

Present Truth

The *Bible alone* as the only rule of faith and practice; *faith alone* as the only means of acceptance with God; and *Christ alone* as the only mediator between God and men.

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Present Truth is a magazine dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity in this generation. It is especially committed to upholding the truth of justification by faith in this time when it is being threatened by humanism, emotionalism, and ecumenism. Our publication is based on the principle of *sola Scriptura*—the Bible and the Bible only as a rule of faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:15-17). We desire to give the gospel trumpet a certain sound (1 Cor. 14:7-9), that through words easy to be understood (Hab. 2:2) people may “be established in the present truth” (2 Pet. 1:12) and like Noah be proclaimers of the righteousness of Christ (2 Pet. 2:5).

Editor: Richard Marin

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Contributors: Since truth is above the preferences and prejudices of any denomination, the editors welcome articles from anyone and will judge them on their merit alone.

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By Faith Alone

When we published our issue on “Divine Acceptance” (PT Vol. 8 #1) we never imagined the type of interest it would stimulate. Its four-point message was simple:

1. Jesus’ life and death on earth is what gives us acceptance with God.
2. This perfect obedience we receive by faith alone.
3. It is in heaven that God counts as righteous those who accept his Son.
4. In the Bible the verb “to justify” means “to declare righteous”.

The second point generated the most controversy. Many questioned our use of the phrase “by faith alone”. This phrase is common in Protestant circles.

Some use the phrase as an excuse for living as they please.

Others include requirements in their definition of faith. For them faith may include obedience, good works, baptism, penance, or pilgrimages.

And still others openly say faith is not enough in order to be accepted by God. For them justification is by faith plus something else—fill in the blank.

Ideas like these filled the mail bag. Some of the letters and our responses to their questions make up this issue of *Present Truth*.

Is one counted righteous in God’s sight when they believe? Must faith include or be accompanied by something else in order to receive divine acceptance? Here is how we understand “by faith alone”:

The preposition “by” refers to the *means* of our acceptance and not to the *basis*. There is a difference! The means is the method for meeting God’s standard. The basis is the standard that must be met. So by means of faith we present to God what he requires.

Faith includes not only belief but trust. It means to depend wholeheartedly on something. Faith not only believes that God exists (James 2:19) but that “he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Heb. 11:6. The faith that saves embraces Christ as a personal Savior who “is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.” Heb. 7:25. Such faith trusts in something outside of itself and outside of one’s personal experience.

The word “**alone**” excludes all our works—bad and good—whether they are done with or without the Holy Spirit’s cooperation (Rom. 3). It also excludes all God’s work done to us (Rom. 4) and in us (Rom. 5). Obedience, even that of baptism, is not part of faith.

The faith that justifies is not clothed with love, obedience, or sacraments. It stands alone, but always has an object. Faith looks away from itself. It trusts in Another’s love, obedience, and sacrifice. It has no eternal value unless its object is the Beloved Son of God. The hymn writer captured the idea when he wrote:

“My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary,
Savior divine;
Now hear me while I pray,
Take all my guilt away,
O let me from this day
Be wholly Thine.” —Ray Palmer, 1830.

“By faith alone” means that faith is necessary in order for one to be saved. Without faith it is not possible to be found in Christ. The “in Christ” motif of the New Testament applies only to those who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. The gate is narrow that leads to life eternal, and few there be that find it (Matt. 7:14).

It is by faith alone that a person enters Christ (Eph. 1:12-13). God places in his Beloved Son all who believe the gospel (Col. 2:5-10). This truth divides humanity into two camps: the few in Christ by faith and the many outside of Christ in unbelief.

A Letter from Indiana

Is salvation by grace alone or by faith alone?

Charles B.... writes in part:

Dear Richard,

I received your booklet, "Present Truth" [Vol. 8 # 1] today, December 15th. Thank you for sending it to me...

On page 17 you state that God accepts people because of grace alone. Then on page 18 you present the idea of "faith alone". If it is by grace alone, there can be nothing else. If by faith alone, there can be nothing else. Now is it your understanding that grace is God's part while faith is man's part? Surely you must be talking about two different things otherwise you contradict yourself. So help me to understand the issue of salvation. [continued below]

Present Truth responds:

Dear Charles,

You ask about an apparent contradiction between "grace alone" and "faith alone".

Grace is something quite different from faith. The grace that saves is an attitude in the heart of God (Rom. 3:24). The faith that saves is a response in the heart of man (Rom. 10:9, 10). Grace gave us a Substitute. Faith accepts that perfect Substitute.

When we say that "God accepts people *because* of grace alone" (page 17) we are speaking about the **basis** of our acceptance with God.

When we say that our acceptance is "*by* faith alone" (pages 18 & 20) we are referring to the **means** of our acceptance with God.

The basis of God's acceptance and the means of obtaining it are two different things.

Grace is unmerited favor. Out of his grace God gave us Jesus. In that undeserved gift he gave us all that justice requires to become his child. Justice requires perfect obedience (Matt. 5:48; Rom. 2:13). Such obedience we are incapable of rendering. But in loving kindness God gave himself as a spotless lamb to be our substitute. Jesus, the lamb of God, perfectly obeyed the law for us. This is why John the Baptist could cry, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29. Since the sin of our first parents, lambs had been offered to God in man's place. Now the true Lamb has come. By his doing and dying he manifested the grace of God that brings salvation (2 Tim. 1: 9, 10). God gave us in Christ's humanity all that is required for our return to fellowship with himself (Rom. 10:4). The **basis** upon which we may be counted God's children was a gift of grace. So in that issue of *Present Truth* we wrote: "God accepts people because of grace alone."

But how is Christ's obedience counted ours? The gift of righteousness must be appropriated.

This is where faith enters the picture. Faith is the hand that grasps the Lamb and receives the blessing. The perfect obedience of Christ is accessible only to the hand of faith.

The word "by" refers to the *means* of our acceptance with God. Faith is the means. God does not accept us *because* of faith. Faith has no merit. It is only the means of receiving divine acceptance. The apostle John wrote: "As many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." John 1:12.

Faith like grace is a gift of God. When Jesus is presented, faith is inspired (Rom. 10:17). "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2:8, 9.

Faith alone is required on our part. By faith we bring the Lamb to God's temple court.

The **only** *basis* of our acceptance with God is GRACE. The **only** *means* of our acceptance with God is FAITH.

CB: *On page 19 you cite the incident of the house of Cornelius. If the person who is "accepted" by God is the one who fears God and works righteousness, how do you get to faith alone?*

PT: We understand, Charles, that at Cornelius' house the apostle Peter began his talk by laying down the *basis* of acceptance with God.

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." Acts 10:34, 35.

This is the same standard that all the inspired writers have given throughout history. God requires perfect obedience. He does not play favorites. His standard is the same for everyone. The person who respects God and keeps his commandments is accepted (Eccl. 12:13).

So you ask how do we get from there to "faith alone". The same way Peter does—by showing that Christ fulfilled all the law's demands and that "whosoever



believeth in him shall receive the remission of sins” (Acts 10:36-43). We preach “peace [with God] by Jesus Christ” (verse 36).

CB: *The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:16,17). If one works righteousness then are they not obeying God?*

PT: We agree that if one works righteousness they are obeying God. Righteousness is obedience to the law. All who love God strive to keep his commandments (John 14:15).

The Bible teaches are two kinds of righteousness: the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith. Both are good yet they are distinct. One is perfect and complete; the other is imperfect and incomplete in this life. One is now in heaven; the other is on earth. One is the perfect righteousness of Christ *imputed* to the believing sinner by the Father. The other is the reflection of this righteousness and is *imparted* to the believing sinner by the Holy Spirit.

The **righteousness of faith** is in heaven and those who believe in it are content to leave it there (Rom. 10:6). It is the perfect human life and character of Christ who is now seated at the right hand of the Father. For all who trust in him, Christ’s character stands in place of their character in the records of heaven (Rom. 10:4). The righteousness of faith is substitutionary and is presently *invisible* except to the eye of faith.

The **righteousness of the law** is on earth and those who participate in it are not content with anything less than fully reflecting the character of Christ. They continually press towards the mark of perfection of Christian character (Phil. 3:12-16). The Holy Spirit works and they work perfecting in themselves holiness (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 John 3:3). In the “righteousness of the law” faith and works cooperate hand in hand like two oars in a rowboat going up the stream of sanctification. The righteousness of the law is *visible* to others around us.

Those who find in Christ their justifying righteousness (that which is of faith) are promised that the righteousness of the law will be fulfilled in them (Rom. 8:4). If you are justified you are being purified. All God’s children receive correction (Heb. 12:7).

While Scripture teaches that there are two kinds of righteousness, only one is worthy of our trust. That is the perfect

one—the righteousness of faith. In Philippians 3:8, 9, Paul expresses this vividly when he writes:

“I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

The righteousness of the law	The righteousness of faith
our own righteousness	the righteousness of God
our Spirit-enabled obedience	Christ’s obedience
in us on earth	in Christ in heaven
a very good thing	a spotlessly perfect thing
accomplished by faith and works	grasped by faith alone
imperfect and incomplete in this life	perfect and complete in Christ
imparted to the believing sinner	imputed to the believing sinner
worthless to trust in	secure to trust in

CB: *On the back of the booklet, you raise and answer the question. Isn’t obedience part of faith? No, is your answer. Is there something about the word “works” which frightens you?*

PT: We are frightened by the idea of being justified *before God* by our works. When it comes to what we put our confidence in, our own righteousness (of the law) is worthless manure (Phil.3:3, 8). Only the righteousness of faith has value here. But *before men* we are justified by our own works. When it comes to a church council we judge a man’s faith by his own righteousness—the righteousness

of the law. If he doesn't live like a Christian we judge him to be "unworthy" and have no basis on which to give him church office (1 Tim. 3; James 2:18).

CB: *Let us consider the passages in Romans 3... Boasting ... has been removed. By what law was it removed? The law of works...? No it was removed by the law of faith (Romans 3:27). Jew and Gentile both are saved by the faith (law) of Jesus Christ. It is called the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25); the law of the Spirit (Romans 8:2); the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2)...*

I look forward to a good study with you...

*For the cause of truth,
Charles B.....,
Indiana, USA*

PT: We understand from Romans 3 that no one can be saved by keeping any law—even the law of Christ! "For all have sinned, and [continue to] come short of the glory of God." Verse 23.

The law described in Romans 3 is still valid for Christians today. Paul says it is a witness to righteousness and a definer of sin. **All the world** becomes guilty before this law (3:19). By this law we know what sin is (v. 20). And this same law testifies of the righteousness of God (v. 21). The chapter ends by asking: "Do we then make void the law through faith?" Paul's emphatic answer is: "God forbid: yea, we establish the law." The law spoken of here remains established as a witness to righteousness and a definer of sin.

How then can a person (Jew or Gentile) be accepted by God? Is it freely, by faith alone? Paul answers: "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." Rom. 3:24, 25. God is "the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Verse 26.

The reason no one can boast about being accepted by God is that his own "doing" was not *why* nor *how* he got accepted—not even his doing of the law of Christ. The "why" was Christ's doing and dying. The "how" was faith alone in that purchased redemption. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what principle? That of

our “doing”? No: but by the principle of naked faith which only grasps the righteousness of Another.

James clearly tells us what the perfect law of liberty is. It is the Ten Commandments (James 2:10-12). John says that the law of Christ is that we love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34). Love is the fulfilling of the Ten Commandments (Rom. 13:8-10); it is bearing one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2). All who bring to God a perfect fulfillment of the law of Christ are accepted by him. This kind of fulfillment can only be found outside of ourselves, in Christ in heaven.



A Letter from California

Is water baptism a prerequisite for justification?

Barry N..... writes:

To the editor,

I received my free sample copy of Present Truth and read the first issue with interest. I was delighted to see that your magazine is "dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity." The booklet was well-written. Also, thank you for your work in compiling quotes from both the Catholic and Protestant perspectives. I appreciate your work.

Since you are dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity, admittedly, I was surprised by the claim within the section "Divine Acceptance According to the Bible" that the Bible teaches we only need to believe to be saved. Properly understood, I do believe that salvation is by faith alone. But when I say this I am not agreeing with the Protestants. Salvation comes only through trusting in Jesus, not by meriting it.

I have included a couple of my own publications which present a different view from what I read in Present Truth, a view which I believe agrees with what scripture is teaching. I welcome your thoughts...

Sincerely,

Barry N....., Pastor

Church of Christ, California, USA

Present Truth responds:

Dear Barry,

Thank you for your kind remarks concerning our issue on "Divine Acceptance" (Present Truth, Vol. 8 #1).

We agree that: "Salvation comes only through trusting in Jesus, not by meriting it." True faith includes not only belief but trust.

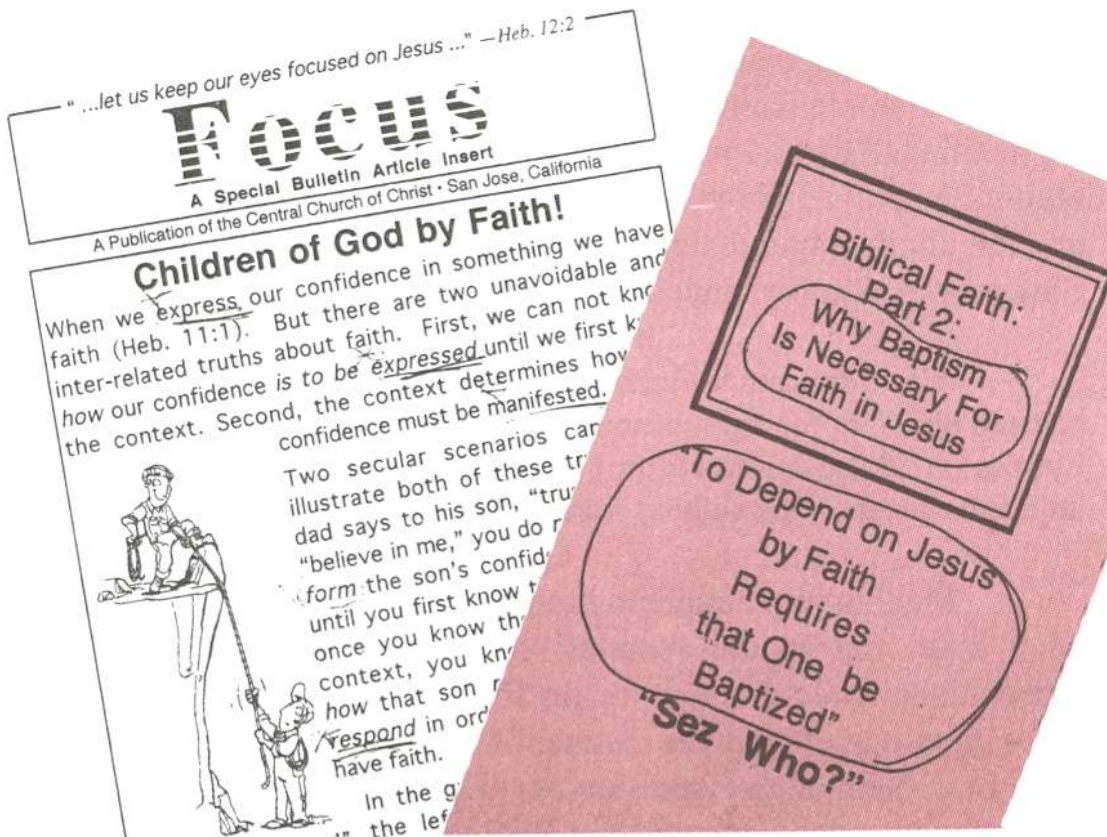
In your 1999 enclosure titled *Biblical Faith: Part 2* you write: "Faith means trust... Faith is not 'just believing'... It is to wholly depend upon Jesus."

We agree so far.

But then you write: "To depend on Jesus by faith requires that one be baptized." "Baptism is necessary for faith in Jesus."

Does the Bible teach that there can be no faith without prior baptism?

We much prefer what you write in your 2002 article titled "Children of God by Faith". There you say baptism follows faith as a "response," "expression," "demonstration," "exhibit," and "manifestation" of faith. In these phrases baptism follows faith and is a public manifestation of it.



We understand, Barry, from your "Children of God" article (top of page 3) that you believe **obedience is required in order to be justified**. This is our position also! In our issue on "Divine Acceptance" we state that "the Bible teaches that God receives as children only those who have perfect conformity to his law." "God accepts those who obey him." p. 18. The apostle Paul summarizes this same idea with the words: "The doers of the law shall be justified." Rom 2:13. We are happy to include in this doing not only the keeping of the Ten Commandments but also the observance of all Christ's commands, and baptism as well. Only perfect obedience to the will of God can merit divine acceptance. God has not lowered his standard. Just as it was in Eden it is today: Life is granted to the obedient (Gen. 2:16,17).

Our entire and perfect fulfillment of God's commandments is found in the birth, life, baptism, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He fulfilled all righteousness in our behalf (Matt. 3:15, Rom. 10:4). To exclude baptism from this obedience and make it a personal prerequisite for justification goes contrary to Christ's words to John the Baptist (Matt. 3:15); and leaves us with "faith plus baptism" as the condition of divine acceptance.

We believe that faith is the only condition upon which justification can be obtained. By it alone we can present to God the perfect righteousness of Christ. God is well pleased with this righteousness. He counts the obedience of Christ as ours and so we are justified (Rom. 3:21-24). Perfect righteousness is credited to our account in heaven (Rom. 4:8). God accepts, pardons and treats as perfect all that come unto him hiding in the righteousness of Christ—even ungodly sinners.

"For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness... faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works." Rom. 4:3-6.

Making water baptism a requirement for justification is like what many did in the apostles' day when they tried to make circumcision a requirement for justification. They taught: "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." Acts 15:1. Neither circumcision nor baptism is a work that we do. Someone else does it to us. Yet Paul taught precisely that such a

work done to us is not a prerequisite for justification. He reminded his readers in Romans that faith alone was credited to Abraham for righteousness. "Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised." Rom. 4:9-11 NIV.

Just as circumcision was a sign for Abraham so baptism is a covenant sign for us today. Baptism is our public confession of Christ. Having been accepted by God as his child we then take the sign of covenant union with him—water baptism. To take the sign without faith in the covenant is hypocrisy. Yet to reject the sign is to reject the covenant. All who truly believe in Christ will be baptized into his body.

We are comfortable, Barry, with the following two statements in your *Biblical Faith* enclosure:

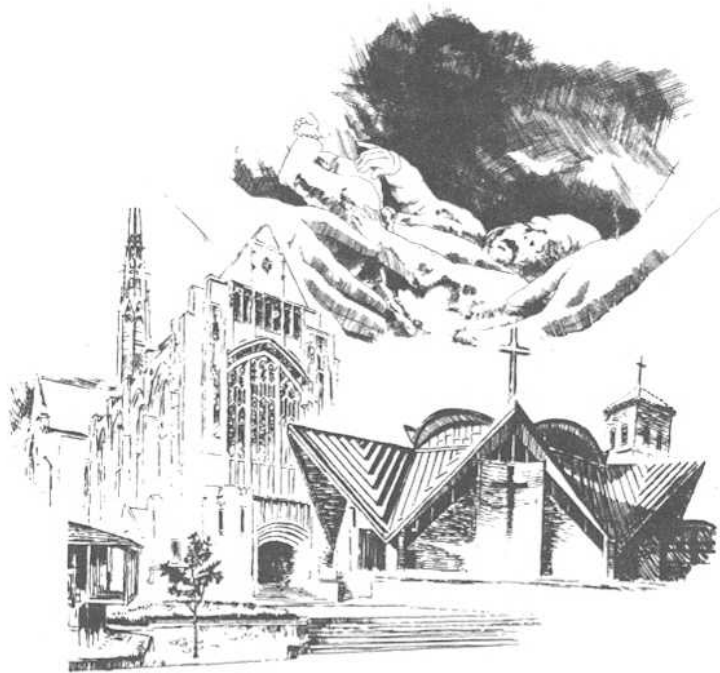
1) "The New Testament places baptism as being the transition point of entering into the covenant of Christ and his covenantal community known as the body of Christ."

2) "With baptism one is said to enter into the body of Christ, namely the new covenant community."

True faith is followed by baptism just as entrance into Christ is followed by entrance into his body. True faith places us in Christ. Water baptism places us into his body, the church. The stories in the book of Acts confirm this. On Pentecost "they that gladly received [Peter's preached] word were baptized: and ... were... added to the church." Acts 2:41, 47. Awhile later Philip, the deacon, "went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them... When they believed Philip... they were baptized." Acts 8:5, 12. When the Ethiopian eunuch asked if he could be baptized, Philip gave a clear, straightforward answer: "If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest. Acts 8:37. Even the persecutor Saul first became a brother in Christ and then he was baptized (Acts 9:17-18; 22:12-16). At the home of Cornelius those who heard the word received the Holy Ghost and then, based on this evidence of faith, were baptized (Acts 10:44-48; 11:17). Lydia in Europe was baptized after the Lord opened her heart and she gave heed to the things which were spoken by Paul (Acts 16:14-15). The Philippian jailer gave evidence of his

faith by washing the disciples wounds before he was baptized (Acts 16:31-34). The testimony concerning Corinth says: "many of the Corinthians believed, and were baptized." Acts 18:8. A dozen men at Ephesus first heard Paul tell them "that they should believe on... Christ Jesus. When they heard [believing] they were baptized." Acts 19:4-5. The consistent testimony of the book of Acts is that baptism should follow faith and involves entrance into the body of Christ.

Faith alone gives us entrance into Christ. Being found in him we are given repentance. And true repentance leads to confession of sins which brings forgiveness. Having been justified and forgiven we go on to seal our union with Christ by immersion into his covenant community. At baptism we confirm our faith which since receiving Christ has developed like an embryo in the womb of heaven. As in the natural world conception of a child precedes its birth so in the spiritual world one becomes a child of God (justification) before being born into the church of Christ (see 2 Cor. 6:14).



Another Letter from Indiana

Are faith and works exclusive?

Steve J..... writes:

Dear Richard,

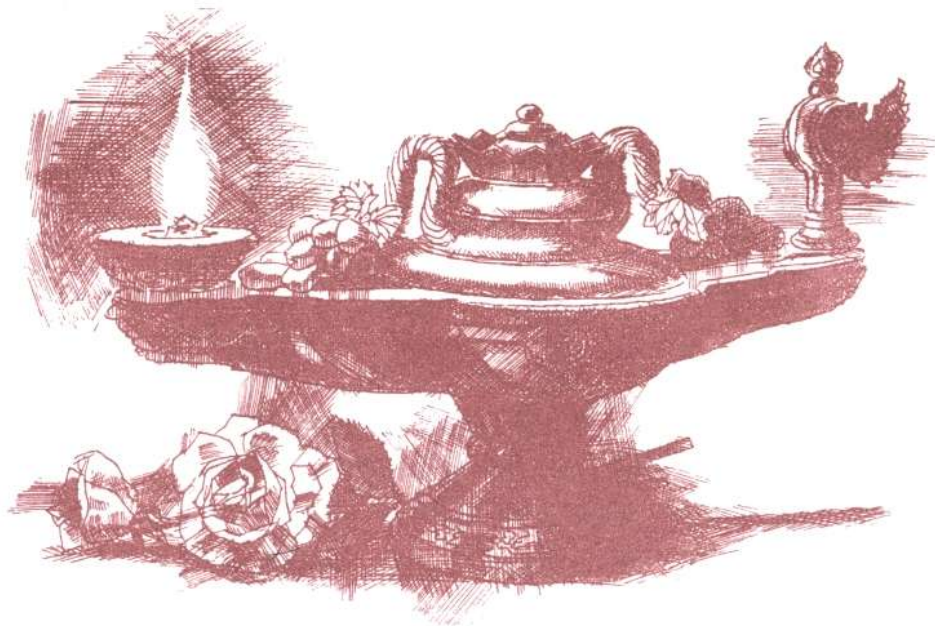
I, too, believe in the restoration of New Testament Christianity. I also believe in justification by faith. Of course, our denominational world does not understand what God means by justification by faith, and I have to say that neither do you if you believe and teach what is taught in Present Truth Jan-Mar 2004, Vol 8, Number 1, "Divine Acceptance." You, as most of the denominational world, incorrectly believe faith and works are exclusive; however, the Bible speaks of different kinds of faith and works. Some which save and others [which] do not; you have mistakenly mixed them up in your Bible references and thus have drawn some faulty, nevertheless, I am certain sincere, conclusions. I have read your material and I would appreciate the same courtesy from you; I have enclosed some material for you, which accurately, scripturally sets forth what God's word says concerning faith and works without denominational dogma or prejudice...

*Serving the Savior,
Steve J..... Pastor
Church of Christ, Indiana, USA*

Present Truth responds:

Dear Steve:

Not only do we believe in the restoration of New Testament Christianity; we also believe in the restoration of the image of God in his people so that they will fully reflect the character of Christ and



sin no more. Faith and works are never exclusive. True faith in Christ *always* produces good works. The person who accepts as their own what God has done for us in Christ has every motive to live a life of obedience (John 14:15), and good works will shine out to God's glory (Matt; 5:16).

We also agree that the Bible speaks of a faith that does not save. James says "the devils also believe and tremble." James 2:19. What do they believe? They believe there is one God and they tremble in his presence but that faith doesn't save them, nor us. Those who come to God "must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Heb. 11:6. Faith includes not only belief but trust. It is more than mental assent. Saving faith embraces Christ as a personal Savior being assured that he can save all that come unto God through him.

The *Bible Correspondence Course* material by John M. Hurt that you enclose is interesting. It takes the same position as Rome: that our baptism and personal obedience are required in order to be justified. Compare what is written on page 5 of Lesson Four with Canon 9 of the Roman Catholic Council of Trent:

“The Bible forever condemns any human theory which teaches that we are justified by ‘faith only’ apart from the works of obedience...” *Bible Correspondence Course* (Hurt Pub, Smyrna, TN), Lesson 4, pg. 5.

“If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification... let him be anathema.” *Council of Trent*, Canon 9.

So, Steve, we cannot agree with the *Bible Correspondence Course* when it states that “Every case of Bible conversion shows that people were saved only when their faith was coupled with the works of obedience to God’s law.” Lesson 4, Pg. 4, Column 2.

But we can agree with it when it says: “Living faith, like the living body, is manifest by action.” Lesson 4, Pg. 4, Column 1.

The Bible is clear in this matter: “To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Rom. 4:5. And “By faith Able... Enoch... Abraham... [etc.] obeyed.” Heb. 11.

Lesson Five of the *Bible Correspondence Course* says: “God always required obedience as a basis for receiving the gift of salvation.”

We agree, but ask *how much obedience*? Could God ever accept anything less than perfect obedience? For this reason Christ when going to baptism said: “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.” Matt. 3:15 NIV. In Christ’s life on earth is found all the obedience that God requires. Those who trust in this obedience will work to obey God’s will in every particular—including baptism.

A Letter from Kentucky

**Where do confession and repentance come
in the order of salvation?**

Michael J..... writes:

Editor Richard Marin,

I have read your publication Present Truth [Vol. 8 #1]. I thank you for sending it to me. I do, however, have a few questions. I would like to quote a few passages from the articles and then ask my questions.

On pages 20-21, you write, "In his sermon at Cornelius' house Peter said 'every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins.' Acts 10:43 RSV. Nothing more is needed; Nothing less can put to our account the obedience that God requires. Faith is the hand that receives the blessing but it is not the hand that performs the obedience. In the third chapter of Romans Paul establishes that faith is the only condition for receiving divine acceptance."

On page 21, you write, "In contrast he establishes that it is faith plus nothing that unites us to the grace of God that is in Christ Jesus... God justifies the ungodly, the uncircumcised, and the heathen by faith and faith alone."

Again on page 27, you write, "At the beginning of the journey it was by faith alone, along the way it is by faith alone, and at the end it will be exactly the same—by faith alone."

*Yet, you turn around and quote Romans 10:8-13. This text states that if one **confesses and believes** he will be saved. Is this the same thing as "faith plus nothing"? Furthermore, must one repent in order to be saved? You stated, on page 29, "When the good news about Jesus Christ is proclaimed the Holy Spirit is present to give repentance and faith." Is this repentance necessary before one is accepted by God? Or does one repent after he has been accepted?*

*I would also like to address your use of the phrase “in Christ”. It is a Bible phrase that deserves Bible attention. You wrote on page 19, “the Apostle Paul confirms that a righteousness sufficient to give us God’s acceptance is found only in Christ.” You quoted, on page 22, Ephesians 1:3 that states that “all spiritual blessings” are **in Christ**. Then, on page 28, you wrote, “How can we enter into Christ? Only by faith.”*

Does not Galatians 3:26-27 also answer the question, “How can we enter into Christ?” This text says, “We are all sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death.” This text states clearly that baptism is the point at which one enters into Christ wherein he finds acceptance, forgiveness, and salvation.

I am enclosing a longer study on the subject of the moment one enters into a saved relationship with God. I would love to hear from you on this matter...

*In Christian love,
Michael J.....-Pastor
Church of Christ, Kentucky, USA*

Present Truth responds:

Dear Michael,

Thank you for taking the time to so carefully read our article on divine acceptance. I can see that we share a common desire to know the truth and express it correctly. Your questions are precise and I will try to be precise in my answers, hoping that you will understand that I am willing to be corrected by Holy Scripture.

Romans 10:8-13: The Romans 10 passage links confession with faith. True faith is always confessed. The thief on the cross confessed his faith when he spoke of the purity of the life of Christ (Lk. 23:40-43); the Ethiopian eunuch confessed his faith by being baptized (Acts 8:36-39); the publican confessed his faith in a repentant plea for mercy (Lk. 18:13-14). Jesus said: “Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven.” Matt. 10:32..

Rather than taking the position that faith includes repentance, confession, and baptism we understand that faith

produces repentance, confession, and baptism. Who confesses a Christ in whom he does not believe? Who changes his mind about what he trusts in if he hasn't first directed his faith towards a more worthy object? Who gets baptized in the name of a God in whom he does not believe?

Faith is counted for righteousness. The person who believes the report about Jesus is counted righteous. "Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Rom. 4:3. Abraham was justified by faith. The Romans 10 passage is clear: "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." Rom. 10:10. When the passage speaks of confession it is referring to salvation: "with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." All the justified will confess Christ.

Confessing Christ flows from faith like water from a spring. If there were no spring there would be no flow. When you see the water flowing you know there is a spring beneath. So also where justification exists Christ is confessed.

True faith is accompanied by repentance. Both are gifts from God that come only when Christ is uplifted. Neither faith nor repentance is our work. By faith we see Jesus crucified for us. In repentance we see ourselves as sinners condemned by a holy law.

If we were to fine tune the order of salvation we would say faith is followed by repentance; repentance by confession of sins, and confession of sins by confession of Christ. Yet each is inseparably linked to the other. Faith is always accompanied by repentance (Acts 20:21). Repentance is accompanied by the confession of sins. And justified children of God confess him publicly and move forward in obedience to all of God's will (Rom. 8:1-4).

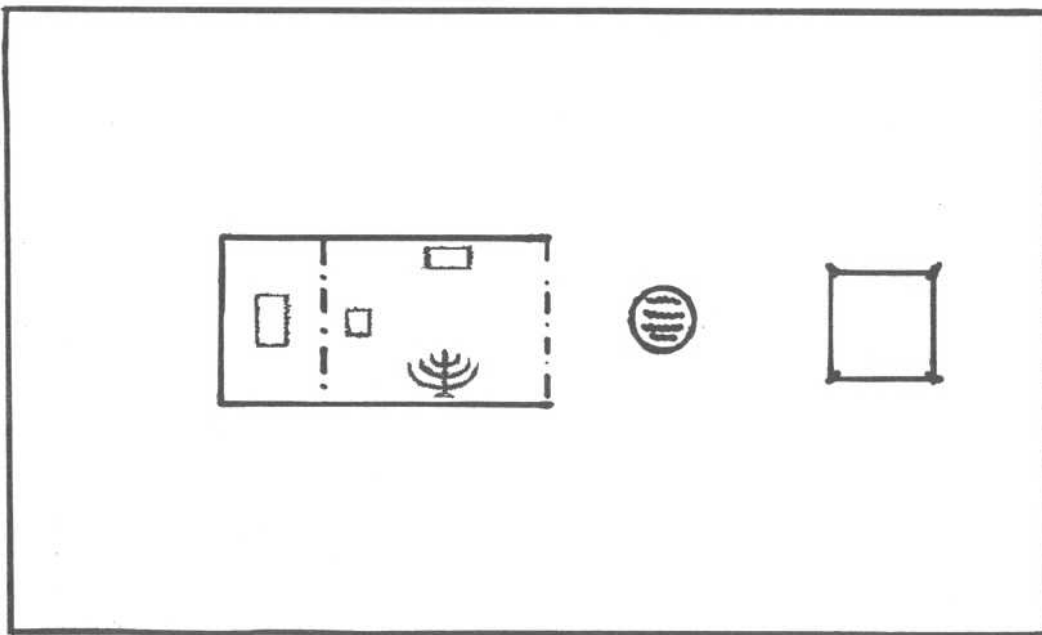
Faith alone brings justification. Faith and repentance bring the forgiveness of sins. Faith, repentance, and confession of sins bring freedom from guilt. If there is no repentance that is evidence that there was no true faith. And if there was no faith there was no justification before God.

Ancient Israel was given an illustration of the plan of salvation in types and symbols. The earthly tabernacle taught how one was to approach God. A sinner convicted of his sin was to bring a lamb (or other animal) and enter the linen-fenced courtyard clutching it to himself. Once inside he confessed his sins upon the innocent substitute and its life was taken and offered on the brazen

altar. By means of its sprinkled blood or its consumed flesh the sin was transferred in figure to the tabernacle or to the priest (Lev. 4-6). There it remained until the final atonement on Yom Kippur when final account was made (Lev. 16).

The arrangement of the tabernacle furniture teaches us about the order of salvation. Between the altar of sacrifice and the Holy place was the laver for washing. Inside the first apartment was the candlestick, table of shewbread, and altar of incense. Within the veil in the Most Holy Place was the ark of the covenant. All this was a figure for the time then present (Heb. 9:1-9) and is recorded for our learning (1 Cor. 10:11).

Like the symbol given in the desert we today may approach God only while clutching his Son by faith. As we enter the door of faith (Acts 14:27) we are surrounded by the white linen of Christ's imputed righteousness (Rom. 4:5-6). At the cross, pictured by the brazen altar, we in repentance confess our sins over the victim. They are transferred to Jesus' account in the heavenly sanctuary and are forgiven by God (1 John 1:9; Col. 1:22; Heb. 7:25) Only then can we proceed to the washing of baptism.

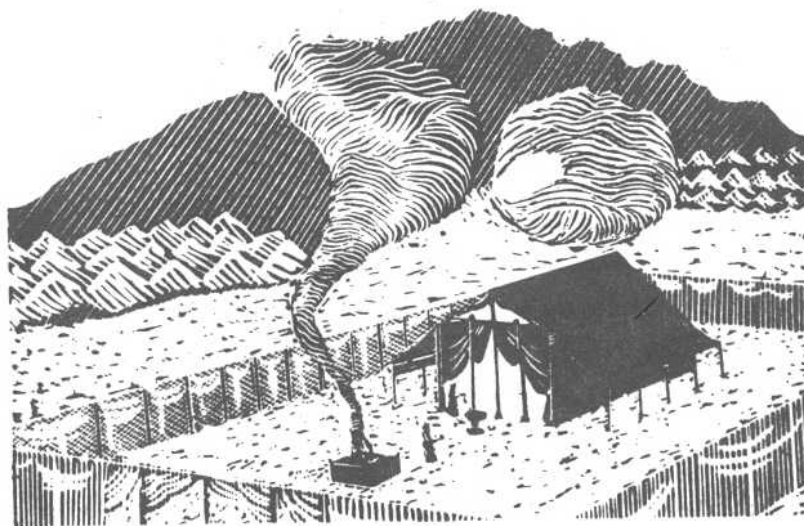


The daily life of the Christain is illustrated by the furniture in the Holy Place: the flame of the Holy Spirit, the bread of the Word of God, and the smoke of prayer mixed with the perfume of the righteousness of Christ. The Most Holy Place represents the final judgment.

Thus the initial steps in conversion are outlined in God's illustration to ancient Israel: First the door of faith; then the altar of confession and sacrifice; followed by the lavar of baptism. To make baptism a prerequisite for justification is like taking the lavar outside of the courtyard and placing it before the gate. In such an outline one would have to be washed before being surrounded by the righteousness of Christ. But, scripture says: "This man receiveth sinners." Lk. 15:2.

Faith alone gives us entrance into Christ. This is followed by repentance and confession. Only then do we come to the baptismal fount and seal our union with Christ by immersion into his covenant community. The pious John Bunyan taught the same truth when he relates in *Pilgrim's Progress* how Christian first enters the wicket gate and then proceeds to the cross where his burden of guilt falls away.

God accepts no one who doesn't have perfect obedience. That kind of righteousness includes a perfect baptism. When Jesus entered the Jordan River, he met that requirement. He told John the Baptist that he needed to be baptized in order "to fulfill all righteousness." This he didn't do for himself but he did it for us as our vicarious substitute. And to all who are in him by faith the Father says "This is my beloved child in whom I am well pleased."



An E-mail from North Carolina

How and when does a person enter Christ?

Tom E.... writes:

Hello - It has been a joy to read your publication, Present Truth, Volume 8, Number 1. I found myself exhilarated by the clarity and impartial tone of much of the article. I was on the verge of calling for a large supply of copies to give to my students when I realized just near the end that you were going to leave part of the truth untold.

With your stated conviction [of] "The Bible alone as the only rule of faith and practice..." I was wondering whether you might have a specific Biblical reference in answer to the question you pose on p. 28, paragraph #2, "How can we enter into Christ?" I have read how God adds us to Christ in Romans 6:3-11, but I do not know of a passage that states or implies that we can enter Christ by an act of heart or mind... The scripture passage you cite from Hebrews 3 touches only the second question you pose in that paragraph, "How do we remain in him?"...

Does the Bible specifically state that we believe into Christ? I am certain that we must believe Him and the truth revealed about Him in the Gospel, but I have not yet found the passage that states that my believing is my entrance into the Savior. I read that Jesus said that "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." Mark 16:16... Your presentation makes it necessary to rewrite this verse to read "He who has believed shall be saved..." It is a scary thing to cut out part of Jesus' final instructions to His followers...

Sincerely,

Tom E....

North Carolina, USA

Present Truth responds:

Dear Tom:

Thank you for questioning whether our answer was Biblical. In the paragraph you cite we wrote:

“How can we enter into Christ? Only by faith. How do we remain in him? Only by faith. And whoever remains in him until the end will be saved (Heb. 3:14).”

I concluded that entrance into Christ was by faith alone since we had established in that issue that justification was by faith alone. For me they were the same. Now you ask “Where does the Bible teach that?”

First let me say that the Bible does not teach that all men enter Christ at the same time. Nor did all the elect enter Christ at the same time. Neither before the foundation of the world nor at the incarnation were we placed into Christ. Entrance into Christ is an individual matter. The apostle Paul fixes this truth in our minds when he says:

“Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.” Rom. 16:7.

So some people enter Christ before others. “For all men have not faith.” 2 Thes. 3:2. Only the elect are in Christ for Peter says to them: “Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus.” 1 Peter 5:14.

Secondly, being in Christ does not refer to some sort of solidarity that binds Christ and us in one great circle of life. Pantheism is not Biblical. In the incarnation Jesus Christ was just one man, He trod the winepress alone and of the people there was none with him (Isa. 63:3). That he acted in behalf of all men is true for he was constituted of God their federal Head and representative (Isa. 9:6), the second Adam. But none of us actually lived that life nor died that death. Those things were done in our behalf, in our place, vicariously.

To be placed into Christ means to have our names written in heaven in the book of the life of the Lamb (Luke 10:19-20; Rev.



13:8). It means to have a new standing before God. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1. We are accepted as God's children (John 1:12). "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17. Christ is in heaven and we are on earth. To be in Christ means to be justified. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God." Rom. 5:1. It means we are represented at God's right hand (1 John 2:1).

The "in Christ" motif of the New Testament refers to believers in Jesus. Paul makes clear that faith in the gospel places one into Christ. To the Corinthians he wrote: "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." 1 Corinthians 4:15. In the first chapter of Ephesians Paul lists a number of things we have in Christ (Verses 3-11). Then he concludes his sentence saying; "In whom we should be to the praise of his glory who first trusted in Christ." Verse 12. The next sentence confirms the truth that believing places one into Christ, by adding: "In whom ye also trusted after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed." Verse 13. And Paul concludes: "I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus... cease not to give thanks for you." Verses 15-16. Entrance into Christ is by faith alone.

A Letter from New Mexico

Is salvation by faith plus baptism?

Ralph S..... writes:

Dear Richard Marin,

If Jesus Christ, the Son of God came to your house and said to you, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," what would be your response? He also made it plain if you don't believe "that" you will be condemned. If he had said, "If you believe and are baptized I will give you a million dollars!" what would your response be? Would you say "I believe and then demand a million dollars? Do you care at all about what the Lord tells us to do?...

Faith "only" has nothing to do with salvation. 2 Corinthians 4:13: "We too believe and therefore we speak." Faith is an action word; a lack of obedience does not bring us eternal life. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Every case of conversion in the book of Acts says they were baptized...

Catholicism nor Protestantism have anything to do with one's salvation, period! ...Really need one say more than Mark 16:16 "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"?

Ralph S.....

New Mexico, USA

Present Truth responds:

Dear Ralph:

We certainly agree that "a lack of obedience does not bring us eternal life." When the rich young ruler asked Christ what he must do to inherit eternal life the answer was: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." Matt. 19:17. God does not grant eternal life on any other basis than perfect obedience to his law, perfect conformity to his nature.

How are we to be accepted by him on this basis? The answer is faith. By faith we can bring to God the obedience of another. This seems like cheating; but it is not. It is grace.

Christ had in heaven an eternal righteousness—a perfect conformity with the will and nature of God. But when he came to earth he wove another robe of righteousness. Scripture says “He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none.” Luke 3:11. We have no perfect garment, so like Jacob we go before the Father clothed in the garb of our elder brother—Jesus Christ. Everyone who comes to God by him will be accepted.

In the robe that Christ wove while in the flesh is included a perfect conception, a sinless birth, a flawless childhood, a righteous baptism, complete victory over the tempter, a tireless ministry, and the infinite suffering of persecution, torture, crucifixion, and ultimate rejection. If we are in him by faith all this is ours and God pronounces the verdict: “This is my beloved son [or daughter] in whom I am well pleased.” May God grant us faith to trust in another’s righteousness. “He that believeth not shall be damned.” Mark. 16:16.

But you wished to speak of baptism.

It is interesting to note that the Bible repeatedly speaks of things other than faith when referring to *salvation* or *entrance into the kingdom of God*. While salvation is grasped and retained by faith alone (Eph. 2:8; 1 Pet. 1:9) there are other things that accompany salvation. Often Scripture includes these with faith because without them no man shall see God. Consider a few:

purity of heart (Matt. 5:8)
baptism (John 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:21)
confession (Rom. 10:10)
repentance (2 Cor. 7:10)
sanctification (2 Thes. 2:13)
regeneration (Titus 3:5)
holiness (Heb.12:14)

So we believe that the saved of earth will participate in all these things. Those whom God adopts he does not leave unwashed (Eze. 16:1-9). God would have each of his children to be pure in heart, baptized, confessing, repentant, sanctified, regenerate, holy beings. And indeed those who see him will be all of these things.

The question is: are we at liberty to take one of these and place it before justification? Is baptism required in order to become God's child? What does Scripture teach?

In Luke 8: 12 Jesus said those who believe are saved.

In John 3:18 Jesus said that whoever believes in him is not condemned.

In Acts 2:21 Peter said that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

In Acts 16:31 Paul and Silas told the jailer salvation would come to him if he believed.

In Romans 10:10 Paul wrote that it is with our heart that we believe and are justified.

In 1 Corinthians 1:21 Paul wrote that God saves those who believe.

In Ephesians 2:8 Paul wrote that faith is the means of salvation.

In Hebrews 10:39 the author wrote that those who believe are saved.

And in none of these verses is anything added to faith. In none of them is baptism made a prerequisite for divine acceptance. So we conclude that justification is by faith ALONE.

Faith unites us to Jesus and in him we become children of God. When we believe, we enter Christ. When we are baptized we enter his body, the church. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16:16.

The Jerusalem council of Acts 15 dealt with this very issue: "certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised... ye cannot be saved." Acts 15:1. The apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. After much discussion Peter rose up and reminded the brethren that at Cornelius' house the uncircumcised that believed the gospel received the Holy Spirit as a witness that God had accepted them. The conclusion of the council added nothing to faith as the sole means of acceptance with God.

Entrance into Christ, justification, has only one condition. It is faith.

When Mark 16 says "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," we understand that baptism follows divine acceptance and

is one of the signs that follows them that believe. It is the sign of the new covenant. True believers will go on from faith to baptism and their lives will demonstrate the power of God in repentance, confession, regeneration, sanctification, holiness, purity of heart and obedience to all God's commandments.

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What we are in Christ

Righteous (Jeremiah 23:6)

Redeemed (Romans 3:24)

Guiltless (Romans 8:1)

Loved (Romans 8:39)

Sanctified (1 Corinthians 1:2, 30)

New creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Free (Galatians 2:4)

Unified (Galatians 3:28)

Spiritually blessed (Ephesians 1:3)

Complete (Colossians 2:10)

Immortal (2 Timothy 1:10)