Mover. You, the sinner, is the recipient. You were dead in your sins. “**But God**” intervened in your spiritual deadness by His sovereign power and did for you the one thing you needed most. God made you alive because of His rich mercy, His great love, and His grace. Note the astounding contrast,

“you were dead But God made you alive.” All the glory belongs to God.

When you are born again (*made alive*) you will suddenly begin to see your true condition as a sinner before God; you will begin to understand that you justly deserve the wrath of God for all eternity in hell; you will begin to understand that Jesus came to save sinners like you; and you will respond to the gospel invitation to repent for the forgiveness of your sins and to believe in (*put your trust in*) the Lord Jesus alone for salvation in Him.

The Gifts of Repentance & Faith.

The new birth is God’s gracious work in you through His Holy Spirit. The abilities to repent and believe are not your works. They are also God’s gracious gifts to you. You are able to repent and believe because God has graciously granted to you the gifts of repentance and faith. Take note of the verb “grant” in following verses : *Acts 5:31* “He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to **grant** repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” *Acts 11:18*, “When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, “Well then, God has **granted** to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads to life.*” *Phil.1:29*, “For to you it has been **granted** for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” All the glory belongs to God.

A New Creation.

God began His good work of salvation in you in eternity. God’s first step in time in continuing this good work of salvation in you is the new birth. We noted already (*Phil.1:6*) that this good work God began He will most assuredly perfectly complete. This is the reason you

must understand that **the Holy Spirit's work** of the new birth in the sinner is never aborted. The new birth always ends in the sinner's conversion to Christ. Having made you spiritually alive, God now proceeds to make you a new creation in Christ. In Adam you are part of the old fallen creation. When you are saved you become a part of the new creation in Christ. This new creation is not a renovation. This new creation is a new creation. God makes you into a new person in Christ.

2Cor.5:17 says, "Therefore if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a **new** creature (or *creation*); the old things passed away; behold, **new** things have come." Note the double use of the word "new". To be saved is to be "in Christ." Noah and his family were saved because they were "in the ark". Your "ark" is Christ. You are saved because you are "in Christ." To be "in Christ" is to belong to Christ and to be a part of His body, the church. To be "in Christ" means God has brought about a radical change in your life. To be "in Christ" sums up as briefly and as profoundly as possible the inexhaustible significance of your redemption in Christ.

Paul wrote, "Therefore if anyone in Christ, a new creation!" Note carefully Paul did not use any verbs. Paul did not say "*he is* a new creation." Paul said "a new creation!". Paul's purpose was to greatly emphasize the radical result of being in Christ – "a new creation!". The word "new" describes that which is new in quality. It is a newness which will not be impaired by time or use. Note the use of this word "new" in the following verses : *Jn.13:34*; *1Cor.11:25*; *Eph.4:24*; *Rev.21:1, 2, 5*.

"The old things passed away". The verb's tense (Greek aorist) points back to the definite moment that God saved you. It is at that very moment the "old" you that was characterized by your sinful, fallen,

spiritually dead state became past. The “old” represents all that you were in Adam. The “old” represents everything that controlled your pre-Christian existence, your value system, your thinking, your behavior, and the enslavements of your former unregenerate way of life. The Lord Jesus Christ is the great divider of history. And when He saved you, He created a radical divide in the history of your life. He changed you from “old” to “new”.

“Behold! New things have come”. The “new” represents all that you are in Christ. You have become new in Christ and a new quality of life has replaced your old past life. This new quality of life is described for us in God’s word. *Eph.4:24* describes this new quality of life as follows : “which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” In other words, this new person God has made you into is the direct opposite to the old person that you were in Adam.

Paul’s verb, “have come” is perfect tense and tell us (i) you have become new, (ii) you are now new, (iii) you will continue to be new because the newness of God’s new creation is not a newness that in the course of time grows old and outmoded. It is a newness that is everlastingly new. In other words, the new has come to stay. There is no going back to the old. You cannot lose your salvation in Christ. This new good work God has begun in you He will perfectly complete in the day of Christ Jesus. In *Rev.21:5* the Lord said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” The new you have become in Christ will inherit the new the Lord is preparing for us.

“Behold!” is Paul’s unmistakable note of triumph and spontaneous jubilation. Like Paul, you are in surprise and wonderment over the radical change God has made in your life. The “old” things which you once loved and enjoyed, you no longer love nor desire. The “new”

things which you did not love nor desire you now love and desire. Now you desire to please God and obey Him. Now you hunger for the word of God. Now, those whom you saw as hypocrites in the church you now see as your brothers and sisters in Christ and you want to join with them in worshiping God. All the glory belongs to God.

Justification & Adoption.

You are a Christian. God has saved you. In eternity God loved you and chose you in Christ for salvation. In time God made you alive in Christ. The line of divine action is as follows : election, predestination, new birth, calling, repentance, faith, justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification.

Justification is a judicial declaration by God concerning you. Justification means, positively, to declare righteous, and negatively, to declare not guilty. Justification brings you into God's courtroom. God is the Divine Judge. You are a sinner. You are standing before the Divine Judge guilty and condemned. How can God justify you, the sinner? (cf. *Prov.17:15*). God is only able to justify you, the sinner, because of what the Lord Jesus Christ did by His death on the cross. *1Cor.15:3* says "Christ died **for** our sins" (cf. *Rom.5:8*; *8:32*; *Eph.5:2* "for"). The word "for" also means "on behalf of". When Christ died, He died on your behalf as your legal substitute. When Christ died, He took all your sins upon Himself and in those three dark hours on the cross He paid the full legal penalty God's Law demanded for your sins.

When you repented of your sins and believed in Jesus, God forgave you ALL your sins. But God did more than forgive you. When you believed in Jesus a great legal exchange took place. God legally imputed to Christ your sins and God imputed to you Christ's righteousness (*2Cor.5:21*). Having legally imputed to you the righteousness of Christ, God made the judicial declaration concerning you – justified (righteous, not guilty) (*Rom.3:26, 28*; *5:1*; *Gal.2:16*). Justification does not make you into a righteous person. Justification is a Divine legal declaration concerning you that you are righteous. Now in the eyes of God, you are not only forgiven, you are also legally

righteous in Christ (*Phil.3:9*). Justification is once for all and an irrevocable judicial declaration (cf. *Rom.8:31-34*). This means that God's legal declaration that you are righteous in Christ can never be revoked.

You came before God with a bad record that deserved judgment, condemnation, and the eternal fires of hell. God took away that bad record and gave you a new perfectly righteous record in Christ, a record that is the righteousness of Christ imputed to you. This righteousness of Christ imputed to you can never become unrighteousness. This righteousness of Christ imputed to you can never be negatively impacted by sin nor tainted by sin.

Justification means you have no penalty to pay for your sins, past, present or future because Christ paid for all your sins. *Rom.8:1* says, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Condemnation is the opposite to justification. If you are in Christ you are justified. If you are in Christ you cannot be condemned. *Vss.33-34* says, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died...."

Justification involves the forgiveness of ALL our sins (*Col.2:13*). Justification means we now have peace with God (*Rom.5:1*). Before we were saved we were the active enemies of God (*Rom.5:10; 8:7*; enemies & hostile are translations of the same Greek word). Christ by His death removed the enmity with God and established peace with God. Because of justification you are legally and irrevocably righteous. Because of the work of new creation you are permanently new in Christ. These two truths guarantee your final eternal destiny in the presence of Christ. You are now called by God to live out on the daily basis that which you have become in Christ. You are called

to pursue a holy life (*Eph.1:4; 4:22-24; 1Pet.1:14-16*). Holy living is pursuing a life of obedience to the word of God.

Having justified you, God, as it were, then took you into another room in that court, the adoption room. In that room God adopted you as His son (or daughter) into His family. When you came out of that room, God ceased to be your Divine Judge. Now and forever He is your God and your Heavenly Father.

Gal.4:4-6 says, “But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶ Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God” (see *Rom.8:14-17*).

1Jn.1:1-3 says, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

The word “see” or “behold” is a forceful exclamation that calls upon us to contemplate this divinely bestowed love and allow the reality of it to sink down into the depths of our being. “How great” is literally “what manner of” and is an expression of astonishment and admiration. It describes something that is out of this world, that is, never before seen in this world. This Greek word is used in *Matt.8:27* when the astounded disciples said, “**What kind of** a man is this, that

even the winds and the seas obey Him.” John is saying to us, gaze upon and contemplate what manner of love (*what out of this world love*) the Father has bestowed on us.

“Has bestowed” is Greek perfect tense. It tells us this love cannot be purchased or earned. It tells us this love is a permanent gift that will never be withdrawn. What is this glorious, measureless, incomprehensible love that the Father has bestowed on us? “That we would be called the children of God.” (You can picture old John here jumping, clicking his heels, and shouting, HALLELUJAH!). We who were once the children of the devil (*Jn.8:44*) are now called the children of God because of Christ’s saving work on our behalf. “Be called” is passive and the subject is the Father. The Father Himself has taken the action to declare our legal status as children in His family. Finally, we have the emphatic assurance, “and such we are.” Note John’s verb. John did not say, “and such we will be”. John said, “and such we are.” It is for this reason Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father who is in heaven” (*Matt.6:9*). All the glory belongs to God.

Salvation – A Present And Eternal Possession.

I want you to note the verbs in bold print in the following verses from the gospel of John :

Jn.3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever **believes** in Him shall not perish, but **have** eternal life.”

Jn.3:36, “He who **believes** in the Son **has** eternal life.”

Jn.5:24, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who **hears** My word, and **believes** Him who sent Me, **has** eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Jn.6:47, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who **believes has** eternal life.”

Jn.10:27-28a, “My sheep **hear** My voice, and I know them, and they **follow** Me; and I **give** eternal life to them.”

You would note that these verbs are present tenses. You believe (*present tense*) and you have (*present tense*) eternal life. These verses do not say you will have eternal life or you hope to have eternal life. The present tense means the moment you believe you receive eternal life. The moment you believe the Lord God gives you eternal life. Salvation in Christ is the present possession of the believer. It is a salvation you know you have received because you begin to experience it. You begin to experience the radical changes this salvation works in you. Because of this salvation every Christian is able to say, “I was ... but now I am....”

But salvation in Christ (*eternal life*) is also is also an eternal possession. The word “eternal” describes the quality of the life you receive and the quantity of the life you receive. The quality is seen in *Jn.17:3*, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” Eternal life is to come into a “knowing” relationship with God and the Lord Jesus Christ, that

is, entering into a personal loving relationship of communion with God. This “knowing” of God must be rooted in His revealed word and not in your private opinions. “Whom You have sent” refers to the incarnation of Jesus and all that entails as revealed to us in the word of God.

The word “eternal” also has a quantitative aspect to it which we cannot ignore nor remove. Eternal is eternal or everlasting. Eternal life (*salvation*) is a life that is everlasting or never ending. This means that those who are truly saved in Christ cannot lose their salvation. Let me put it this way : the Bible makes it very clear that it is impossible for those who are saved in Christ to lose their salvation.

We have already looked at the following verses : *Phil.1:6; Rom.8:38-39; 2Cor.5:17*. What is the common thread in these verses? The verbs “am confident”, “am convinced”, “have come” are Greek perfect tense. The Greek perfect tense speaks of something done in past time with permanent or lasting effects.

Phil.1:6 “I am confident” (*perfect tense*). The Holy Spirit is saying that we have a permanent confidence, which is, the good work of salvation God began in us He will most assuredly and perfectly complete.

Rom.8:38-39, “For I am convinced (*perfect tense*) that *neither* death, *nor* life, *nor* angels, *nor* principalities, *nor* things present, *nor* things to come, *nor* powers, ³⁹ *nor* height, *nor* depth, *nor* any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” We have **10** negatives (*italicized*) in these verses attached to the verb “will be able”. The Holy Spirit is saying that the Christian has this permanent confidence that it is absolutely

impossible for anything to separate you “from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

2Cor.5:17, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature (or *creation*); the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” “Have come” is perfect tense. (see page 16).

Jn.5:24, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but **has passed** (*perfect tense*) out of death into life.” There is no going back into (spiritual) death once you have passed into eternal life. The move is permanent and irrevocable.

Jn.6:37-40 & 44, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will **certainly not** cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but **raise it up** on the last day. ⁴⁰For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will **raise him up** on the last day..... No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will **raise him up** on the last day.” Note the following :

Firstly, “certainly not” is the double negative “not not”. Secondly, note the emphasis on “the will of the Father”. Jesus must carry out and cannot break His Father’s will. “My Father” emphasizes Jesus’ identity. Thirdly, note the promise “I will raise up” repeated three times.

Jn.10:27-28, (literal translation) “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸and I give eternal life to them, and

they will not not perish into the ages; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.” This is a very powerful statement from Jesus. The verbs “hears, know, follow, give” are present tenses. “Know” also has in it the idea of “love”. Note the double negative : “not not ... into the ages” conveys the meaning “never ever eternally”. “Perish” is the opposite of eternal life. Jesus’ point is that His sheep will never ever perish, that is, never ever lose their eternal life.

I can share a number of other verses with you, but I do hope that I have made and proven the clear Biblical point about the eternal possession of your salvation in Christ.

The question will arise : wouldn’t a teaching like this give license to “believers” to live presumptuously and commit sins? Firstly, *1Jn.1:8-2:1* makes it very clear that the Christian will sin. Now note *Jn.3:36*, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” The assurance we have is, “He who believes in the Son has (*present tense*) eternal life.” The second statement is a serious warning. “Does not obey” speaks of disobedience rooted in unbelief. In other words, if you truly believe in Jesus you will pursue a life of obedience to Jesus. If you are not striving to pursue a life of obedience to Jesus, your lifestyle of disobedience proves that you did not truly believe. The consequence for you is expressed in two ways : (i) you “will not see (eternal) life”; (ii) “the wrath of God abides (*present tense*) on you.”

Baptism.

We come to consider the second major point : baptism. What is baptism? “Baptism is a church’s act of affirming and portraying a believer’s union with Christ by immersing him or her in water, and a believer’s act of publicly committing him or herself to Christ and His people, thereby uniting a believer to the local church and marking off him or her from the world.” (Bobby Jamieson : Understanding Baptism).

After His resurrection and before His ascension, the Lord Jesus gave to His disciples the Great Commission. We read in *Matt.28:18-20*, “And Jesus came up and spoke to them (*the disciples*), saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and [of] the Son and [of] the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The main verb in these verses is “make disciples”. The verb is a command from the Lord. The other verbs : “go (or going) ... baptizing ... teaching” are participles hanging on the main verb. The effect is that all four verbs are commands. A disciple is a Christian. *Acts 11:26* tells us “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” How are disciples made?

The first assumed point is that you preach (or teach) the gospel to those who are not disciples, and call them to repentance of their sins and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who repent and believe and show the evidences (*fruit*) of true conversion are baptized and added to the local church membership. In the church they come under the

teaching of the pastors and are invited to participate in the Lord's Supper.

Matt.3:1-2 tells us John the Baptist came preaching a message of repentance. *Vs.6* tells us that those who repented “were being baptized by [John] in the Jordan river, as they confessed their sins.” Then we are told that the Pharisees and Sadducees also came to John to be baptized by him. And John said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear **fruit** in keeping with repentance” (*vss.7-8*). In other words, show evidence that you have indeed repented. In *Acts 26:20* Paul said he preached the gospel that people “should repent and turn to God, performing **deeds** appropriate to repentance.”

The English verb “baptize” comes from and is a transliteration of the Greek verb **baptizo**. **Baptizo** actually means to immerse or submerge. The verb was used to describe ships that sank or people being drowned. So we can correctly translate the Great Commission as “immersing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan river. Note carefully the description : “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized (*immersed*) by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰Immediately coming up out of the water...” (*Mk.1:9-10*). The word “in” is literally “into” (Gk. **eis**) – “into the Jordan”. **Eis** indicates the element into which Jesus was immersed, the waters of the Jordan river. And then Jesus came up “out of the water.” *Matt.3:16* used the same verb when it said, “After being baptized (*immersed*), Jesus came up immediately from the water.” The picture here is inescapable : Jesus went into the Jordan river. John immersed Him. Jesus came up out of or from the water.

Jesus' command is to make disciples and baptize them. The apostles and early church obeyed Jesus. Consider the following verses :

Acts 2:38, 41, “Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.... So then, those who had received his word were **baptized**; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.”

Acts 8:12, “But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being **baptized**, men and women alike.”

Acts 8:36-39a, (baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch). “ the eunuch said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being **baptized**?”³⁷ And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”³⁸ And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he **baptized** him.³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit snatched Philip away.” Note the clear emphasis : they went down into the water. The eunuch is immersed. They came up out of the water.

Acts 9:18 (baptism of Saul or Paul). “And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was **baptized**.”

Acts 10:47-48, (conversion & baptism of Cornelius & others). “Then Peter answered,⁴⁷ “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be **baptized** who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?”⁴⁸ And he ordered them to be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ.”

Acts 16:14-15 (conversion & baptism of Lydia & others). “A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. ¹⁵And when she and her household had been **baptized**.”

Acts 16:32-33, (conversion & baptism of the Philippian jailer). “And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. ³³And he took them that *very* hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was **baptized**, he and all his *household*.”

Acts 18:8, “Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being **baptized**.”

The evidence is overwhelming and clear : the apostles baptized (*immersed*) people after they heard the gospel, repented of their sins, and professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We firmly believe this is the Biblical pattern. We firmly believe that baptism must be by immersion after conversion to Christ. This is the practice in our church.

The Bible does not teach that baptism saves the sinner. Those who teach that unless you are baptized you are not saved are teaching a false gospel. Such people are no different to the Jews who were teaching, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (*Acts 15:1*). If baptism does not save, why is it important that we baptize those who profess conversion to Christ?

The first answer is that the Lord Jesus Christ commanded us to baptize His disciples. We baptize disciples because we are obeying the Lord Jesus Christ. And disciples submit to baptism because they are obeying the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot call Jesus “Lord” and then refuse to obey Him (cf. *Lk.6:46*). If you claim to be a Christian but refuse to submit to baptism, that will raise a serious question about your claim (see above *Jn.3:36*; p.26).

Secondly, baptism is the public testimony that you have repented of your sins, received the forgiveness of your sins, and have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Baptism is where faith goes public. Baptism is how you nail your colors to the mast as a disciple of Jesus.

Thirdly, baptism signifies a change in allegiance. D. A. Carson commented that *into the name* “strongly suggests a coming-into-relationship-with or a coming-under-the lordship-of.... It is a sign both of entrance into the Messiah’s community and of pledged submission to His Lordship.”

Fourthly, baptism is the sign of our union with Christ (*Rom.6:3-5*; *Gal.3:27*; *Col.2:12*). Paul’s point in Romans is that in conversion to Christ we have died to sin. The relationship we had with sin in which sin was our master has ended. And baptism is the picture of this. Your baptism is more than simply the act of immersing you in water. In that baptism we are proclaiming that we are baptized into Christ Jesus. In that baptism we are saying that we are united to Christ in His death. This is what Paul meant when he said in *Gal.2:20*, “I am crucified with Christ.”

Crucifixion is execution. In His crucifixion Christ died *for* our sins. In our crucifixion with Christ we died *to* sin. We died to sin’s lordship

and rule over us. The verb **“I am crucified”** (perfect tense) speaks of a once-for-all, permanent, unrepeatable crucifixion. Your crucifixion and death to sin cannot be repeated, overturned or overthrown. Sin cannot regain mastery in your life. In other words, as we have seen, if you are truly saved you cannot lose your salvation in Christ.

Baptism means we died with Christ. Baptism means we were buried with Christ. Baptism unites us with Christ’s burial. But in baptism we are not kept under the water. We are raised from the water. The raising in baptism unites us to Christ’s resurrection. Baptism says our old way of life was buried, that is, it has passed away completely and we are raised to “walk in newness of life” (cf. *Rom.6:4*). We are raised to conduct ourselves in a new quality of life. Baptism says we have been freed from our slavery to sin and have now become slaves of righteousness (cf. *Rom.6:17-18*).

Commenting on *Gal.3:27*, the theologian, Timothy George, wrote, “Paul described all that baptism was given to represent in one of the most striking metaphors found anywhere in the New Testament, that of “putting on” Christ.” And Colin Kruse wrote that by the expression “put on Christ”, “Paul’s [means] that those who have been baptized have taken upon themselves the obligation to live like Christ.”

Church Membership.

Baptism is also the door of entrance into membership in the local church. The New Testament speaks of the church in two distinct ways : the universal church and the local church.

The universal church is the body of all true believers everywhere. The universal church does not consist of only believers who are alive. The universal consists of all believers, those who are alive and those who have already died. The universal church begins with Abel, the first believer to die. When Jesus made the promise in *Matt.16:18*, “I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it”, He was speaking of the universal church. The Lord Jesus is the Head of the church (*Eph.5:23*). The Lord Jesus is the Chief Shepherd of the church (*1Pet.5:4*; cf. *Jn.10:11, 14, 16*, note the emphasis : “one flock with one shepherd”).

There is coming a day when all believers who ever lived from every nation under heaven will be gathered together as a single crowd before the throne of God to worship. *Rev.7:9-10* says, “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands; ¹⁰ and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

Christ’s universal church finds its visible expression through the many of Christ’s local churches scattered around the world. The clear emphasis in the N. T. is on the local church. And so we read about churches in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Antioch, Galatia, Ephesus,

Corinth, etc. When Paul and Barnabas went out on their first missionary journey, they were sent out by the church in Antioch. *Acts 13:1-3* says, “Now there were at Antioch, **in the church that was there**, prophets and teachers:....² While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”³ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”

Paul and Barnabas then went through a series of cities preaching the gospel and establishing churches. *Acts 14:23* says they appointed elders in “every church”. Every church had their own elders (*pastors*). And *vss.26-27* tell us that, having completed their work, “they sailed to Antioch ... and gathered the church together.” They returned to their home church in Antioch to give their report.

The N.T. epistles were written to specific local churches with their specific memberships. In *Rom.16:1* Paul wrote to the church in Rome about Pheobe who was a member of the church that was in Cenchrea. In *Col.4:12* Paul wrote to the Colossians and said, “Epaphras, who is one of your number....” In other words, Epaphras is identified as a member of the Colossian church. In *Phil.2:25* Epaphroditus is identified as a member of the Philippian church. In *Rev.2:13* the Lord Jesus identified Antipas as a member of the church at Pergamum.

An ideal N.T. church consists of elders (*pastors*), deacons, and the members (*saints*) (*Phil.1:1*). The newly established churches in *Acts 14* had memberships and elders. The moment you are saved in Christ you become a member of Christ’s universal church. Christ’s makes you a member of His universal church through the baptism in the Holy

Spirit. *1Cor.12:13* says, “ For by (or *in*) one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free....” “We were baptized” is a passive verb. The subject is not the Holy Spirit. *Matt.3:11* shows us the subject is “Jesus” – “He will baptize you with (*in*) the Holy Spirit.”

But becoming a member of Christ’s universal church does not automatically make you a member of any of Christ’s local churches. You are required to become a member of a local church. This is done through baptism. The clear precedent is seen in *Acts 2:41*, “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.” There are three points to note here. Firstly, the people “received his word”, that is, they received and responded to Peter’s gospel message about Christ and his call to repent for the forgiveness of sins by believing in Jesus.

Secondly, they were baptized (*immersed*). Thirdly, “they were added.” Added to what? They were added to the church that was already in existence in Jerusalem. The apostles did not baptize people just for the sake of baptizing them. They baptized converts and joined them to the locally established church. And as *vss.42-47* show, they became actively involved in the church.

The word “church” means a called out assembly. It is God who has called us by His Holy Spirit. There are other imageries that are used to describe the church. The church is a flock of sheep (*Jn.10:16*). The church is a body like the human body (see *1Cor.12*). The church is a building (*Eph.2:21*) and the members are living stones in that

building (*1Pet.2:5*). The church is God's household (*Eph.2:19*). The church is God's temple (or sanctuary) (*1Cor.3:16-17; 2Cor.6:16*).

The question I want to answer now is : **What does church membership involve?** *Acts 2:42, 46-47* give us a basic outline. Luke wrote, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.... Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."

1). "They were continually devoting themselves" points to their faithful attendance to the services of the gathered church. This was the early beginning and unusual times. They were gathering under the leadership and authority of the apostles. As the churches developed and became settled, they gathered under the leadership and authority of their pastors. This early apostolic church was meeting on a daily basis. The settled church would meet on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week (cf. *Acts 20:7; 1Cor.16:1-2*).

Heb.10:25 warns, "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." This warning positively calls upon the Christian to faithfully attend the assembling of his **own** local church. Note the word "own". It means the local church in which you are a member. Habitual culpable absence leads to drifting and neglect

(*Heb.2:1, 3*); serious reversals in spiritual growth (*Heb.5:11-14*); and even apostasy (*Heb.10:26-31*).

2). The second point we must note here is that they were gathering to worship God (“praising God” – *vs.47*). The worship of God is the highest, greatest, and most important activity of the church. A study of the Bible is a study into the worship of God. Jesus said, “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (*Jn.4:24*). The worship of God must be both sincere and rooted in truth as revealed by God. Worship must not be based upon our personal opinions, likes and dislikes. We are not being worshiped. God is being worshiped. We are the worshipers and we must worship God in keeping with what pleases God. God has revealed to us in His word the worship that pleases Him.

3). These church members were “devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.” Why is it vitally important to devote yourself to the teaching (and study) of God’s word? God’s word is the spiritual food we need to grow in Christ (*Matt.4:4; 1Pet.2:2; 2Pet.3:18; Heb.5:11-14; 1Cor.3:2*). God’s word is the truth and wisdom we need to live in this fallen world (*Psa.1:1-3; 119:105; Prov.6:23; Jn.17:17*). *Col.3:16* says, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another” We must become rich in our knowledge of God’s word. If we do not, we would not be able to wisely admonish (*exhort, encourage, correct*) one another.

4). “The breaking of bread” refers to the Lord’s Supper (*Communion; the Lord’s Table*). Jesus commanded us to celebrate the Lord’s

Supper (*1Cor.11;23ff; Lk.22:19-20*). This is a command that must be obeyed by every disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. This command to celebrate the Lord's Supper (*1Cor.11:20*) can only be obeyed within the context of the church gathered for worship on the Lord's Day (*Sunday*) (*Rev.1:10*). The Greek word for "Lord" in "the Lord's Supper" and "the Lord's Day" is **kuriakos**. These are the only instances in the N.T. in which **kuriakos** is used. The Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper are the peculiar possessions of the Lord Jesus which He has given to us as gracious gifts.

The Lord's Supper is not and must not be treated as a superstitious practice. The Lord's Supper does NOT save the sinner. The celebration of the Lord's Supper is a command the church obeys. The Lord's Supper is strictly reserved for those who are already saved in Christ, baptized by immersion after conversion, and a member of the local church. And as noted already, the Lord's Supper must be celebrated on the Lord's day within the context of the local church gathered for worship under the leadership of the pastors. The Lord's Supper must remind us of the infinitely great price the Lord Jesus paid for our sins. It is a remembrance celebration. It is a thanksgiving celebration. It is a celebration of peculiar worship to Christ. It is a celebration that reminds us that we are called live in newness of life, that is, we are called to pursue a holy life to the glory of God.

5). "The prayers" refer to the corporate prayer meetings of the gathered church. This is a very important part of the church's life together. The church's corporate prayer meetings must go hand in hand with your private devotion to prayer. We are commanded to pray without ceasing (*1Thess.5:17; cf. Col.4:2; Lk18:1; Phil.4:6-7*). Prayer must characterize our lives. We must pray at all times about

everything. We must get into Nehemiah's habit of whispering short prayers to God (*Neh.2:4b; 4:4, 9; 6:14*). But our private prayers must not become a substitute for the corporate prayer meetings of the church (cf. *Acts 12:5*).

6). The church was devoted to fellowship. Fellowship is being committed to one another because of Christ. We are members of the same family, the family of God. The bonds that unite us are far greater than the bonds that unite physical families. Our enjoyment of each other's company must go beyond mere socializing. Consider with me the following sampling of verses :

- ❖ Love one another (*Jn.13:34; 15:17; Rom.12:10*).
- ❖ Care for one another (*1Cor.12:25*).
- ❖ Build up and encourage one another (*Rom.14:19; 1Thess.5:11*).
- ❖ Accept one another (*Rom.15:7*).
- ❖ Be of the same mind with one another (*Rom.12:16; 15:5*).
- ❖ Serve one another (*Gal.5:13*).
- ❖ Be patient and tolerant with one another (*Eph.4:2*).
- ❖ Be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another (*Eph.4:32*).
- ❖ Pray for one another (*Jas.5:16*).

It is easy to love those who love us. The Biblical challenge we face is to love all the children of God in our local church assembly. First and foremost, we must begin with them before expanding our horizons (cf. *Gal.6:10*).

7). We must willingly and humbly submit ourselves to the discipline of the church. The word “discipline” means to teach. It is teaching with a view to correcting and bringing about spiritual and moral change and growth in your life. The church member must commit himself, unless providentially hindered, to be present during the preaching and teaching of God’s word by the pastors and other qualified teachers. Pastors are commanded to “preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2*Tim.4:2*; cf. *Tit.1:9*). *1Thess.5:14* says, “We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.” *Gal.6:1* says, “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.” *Prov.27:6* says, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” *Psa.141:5* says, “Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; It is oil upon the head; Do not let my head refuse it.”

8). Members of the local church must commit themselves to financially supporting the ministries of the church. Salvation is God’s gracious, free, eternal gift to us. But our salvation cost God His Son. And our salvation cost the Lord Jesus Christ His life. *2Cor.8:9* says, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.” The ministries and the maintenance of the church cost money. God requires of us to financially support the church so that it can be maintained, its ministries can continue effectively and its growth can continue. This is not the context for doing an extensive study of the subject of “giving” from the Bible. I would give you in outline form some of the basic truths for your consideration. The attached verses are not an exhaustive list.

- a. Everything belongs to God. *Exod.19:5; Deut.10:14; 1Chron.29:16; Neh.9:6; Psa.24:1; 1Cor.25-26.*
- b. The Lord has given to us. *Jn.3:37; Dan.4:17; 1Chron.29:14, 16; 1Cor.4:7.* Illustrations : *Gen.24:35; 26:12-14; 30:43.*
- c. Failing to acknowledge points 1 & 2 (*Deut.8:11-18*). Failure results in : forgetting God's goodness; ingratitude; pride; (cf. David's humility *1Chron.29:10-16*); the idolatry of covetousness (cf. *Eph.5:5*).
- d. God redeemed Israel from Egyptian slavery, settled the Israelites in Canaan, set apart the Levitical tribe as priests to lead the worship of God in Israel. God commanded the Israelites to tithe to support the Levites. "Tithe" means ten percent. *Josh.13:33; Lev.27:30; Deut.12:19; 14:27; Num.18:6-7, 20-28; Deut.18:1-5.* Rich or poor, no Israelite was exempted from tithing to support the Levites.
- e. The context of O.T. tithing was worship. *Num.18:24, 26, 28; Deut.12:5-7, 11-12; 14:23 ; 26:10-11.* The Lord warned three times : "none shall appear before Me empty-handed" (*Exod.23:15; 34:20; Deut.16:16*).
- f. Giving our tithes and offerings to the Lord is worshiping the Lord. It is not something we simply do as an extra activity along with our worship. Note the worship language in *Phil.4:18*, "But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, **a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.**" This language is drawn from O.T, worship (cf. *Exod.29:18, 25*).
- g. The history of Israel is a history of covenant unfaithfulness to God. Every time the Israelites became unfaithful, they would

- cease to tithe and support the Levites. But whenever there was a restoration to faithfulness, tithing would immediately be restored. We find such examples in the reign of King Hezekiah (*2Chron.31:4-12, 20-21*); King Josiah (*2Chron.35:2-3*) restored the priesthood and the assumption is that he restored the tithe; Nehemiah (*Neh.10:28-39; 12:44; 13:9-14*). Note the warning in *Mal.3:5-15*.
- h. Pastors must be supported because like the Levites they devote their lives to the work of the ministry. *1Cor.9:8-14; Gal.6:6-8; 1Tim.5:17-18; Phil.4:10-20* (the example of the Philippian church supporting Paul).
 - i. How are pastors to be supported? God set the pattern for us in the support of the Levites : tithes & offerings. Rich or poor, no Christian is exempted from faithful systematic giving. The example of the Macedonians in *2Cor.8:1-5* shows us that poverty is not an excuse for not giving.
 - j. Abraham & Jacob paid tithes before the Mosaic Law within a context of worship (*Gen.14:17-24; 28:10-22*). The subject of tithing is bracketed by what Abraham did (*Gen.14:17-24; Heb.7:4-10*). We are the children of Abraham (*Gal.3:7, 28-29*). We are the Israel of God (*Gal.6:16; Phil.3:3*). Jesus said in *Jn.8:39*, “If you are Abraham’s children, do the works of Abraham.”
 - k. Giving (faithful tithing) is a barometer of the spiritual state of your heart. Is your heart generous? (*2Cor.9:6-7; 1Chron.29:14; Prov.3:9-10; 11:25; 22:9; Deut.26:10; 1Tim.6:18*). Or is your heart selfish, covetous, and idolatrous. (*Eph.5:5* warns that a covetous man is an idolater). The sin of selfishness is marked by ingratitude, pride and forgetting the goodness of God who has blessed you with what you have.

9). Members of a local church must commit themselves to the work of evangelism and missions. The work of evangelism and missions began in eternity with God sending His Son into this world. There are several verses in the gospel of John that tell us the Father sent Jesus (e.g. *Jn.5:37; 6:44, 57; 12:49; 14:24*). Jesus came preaching the gospel (*Mk.1:14-15*). After His death and resurrection, Jesus said to His disciples, “as the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (*Jn.20:21*).

Before his ascension, Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission in *Matt.28:18-20*. We looked at this passage already. (cf. p.27). The command given to the apostles, who were the representatives of the church, were given to all of Jesus’ disciples for all time. We are to be involved in the work of preaching the gospel and making disciples until Jesus returns. It is of interest to note that the gospel of Matthew began with the announcement of salvation in Christ (*Matt.1:21*) and Christ is “Immanuel” – God with us. And Matthew closes with the command to spread the message of salvation in Christ with the promise, “I am with you” – God with us.

In *Lk.24:46-48* Jesus said to His disciples, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be preached in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.” In *Acts 1:8* Jesus said to His disciples, “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

In *Rom.1:16* Paul said, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” *1Cor.1:18, 21*, “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.... For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe.”

The apostle Peter wrote in *1Pet.3:15*, “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” “Always being ready” – as a Christian you must never be unprepared nor unwilling to respond to those who question you. “Make a defense” calls for a systematic rational answer. “The hope” is the hope of Christ as set forth in the gospel that is seen in your life.

There is a variety of ways in which we can do the work of evangelism. But the two primary ways, which go hand in hand, are preaching and prayer. God chose preaching to be the primary method for the proclamation of the gospel (*1Cor.1:21; 2Tim.4:2*). We must never abandon God’s primary choice of preaching. We must never remove preaching from its primary position.

Secondly, we must pray. In *1Thess.5:25* Paul gave this command, “Brethren, (*continually*) pray for us.” In *2Thess.3:1* Paul wrote, “brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as *it did* also with you.” Paul wrote in *Col.4:2-4*,

“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of thanksgiving*; ³praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; ⁴that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.”

In *Eph.6:19* Paul wrote, “pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

The Lord Jesus promised us fruit. Jesus said in *Jn.15:16*, “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.” In our praying, let us boldly ask for the fruit of conversions. Jesus said in *Matt.7:7*, “Ask, and it will be given to you.” So let us ask.

The work of missions is generally conceived of as doing the gospel ministry in another country, seeking conversions, making disciples, and establishing churches. If God has called you to be a missionary, you should obey. But beyond that we should all be involved in praying for the work of missions and financially supporting the work of missions.

We have already seen the Philippian church’s support of Paul in *Phil.4:10-20*. Now consider the following verses from the apostles Paul & John :

Rom.15:22-24, “ For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you; ²³but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you ²⁴whenever I go to Spain—for I hope to see you in passing, and to **be helped** on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while.”

1Cor.16:5-6, 10-11, “But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; ⁶and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that **you may send** me on my way wherever I may go.... Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord’s work, as I also am. ¹¹So let no one despise him. But **send** him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren.”

2Cor.1:15-16, “In this confidence I intended at first to come to you, so that you might twice receive a blessing; ¹⁶that is, to pass your way into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you **to be helped** on my journey to Judea.”

Tit.3:13, “Diligently **help** Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way so that nothing is lacking for them.”

3Jn.1:5-8, “Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially *when they are* strangers; ⁶and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well **to send** them on their way in a manner worthy of God. ⁷For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth.”

Take note of the verbs “help” and “send” in bold print. They are translations of the same Greek verb and speak of helping a person with money, food, clothing, transport, and even companions for travel. This is Paul’s & John’s missionary support verb. As a Christian you

must pray that God gives you a heart for missions and then, in answer to that prayer, you must become involved in praying for and financially supporting missions.

10). Members of a local church must give prayerful consideration to getting involved in the ministries of the church. We noted earlier that one of the imageries of the church is the human body. The human body consists of a variety of organs. If the body is to function properly all the organs in the body must work properly and carry out the functions they were designed to carry out.

The apostle Paul wrote in *1Cor.12:12, 18, 27*, “¹²For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.... ¹⁸But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, **just as He desired**.... ²⁷Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.” Then Paul said in *vs.4-11* that God gave gifts to every member of the church to function in the church. But note carefully what Paul said in *vs.7*, “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good**”, and then in *vs.11*, “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually **just as He wills**.”

And *1Pet.4:10-11* says, “As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

A few points must be noted for emphasis :

- Christ's body has many members.
- God has put you in this church.
- God has gifted you to serve in the church in keeping with His will.
- Your gift is for the common good of the church.
- Your gift is for serving in the church to the glory of God.

Conclusion.

The Christian life is not a sprint race. The Christian life is a long-distance race. *Heb.12:1-3* says, “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

The first fact we must note is that this Christian race can be run successfully. The “cloud of witnesses” speaks of those who have successfully completed the race. Just before he died, Paul said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course (race), I have kept the faith” (*2Tim.4:7*). This is not an easy race to run. It is a race that has many trials, sufferings, persecution, discouragements, struggles, etc. It is a race that has a lot of valleys, some quite dark.

Jesus said, “ If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me” (*Jn.15:18-21*). Paul wrote, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (*2Tim.3:12*).

As a Christian you are in a war with sin, the world, the flesh, and the devil (*Rom.7:14-25; 1Jn.2:15-17; 2Cor.11:14; 1Pet.8-9*). When Christ called and saved you, He called you to be His disciple. And Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me (that is, to be My disciple), let him **deny** himself, and **take up** his cross daily and let him **follow** Me” (*Lk.9:23*.) The verbs in bold print are commands. Jesus added in *Lk.14:27*, “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me **cannot** be My disciple.” Note the verb “cannot”. It points to that which is impossible. The cross was an instrument of execution. A man carrying a cross was a man going out to be executed. The ultimate for the disciple of Christ is this : you must be prepared to die for Christ just as He died for you.

It is for these reasons the writer to be Hebrews said to us, “let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” “Endurance” is patient endurance – one step at a time, one day at a time you plod along. Sin will trip you up and you will fall. But (literal) “seven times a righteous man falls, and rises again” (*Prov.24:16a*). “Seven times” is emphatic and pictures the totality of a cycle. When the cycle is done, the righteous man rises and starts all over again. *Micah 7:8* says, “Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall I will rise; Though I dwell in darkness, the LORD is a light for me.” Never forget your golden promise in *1Jn.1:9*.

The Christian life is also a life of gracious victories, joy, hope, etc. from the Lord. *Neh.8:10* says, “the joy of the LORD is your strength.” The fruit of the Spirit is joy (*Gal.5:22*). Peter spoke about rejoicing “with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (*1Pet.1:8*). Paul was in prison when he wrote the letter to the Philippians. And in this letter

he spoke of joy and commanded the Philippian believers, “rejoice in the Lord” (*Phil.2:18; 3:1; 4:4*).

Rom.5:5 says God has given us a hope that “does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Does not disappoint” means “will never put to shame”. “Poured out” (perfect passive tense) speaks of your hearts being abundantly and permanently flooded to overflowing with the love of God through the Holy Spirit. The subject of the passive verb is God. “Through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” reminds us that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (cf. *Rom.8:9; 1Cor.3:16; 6:19; 2Tim.1:14*). The hope God has given to us will never put us to shame. Why? God has flooded our hearts with His love. God has given us His Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

Note Paul’s prayer in *Rom.15:13*, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” *Tit.2:13* describes the second coming of Christ as “the blessed hope”.

I close by simply quoting to you *Rom.8:35-39*,

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

³⁶ Just as it is written,

“FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;

WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.”

³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,
³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

You are invited to attend

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Pastor Amresh Semurath (1950 -). The Lord saved Pastor Semurath at age 12. He entered into full-time ministry in January 1972. He has been the pastor of The Reformed Evangelical Church since May 1st, 1977. He was married to Patricia (deceased). God blessed them with two sons. He studied theology at Jamaica Bible College, Mandeville, Jamaica.