

Now that I'm a Christian, where do I go from here?

I

The New Birth

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE "BORN AGAIN"

When a hopeless, sinner realizes his lost condition and repents of his sins, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal savior and his only hope of laying claim to eternal life, a very marvelous thing happens. By the mercies of God, he is forgiven of all his sins, his guilt is removed, and his nature is changed from that of a sin-loving, rebellious sinner to that of a Christ-loving obedient child of God. This miraculous experience is called the "Born Again Experience" or the "New Birth."

Jesus declared this experience to be absolutely essential to salvation when He told Nicodemus: "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You **must** be born again.' (John 3:7).

Simply joining a church, submitting to water baptism, or reforming is not enough. There must be a change in the heart of the person. When he is born again, his sin is removed and replaced by the Spirit of God. About 587 years B.C., the Prophet Ezekiel prophesied about this experience, saying: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezekiel 36:26, 27)

The change produced in the born again believer is so complete that the Apostle Paul, in a letter to the Corinthian church said: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2 Cor, 5: 17), Paul was actually teaching that the believer has experienced a supernatural change that has literally "re-created" him spiritually and caused him to become a completely "new" man. All his sins are forgiven and no record is kept in heaven concerning his ungodly past. He then stands justified the sight of God exactly the same as if he had never sinned at all.

HOW THE NEW BIRTH MANIFESTS ITSELF

The great change in the life of the born again believer will manifest itself by the very apparent difference in his way of thinking. He will no longer think like the world, but will think like a Christian. His mind will certainly be affected by the new birth, as is taught in the book of Romans: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2).

There will be a great difference in the things that he loves, in accordance with the command of the Apostle John: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world." (1 John 2:15- 16), He will find instead, that he has acquired a deep affection for other Christians, and by this he knows that he has been born into the family of God, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. ... (1 John 3:14).

The most noticeable thing about the new-born Christian is the drastic change in his behavior. He will no longer pursue a life of sin, for the Bible teaches: "Whoever has been born of God does not [continue to] sin, ... and he cannot [continue to] sin, because he has been born of God." (1 John 3:9). Quite the contrary, he will begin to follow after righteousness. " ... you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him." (1 John 2:29). He will strive to always denounce wickedness and to do that which is right, so that he may honestly say as Jesus said: " ... I always do those things that please Him." (John 8:29).

II

Water Baptism

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized... " (Acts 2:38)

Water Baptism is an important ordinance of the church. Jesus Himself was baptized in water. St. Mark tells us: "It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan." (Mark 1:9). Jesus commanded that all converts be baptized. Just before He ascended back into heaven, he commanded his disciples: "Go 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," (Matt. 28:19)

Three questions are continually asked concerning baptism water. When these questions are answered satisfactorily the doctrine of water baptism is easily understood.

IS WATER BAPTISM ESSENTIAL?

A simple yes or no to this question would never satisfy the sincere new convert, so we will break our answer into two parts and hope to provide an adequate answer.

First: We should say that baptism in water is not essential to the initial conversion of the sinner. Indeed, water baptism has nothing at all to do with the new birth, Water will not wash away sins, for: " ... the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7).

John the Baptist preached that men must first repent before being baptized. He refused to baptize those who had not repented. Matthew's record says: "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'

. . . Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,'" (Matt. 3:1-2, 5-8). John the Baptist taught (and rightly so) that water baptism is only for those who repent and sinners are not to be considered worthy candidates. So the, since water baptism must come after conversion, obviously it cannot be essential to conversion.

Second: Water baptism was commanded by Jesus (Matt. 28:19) and by the Apostle Peter (Acts 2:38; 10:48). It was practiced by Jesus and his disciples (John 4:1-2), by Philip (Acts 9:18), by Paul and Silas (Acts 16:33) and others. This ordinance was considered to be of great importance by the apostles and the early church and was carefully and faithfully obeyed, Since baptism in water is indeed a New Testament commandment for every Christian, submission to water baptism is simply an act of "obedience." On the other hand, refusal to submit to water baptism constitutes "disobedience." Any type of disobedience to God is sin and if not corrected will ultimately result in the loss of fellowship with God.

We can only conclude then, that although water baptism is not essential to the initial conversion of the sinner, it is indeed an essential act of "obedience" after conversion in order to preserve an "obedient" status and remain in fellowship with God.

WHAT IS THE PROPER METHOD?

The word "baptize" in the New Testament is from the Greek root "bapto" which means: "to dip; dip under; sink; immerse; plunge; and to cover wholly with liquid." With this understanding it is easy to see that water baptism must be by immersion, and that sprinkling is not at all acceptable. The Bible does not record even one instance where baptism was accomplished by sprinkling rather than by immersion. Matthew teaches that Jesus was baptized by immersion, "When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; ..." (Matt. 3:16). How could He come up out of the water if He had not been down into the water? If He were only sprinkled, this scripture would not make sense. In the book of The Acts of the Apostles, it is recorded that: "... both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him." (Acts 8:38). This would hardly have been necessary if only a cup of water was needed for sprinkling.

Jesus explained the correct mode for water baptism by saying: "Go 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," (Matt. 28:19).

WHAT IS THE SYMBOLISM?

Water baptism symbolizes the believer's fellowship with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. Paul explains it quite well by saying: "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection," (Rom. 6:4-5).

It is like an announcement to the public that the believer has buried his ungodly past and has now risen to a new life of obedient serving.

III

Sanctification

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Thess. 5:23)

The word "sanctify" literally means: to set apart from a profane unto a Godly purpose. In sanctification, man is "set apart" from the dominion of sin by the purifying of his spirit and by his consecration to a life of fellowship and harmony with God.

THE NEED FOR SANCTIFICATION

Man is by nature a sinful creature. Until he becomes a Christian and receives a new nature, he lives in sin as a matter of habit. He cannot stop sinning. The malignant roots of sin are firmly implanted deeply within his heart. That is why Jesus said: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness." (Mark 7:21-22). Man sins because he must. It is in his heart to do so. Jeremiah recognized this and said: "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked . . ." (Jer.17:9). Hence the need for sanctification,

THE ADAMIC (OR HUMAN) NATURE

This "tendency" to sin is not a trait that must be developed. It is a part of the heritage of the human race. This fact is often manifested in the behavior of small children who covet and steal the toys of playmates and when caught, point the blame to brother or sister. They were not taught to covet, steal, or to lie. In fact good parents make every effort to teach their children not to do these things. It is simply the natural thing to do. The truth is, every man inherits the "tendency" or "compulsion" to sin from his father who inherited it from his father and so on, all the way back to Adam.

When God placed Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, He commanded them saying: "... Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Gen. 2:16-17). The story of man's failure began when Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation and ate of the forbidden fruit. By yielding themselves to sin they became the servants of sin as is taught by the Apostle Paul: " Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey ... " (Romans 6:16) Through the forbidden fruit the element of death entered the lives of Adam and Eve. They began to age immediately and in the process of time their bodies would surely return to the dust from where it came.

Their spiritual death (separation from God), however, came immediately and was transmitted to all their progeny in all generations. Paul said: "... Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned..."(Romans 5:12). No wonder St. John was moved to say: "... the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one." (1 John 5:19)

For man to be brought back into loving fellowship and harmony with God, the Adamic nature must be subdued. His heart must be purified and his mind renewed, freeing from the bondage of sin. Paul expressed it quite well to the Roman church saying: "... knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died [whose Adamic nature is crucified] has been freed from sin." (Romans 6:6-7). When man is set free from his ungodly nature he is then eligible to serve God: "And having been set free from sin, you became slaves [servants] of righteousness." (Romans 6:18)

WHEN SANCTIFICATION BEGINS

When a person experiences the new birth, sanctification has already begun: "... because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth," (2 Thess. 2:13). Obviously, if salvation is obtained through sanctification, a person does not have salvation until he is first sanctified, at least to a degree. We taught in chapter one, that a man receives a new nature at the time of the new birth and is spiritually re-created and made a "new man." So then, sanctification is a part of the new birth.

SANCTIFICATION IS PROGRESSIVE

Sanctification is not by any means completed at the time of the new birth. Paul was addressing a group of sanctified Christians in Thessalonica when he said: " Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely;... " (2 Thess. 5:23), indicating that they were not yet completely or sanctified. Peter adds an "amen" by saying: "... but 'grow' in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... " (2 Peter 3:18). The Apostle Paul recognized his own need for a more complete sanctification, saying: " Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil 3:12-14).

The experience of sanctification in the believer is developed and enriched as his dedication to God deepens. Thus, sanctification is a progressive work that can be, and should be cultivated.

COMPLETE SANCTIFICATION

Complete sanctification [purification and separation] can never be accomplished in this life. Even if a believer attained such a closeness to God that he lived perpetually in a state of absolute sinlessness, he would yet inhabit a body of dust, under sentence of death:

" ... And as it is appointed for men to die once... " (Hebrews 9:27). Just as the spirit was made alive to begin the process of sanctification, even so, the body shall be made alive at the time of the resurrection to **complete** it.

"... the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be **raised incorruptible**, and we shall be changed." (1 Cor. 15:52). When Jesus appears to call forth the dead in Christ, the believer will experience the last step in his spiritual metamorphosis. His body will be made new and will be like the body of our Lord Jesus Christ: " For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will **transform our lowly body** that it may be conformed to His glorious body.... " (Phil. 3:20-21). The battles and trials of earth will be past and his soul and spirit will be completely conformed to the mind and will of God. He will become a glorified man, as was promised: " ... it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him.... " (1 John 3:2).

Thus, the believer attains unto entire and absolute separation from the world, and reaches purification to the fullest extent. His sanctification being now made complete, the prayer of the Apostle Paul in his behalf is finally answered: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess. 5:23).

IV

Trials And Temptations

" ... When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job 23:10)

THE TEST OF FAITH

Every Christian's faith in God will be tested from time to time by temptation. The new Christian is often quite shaken at his first encounter with temptation. Since his new birth he has felt nothing but peace and joy in the Lord. He is probably quite convinced that no kind of sin can ever attract him again. Then suddenly, he finds himself tempted to commit sin. It is not uncommon for a new Christian to become discouraged and doubt the validity of his experience. He may even wonder if he was ever really saved at all.

He should then read the words of the Apostle Peter who wrote: " Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you" (1 Pet 4:12). Peter explains that trials are sometimes needed, and are consequently, quite precious. In chapter one he says: "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ," (1 Pet 1:6-7). Trials, when conquered, serve as stepping stones to a deeper, fuller faith in God and the victorious Christian will be rewarded for his faithfulness. "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." (James 1:12).

THE SOURCE OF TEMPTATION

It is important for the new Christian to know that God is not the source of temptation, as Satan would have him believe. If this was true there would be no source of help or comfort when the testing becomes severe. What kind of God would smite a man with one hand while holding him up with the other, all the while assuring him with words of comfort? A believer would soon learn to distrust God rather than to trust Him. The Bible is quite plain concerning this subject. St. James declares: " Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." (James 1:13-14). Every believer has certain areas of weakness in his Christian experience. Certain sins will seem harder to resist than others. Satan, knowing these weaknesses, will confront the believer with abundant opportunities to commit sin in these areas. Thus he suffers temptation and his faith is tried.

God is also aware of these weaknesses and " ... God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). He will stay the hand of Satan before the trial becomes too severe if the tempted one will but cling to his faith, resisting with all his might.

It should be clearly understood that temptation itself is not sin. The Lord Jesus was tempted, but never committed sin. By enduring temptation he conquered it and is therefore able to strengthen others. The writer of Hebrews declares: "For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid [sustain; uphold; bolster; rescue]those who are tempted." (Heb.2:18). Christ fully understands the terrors of temptation and will respond to any appeal for help. "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:15-16).

OUR ADVOCATE WITH THE FATHER

Although every necessary provision has been made so that the Christian need not, and should not, fail, he will nevertheless, sometimes submit to temptation and commit sin. He will then discover that joy and peace have vanished away, leaving a dreadful feeling of guilt and shame.

However, our God who understands the nature of men, has made provision even for Christians who fail. The guilty believer should come quickly to God in humble repentance. Then, Jesus Christ Himself will plead his cause before the Father. He will be promptly forgiven and restored to full fellowship with God. Joy and peace will soon return, giving assurance that all is well. St. John wrote: "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." (1 John 2:1-2). Also, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

V

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit

"... Receive the Holy Spirit." (John 20:22)

The Holy Spirit should never be referred to as "it". He is one of three members of the Godhead and should always be referred to with masculine pronouns such as "He" or "Him",

Since we have already defined the word "baptize" in chapter two on water baptism, we have already established a good basis for understanding the doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In water baptism, the candidate is of course, the believer, the baptizer is the minister, and the element is water. This is the kind of baptism that John the Baptist practiced. But John preached a far greater baptism that was yet to come. Notice his prophecy in Matthew 3:11: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." This was to be a Spiritual baptism in which the believer is still the candidate, but **Jesus Christ** is the baptizer and the **Holy Spirit** is the element. It is quite simple to understand then, that the experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is **to be spiritually immersed into the Holy Spirit by the Lord Jesus Christ**. It is an unspeakable, marvelous experience of the believer dwelling in the Spirit and the Spirit dwelling in the believer.

FOR ALL BELIEVERS

Some would have us believe that the Holy Spirit baptism is nothing more than the new birth. This, of course, is quite wrong. Although it is true that the believer does receive the Spirit (to a measure) at the time of his conversion, the baptism [immersion] in the Holy Spirit is another experience altogether. Jesus was speaking to his own disciples when He said: "... you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:5). It is also true that Peter, James, John, the mother of Jesus and the rest of the one hundred twenty people who received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost were already Christians and very dedicated followers of the doctrines of Jesus.

There are also those who would have us believe the Holy Spirit baptism is not for people of today, but was only intended for those who received it on the day of Pentecost. This teaching is also very much in error. There are many scriptures that could be used to prove the point, but the one statement made by the Apostle Peter in Acts 2:39 should be enough. He said: "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

THE PURPOSE

The reasons for being filled with the Holy Spirit are many. Those who are Spirit-filled will find that He is a comforter (John 14:16), a teacher and reminder (John 14:26), a guide and a revealer of things to come (John 14:13).

Spirit-filled believers are led by Him (Romans 8: 14) and helped to pray more effectively through Him (Romans 8:26,27). Obviously, to be baptized, that is, immersed or covered completely with the Holy Spirit is to have the most intimate relationship with God that his eternal love and goodness has made possible.

Perhaps the most important of all the reasons for being baptized in the Holy Spirit is the fact that it creates within the believer great power with God, especially power to witness. This is the promise of Jesus: " ... But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me... " (Acts 1:8).

THE PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Paul taught the church at Galatia that: " ... the fruit of the Spirit [Greek, Pneuma: Holy Spirit] is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. " (Galatians 5 :22-23). The believer who is truly baptized in the Holy Spirit will certainly demonstrate these divine attributes. Yet, there is a more explicit evidence.

Every believer, upon receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit, will experience a miracle that leaves no room for doubt as to whether his experience is genuine. It is the miracle of tongues. When the yielded believer, overflowing with the fullness of God, finds himself praising God in a language he has never learned, as the Spirit gives him the utterance, he may be certain that he has been baptized in the Holy Spirit. The miracle of tongues is the **initial physical evidence**.

There are those who teach that tongues are not for people of today, but were only for the one hundred and twenty on the day of Pentecost. There is of course, no scripture at all to justify such a theory. On the other hand, the Bible bears abundant proof that speaking in tongues is for every Holy Spirit baptized Christian. On the day of Pentecost they **all** spoke in tongues. "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come ... they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1,4). They accepted this as evidence that they had received the promised Holy Spirit. Peter stood and preached to the onlookers saying: " ... But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit [Greek, Pneuma: Holy Spirit] on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams.'" (Acts 2: 16-17).

Later, The Apostle Peter was sent by the Spirit to the household of a gentile (non-Jew) named Cornelius. As he preached to them about Christ, "... the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word" (Acts 10:44). Peter and the Jewish brethren who accompanied him, knew that the experience was indeed genuine, "For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God ..." (Acts 10:46). This happened about eight years after the day of Pentecost.

Paul was not one of the hundred and twenty, but he spoke with tongues. He testified to the Christians at Corinth: "I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all" (1 Cor. 14:18). He encouraged others to speak with tongues: "I wish you all spoke with tongues..." (1 Cor. 14:5), and explained that speaking in tongues is a help to the believer:

"He who speaks in a tongue edifies [improves, benefits] himself... " (1 Cor. 14:4). It was about twenty-six years after the day of Pentecost that Paul taught these things.

Neither the household of Cornelius nor the Christians at Corinth were of the original hundred and twenty who received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Let it be settled in our minds then, that the doctrine of speaking in tongues as the initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, is indeed taught in our New Testament, and that every New Testament doctrine is for every New Testament Christian. Those who receive the Spirit baptism will speak in tongues.

RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT BAPTISM

There is no certain method one must follow to receive the Holy Spirit baptism except to be completely yielded to God. On the day of Pentecost they were simply sitting and waiting for the Holy Spirit to come (Acts 2:1-4). When the household of Cornelius received, they were listening to Peter preach (Acts 10:34-46). Again, when Philip had preached in the city of Samaria and gained a lot of converts, Peter and John went down to join him. They first prayed for the new converts and then laid their hands on them. The new Christians then received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15,17).

Through the years, many thousands of Christians have been baptized in the holy Spirit while simply lifting hands and voices to God in heart-felt praise and worship. Through the door of sincere praise, the believer becomes enraptured in glorious communion with God. When he reaches the point in worship where his whole soul and spirit becomes completely submitted and yielded to God, he will receive the Holy Spirit.

Every believer should earnestly seek God for a baptism in the Holy Spirit as soon as he becomes a Christian. Please consider the admonition of the Apostle Paul, who said: "And be filled with the Spirit" (Eph.5:18).

VI

Tithing and Giving

And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S. It is holy to the LORD. And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD." (Lev.27:30,32)

PART ONE: TITHING

The word "tithe" simply means: "a tenth part; one tenth." Many centuries ago, God established tithing as a means of financial support for his ministers. Some people believe that tithing was taught only under the Law that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. This idea is very much in contrast to the actual teachings in the Word of God.

BEFORE THE LAW

More than thirty-eight centuries ago, long before the Law of Moses was given, Abram paid tithes to Melchizedek, the minister of God in the city of Salem, which we now know as Jerusalem: "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithes of all." (Gen 14:18-20).

One hundred fifty-three years later, his grandson, Jacob whose name was later changed to Israel, vowed to God that he would be a faithful tither: "Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.'" (Gen. 28:20-22). This was yet about two hundred sixty-nine years before the giving of the Law.

INCLUDED IN THE LAW

Although tithing **did not originate** with the Law of Moses, it **was included** in that Law. (see Lev. 27:30, 32, the opening verses of this chapter)

The tribe of Levi was chosen of God to be ministers to the rest of Israel and were to be supported by their tithes: "Behold, I Myself have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel; they are a gift to you, given by the LORD, to do the work of the tabernacle of meeting. ... Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting." (Num. 18:6,21).

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Tithing is also a New Testament doctrine. Jesus once rebuked a group of Pharisees who were faithful to tithe, but committed other sins. He commended them for their obedience to tithing, but denounced them for their unfaithfulness in other things: "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone." (Luke 11:42). The word "ought" used in this verse is the Greek word *dei*, which means: "is necessary; to be binding upon." Thus, Jesus established the system of tithing as a binding (essential, crucial) New Testament Doctrine.

When Jesus became the perfect and final sacrifice for sin by His atoning death on the cross, He eliminated the need for any further blood sacrifices. This fulfilled and ended the ministry of the Levitical priesthood.

The seventh chapter of Hebrews explains that Jesus, who was not of the tribe of Levi, but of Judah, instigated a new priesthood (verses 11-17), with Himself as the High Priest (verses 22-28). Now, instead of calling only Israelites of the tribe of Levi, into the ministry, our Lord calls whom He will, from every nationality, race and color. They become Levites in a spiritual sense, Jews inwardly (Romans 2:29).

The careful Bible student will notice that the writer of Hebrews meticulously explains the changing of the priesthood, but does not offer a substitute system for their support. The book of Hebrews was written about thirty-one years after the crucifixion of Christ. It was on the day of the crucifixion that the last blood sacrifice was offered in the temple by a Levitical priest. And yet, Heb. 7:8 says: "Here mortal men receive tithes," implying that tithing was still being practiced.

Since Jesus said: ", .. the laborer is worthy of his wages .. , " (Luke 10:7), and Paul clearly taught: " ... those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel." (1 Cor. 9: 14), it makes no sense at all to believe that God has made no provision for his ministers. And yet, this would be the case if tithing is not for New Testament Christians, for nowhere in Scripture can a substitute program be found. Actually, tithing is taught very forcefully in both Testaments as an ordinance instituted by God as a means of financial support for His ministers, It was originated by Abram more than four hundred years before the Law of Moses was given and is to continue for as long as God has ministers on the earth.

Notice Heb. 7:5-6: "And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises." These two verses should dispel any further doubt concerning tithing. The writer is clearly explaining that tithes are no longer to be paid to the Levitical priesthood, whose ministry is no longer needed, but to the priesthood of Christ, after the order of Melchizedek.

BLESSINGS

God has obligated Himself to bless those who tithe properly and faithfully with financial prosperity: "'Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this,' Says the LORD of hosts, 'If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,' Says the LORD of hosts;" (Malachi 3:10-11).

As we honor the Lord, He will honor His promises. Proverbs 3:9-10, "Honor the LORD with your possessions, And with the first fruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine."

PART TWO: GIVING

Giving is not the same as tithing. It has been said that whenever God enables a man to earn a dollar, he actually gives him ninety cents and trusts him with a dime. The dime is of course, the tithe, which belongs to God already. In giving, man renders unto God an offering from the ninety cents that is his own. Offerings may be given for any Godly cause that the giver may choose, such as: world missions, building programs, love offerings, benevolence, Sunday School, church upkeep, etc.

HOW TO GIVE

The right way to give is: " So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Cor. 9:7). Every man should give in proportion to his income: " ... let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper ... " (1 Cor. 16:2).

THE BLESSING IN GIVING

The Apostle Paul tells us: "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever." Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God." (2Co 9:8-11)

VII

Occupy Till I Come

" ... He spoke another parable... Therefore He said: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business (keep busy, occupy) till I come.'" (Luke 19:11-13)

BEING A WITNESS

The highest earthly privilege that anyone could ever have is that of being a representative of Jesus Christ our Lord. He has commissioned every Christian to be exactly that. "... you shall be witnesses to Me ... " (Acts 1:8). The Christian who is truly grateful for his new birth will find this to be a very pleasurable task. He will just naturally want to tell others about the atoning (reconciling) death of Jesus and the saving grace of God.

Being a good witness will not always be easy. There will be some persecution: " Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (2 Tim. 3:12). That is why Jesus said: " ... If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Matt. 16:24). But the persecution will seem worth it when the witnessing has proved effective and a person is won. The Psalmist taught: " He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves with him. " (Psalm 126:6).

PRAYER AND BIBLE STUDY

The importance of a regular, daily prayer life cannot be overstated. Jesus taught: "... men always ought to pray and not lose heart, " (Luke 18: 1).

Prayer is nothing more and nothing less than talking with God. A regular habit of daily prayer should be instituted early in the believer's new life and should never be discontinued. No doubt, this is what Paul was teaching the church at Thessalonica when he wrote: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). No Christian will ever outgrow his need for a consistent prayer life.

Believers are not to pray through Mary, the mother of Jesus, or any of the saints. Jesus taught that they should pray directly to the Father: "Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you." (John 16 :23).

Also of great importance is the need for everyday Bible study. The attentive Christian will learn a great deal from the preaching and teaching of his Pastor, Sunday School teacher and etc., but his own private Bible study will do more to deepen his understanding of God and His Word. That is why Paul said: "Be diligent (labor, study) to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. " (2 Tim. 2:15).

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

Regular church attendance is like an anchor of faith. The spiritual atmosphere, the singing and worship, the preaching of the Word and the fellowship of the brethren tend to strengthen the faith of the believer. Let him miss only a few services and his soul will feel the effects. That is why the Bible says: " Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering ... not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. " (Heb. 10:23,25).

Instead of contributing to the problem of empty church pews. the properly motivated Christian will seek to fill them with people. He will obey the words of our Lord Jesus, who said: " ... Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. " (Luke 14:23). Many sinners will attend church if they are invited.

RESPECT FOR THE PASTOR

The Pastor of the church is a man of tremendous responsibility. His congregation should respect for the spiritual leader that he is. should never be subjected to the pressures of needless criticism by those who do not understand his administrative policies. The layman would do well instead, to pray that his Pastor will be led of the Lord.

The pastor must watch for the souls of all his congregation, and give account to God. He will do so in joy if the Christian is submissive, but in grief if he is critical and rebellious. Let us give attention to Hebrews 13:7, 17: "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct..... Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."

WATCHING FOR THE RETURN OF CHRIST

Perhaps the most cherished of all the promises in God's Word, is the one made by Jesus in John 14:2-3: " "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

The return of the Lord for his people is often called "The Rapture." Instead of coming all the way to a landing on the earth, he will stop somewhere in the air to call forth His own: " For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

Those believers who are still alive at his coming, will be instantly changed to immortality. Paul explained it, saying:

" Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." (1 Cor. 15:51-53).

But until our Lord does return, there is much work to be done for the kingdom of God. " ... The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few.... " (Luke 10:2). Therefore, every Christian, while waiting and watching, should concern himself with the business of winning souls for the kingdom of God, remembering always the admonition of the Master: " ... do business (keep busy, occupy) till I come" (Luke 19:13).

(Adapted from, *Now that I'm a Christian, where do I go from here?*, By Robert O. Johnson, and is used by permission)