

# THE ROAD TO ETERNAL LIFE

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# Introduction

*“. . . Broad is the road that leads to destruction . . . and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:13, 14, New International Version).*

**D**o you believe in many roads to salvation?

Although most churches have formal procedures for admitting believers into their group, their practices differ greatly. Each seems to take a different road. Even their baptismal ceremonies are different. Some sprinkle or pour. Others fully immerse believers in a stream or lake. Some groups baptize babies, while others do not. Still others believe there is no need for baptism at all. Most claim to obtain their authority from the Bible, yet they are widely diverse in their practices. Is there biblical authority for such widely divergent beliefs and customs? And does it really matter, to you or to God?

When you think about establishing a relationship with God, what comes to your mind? Do you envision attending a revival meeting or following a televangelist? How about prayer meetings or church-sponsored bingo games? Perhaps your only contact with religion has been hard-sell door-to-door evangelism or street-corner preachers.

With so many varying and contradictory approaches, it isn't surprising that some people have become cynical of religion altogether. To some, the idea that one can live forever surely must be one of those too-good-to-be-true notions. To the hard-core cynic, baptism may sound like just an empty religious term or quaint custom, and

suggesting that it is a necessary step for eternal life would seem preposterous. Others simply don't know what to make of it.

But what about you? Do you know what the Bible reveals on this vital subject?

Notice what Christ Himself has to say: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44, New King James Version throughout unless noted).

Clearly, coming to God is a process that He starts, and we must choose to accept or reject His way when offered. If we accept, we have a definite process to follow. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter instructed those assembled to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38). Then God gave them His Holy Spirit, which He will also give us if we follow these same steps, enabling us to live the new life to which we have been called.

Baptism represents the most significant commitment a human being can make in this life. Though a simple ceremony, baptism powerfully acknowledges profound changes in one's heart and mind. It symbolizes fully yielding to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

God earnestly desires that we take this path. Through the apostle Peter, God tells us He “is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish *but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9). Accepting His offer allows us to become His children. In John 1:12, we read, “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God . . .”

Baptism, as explained in your Bible, is much more than a means to join a church or just a religious ceremony for infants. It represents a mature decision, made only after careful deliberation. Jesus Christ cautioned anyone who would follow Him to “count the cost” before committing. (See Luke 14:27-33.) Baptism is an act symbolizing the magnitude of that commitment—and a major step on the narrow road that leads to your eternal life.

# Repentance: Your First Step

*“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’” (Matthew 3:1, 2).*

**A**fter God calls us, repentance is the starting point in our relationship with Him. Without repentance, we are cut off from God: “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1, 2).

However, God wants all to repent and become His children (2 Peter 3:9; John 1:12). For this to happen, God in His great mercy begins leading us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Notice how Peter was used by God to instruct those He was calling. In Peter’s first recorded sermon on the Day of Pentecost, he said, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Those listening were “cut to the heart.” They implored Peter and the other apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, “Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:36-38).

But what does it mean to “repent”? Definitions of repentance include: a turning with sorrow from a past course of action; the changing of one’s mind for the better; regret or contrition; sorrow for sin with self-condemnation; abhorrence of past sins; complete turning from sin.

The Bible describes repentance as a profound realization of our sins and resulting sorrow that leads us to change our thoughts and actions. “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Godly sorrow allows us to see how totally corrupt we are as humans and causes us to place our hope in God. It leads to a deep, life-altering commitment. Worldly sorrow, by contrast, is shallow and superficial, producing no real and permanent change.

At its core, repentance is change. It is turning from our previous way of life to serve God. Peter, in his sermon quoted above, described repentance as a personal expression of deep and heartfelt surrender to God, the result of recognizing and acknowledging what Jesus, as our personal Savior, did to reconcile us to God the Father (Romans 5:8-10; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20). Repentance unites us with God the Father and Jesus Christ in an extraordinary relationship.

## The miracle of repentance

Early in our relationship with God, we need to understand that repentance is a miracle. Through the Bible we see the opportunity to repent as a gift from God, possible only when God draws us to Him. Jesus stated plainly, “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him . . .” (John 6:44).

It is impossible for anyone, acting alone, to completely surrender his or her will to God. Humanly we cannot comprehend the depth of change that God desires in our hearts and minds. We need help even to understand what sin is. That’s why God must grant us repentance (Acts 11:18). In addition, we need the will—both the desire and the choice—to repent. This willingness to repent, too, comes from God. “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

Although God “desires all men to be saved,” He doesn’t force anyone to repent (1 Timothy 2:4). His kindness and goodness lead us to

repentance (Romans 2:4), but He doesn't make the choice for us. The decision is still ours. Those who choose to genuinely repent soon realize God is active in their lives—working within them to create a deep desire to make whatever changes are necessary to please Him. They want to learn God's will and what He expects of them. They study God's inspired Word, the Bible, to better understand God's will. They desire to submit to God and live according to His instructions.

Sincere study of God's Word, coupled with a strong desire to yield to His will, soon lets us see in ourselves the selfish desires that dominate the behavior and reasoning of most people. We begin to recognize the pervasive influence that the "carnal mind," as Paul called it, has on our thinking and behavior (Romans 8:7). Before we can repent, God must convict us of sin (John 16:8), helping us to realize how far away we are from God's ways. We must recognize the sin within us and comprehend our deep-rooted hostility to God.

To recognize sin in ourselves is an enormous step. The first step in changing a bad habit or avoiding a wrong act is to recognize the problem and admit that it exists. We must be willing to admit our faults and acknowledge our guilt. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:9, 10).

### **What is sin?**

In today's world, sin is not a popular subject. As a society we search for ways to absolve ourselves of responsibility for our actions. We hear experts say, "He was abused as a child, therefore we cannot hold him responsible for what he did." We reason that, if everybody is doing something, it cannot be all that bad.

But God, through the Bible, goes right to the heart of the matter, clearly defining sin for us: "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). To what law was John referring? He made it clear in other verses in this epistle. "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3, 4). And, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments

are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). Sin is defined as breaking God's commandments and laws.

Why should we worry about transgressing God's laws? Because our eternal life is at stake! Paul warned, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). We readily see sins such as murder, theft and adultery. However, Christ made it clear that we can sin by our very *thoughts*, not just our actions. He said that anger, hatred and lust—our thoughts and attitudes—violate God's commandments against adultery and murder just as surely as our physical actions (Matthew 5:22, 28; 1 John 3:15).

We have all missed the mark. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Paul describes our natural, carnal state apart from God: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God . . . There is none who does good, no, not one . . . Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:10-12, 15-18).

### **Repentance is change from the inside!**

God is not harsh, even though He knows we are sinners. He does, however, require that we surrender our will to Him. He expects us to bring into our lives His way of thinking and living as revealed in the holy Scriptures. He wants us to rid ourselves of our former way of thinking and living and become a "new man" in thought, attitude and character (Ephesians 4:22-24). He tells us to "be renewed in the spirit of your mind" (verse 23).

These admonitions mean for us a lifetime of growth and change, starting with the initial change—the repentance God expects before baptism. He asks us to change our heart and direction in life.

"To be carnally minded is death," said Paul, "but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). We must be willing to let the revealed Word of God change our thinking. That is where real repentance begins. Repentance is our personal choice to let God change us inside and out! James says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you . . ." (James 4:8).

## Follow Jesus Christ's Example of Commandment Keeping

In Matthew 19:16, Jesus was asked what must be done to inherit eternal life. His answer: "If you want to enter life, obey the commandments" (verse 17). Jesus then enumerated enough of the Ten Commandments to make clear which commandments He meant: ". . . 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (verses 18, 19).

Today some people will tell you that keeping the commandments was fulfilled by Christ, so we are no longer required to keep them. Let's notice what Jesus has to say about this idea. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17).

Some try to deny His plain, simple statement by interpreting the verse to mean the law was not abolished until Jesus came and fulfilled it. They then interpret "fulfill" as "bringing to an end," "superseding" or some other synonym for "abolishing." In essence they have Jesus saying, "I have not come to abolish the law, but to abolish it."

Jesus, on the other hand, said

heaven and earth would disappear before the smallest part of the law would do so (verse 18). He said the law would continue until everything is accomplished. Because the fulfillment of many biblical prophecies of Christ's second coming is yet to occur (the prophecies have not yet been accomplished), we know the law has not ceased to exist.

The truth of the matter is that Jesus was speaking to people who believed in keeping all of the Ten Commandments. He reaffirmed the necessity for all who come to Him to do likewise. In Matthew 5-7 Jesus explained how God intended for the Ten Commandments to be kept. By making this explanation, He was fulfilling a prophecy about Himself from Isaiah 42:21: "The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will magnify the law and make it honorable."

### The meaning of *fulfill*

The word *fulfill* in Matthew 5:17 means "fill up," "make full," "fill to the full" or "complete." Jesus came to magnify, or fill completely full, the meaning of God's law. Jesus' teaching that a man who lusts after a woman has already committed adultery in his mind represented Jesus' magnifica-

*"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17, 18).*

tion of all of the Ten Commandments. He explained the full meaning of the commandments. He showed that He expects more than just a legalistic, letter-of-the-law approach; He also expects a submissive, yielded mind.

Jesus further clarifies: "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (verse 19).

Clearly, *fulfill* does not mean "abolish."

### Did Paul change Jesus Christ's teachings?

Another common misunderstanding is that Paul introduced a new gospel, one that made it unnecessary to follow Christ's example of obeying the law. But the New Testament apostles, who were personally taught by Jesus, certainly did not agree with this idea.

John said: "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But

whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:3-6).

Paul himself refuted this erroneous idea, saying, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Far from condemning the law, Paul said, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12) and, "I delight in the law of God" (Romans 7:22).

We must avoid reading our own ideas into the Bible. Our Savior warned against trusting our own ideas instead of the laws of God: ". . . This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men . . . All too well you reject the commandment of God that you may keep your tradition" (Mark 7:6-9).

We, too, must be sure we follow Christ's example instead of our own ideas.

God's mercy is so great that He will forgive us, provided that we forsake both our way (our wrong behavior) and our thoughts. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the LORD" (Isaiah 55:7, 8).

### Learn to think like God

If change originates from the inside, with our thoughts, right behavior will follow. Godly behavior is only the fruit of righteous convictions, desires, emotions and attitudes—the result of our thoughts.

But how can we learn to think like God? How can we change our thoughts? God reveals His thoughts and mind through His Word, the Bible. It contains His values, standards and principles. We learn to think like God by reading and studying the Bible.

Proverbs 2:1-5 expresses it clearly: "My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God."

Jesus confirmed the importance of God's Word as our guide to life. He said, "It is written: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). One with a truly repentant attitude will search God's Word for instruction on how to live.

### Fruits of repentance

Repentance was an integral part of the message of John the Baptist, who "went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3). Notice that his message connected baptism, repentance and the remission (forgiveness) of sin. One cannot properly discuss one of these topics without discussing the other two.

John was popular among the people of his day. Crowds followed him, asking him for baptism. But not all were welcomed by John.

Some simply had no comprehension of repentance. John admonished them: "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance . . ." (Luke 3:7, 8).

John's refusal to baptize everyone astonished them. Just what were these fruits he demanded? What did he expect? They asked him, "What shall we do then?" (verse 10).

John's answer is one of the most penetrating and revealing descriptions of true repentance in the Bible. He showed that real repentance produces fruit: genuine results from a change of heart. John did not provide a dictionary definition of the words *repentance* and *fruits*. Instead he gave examples of how people need to change to be truly repentant before God.

"He answered and said to them, 'He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.' Then the tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than what is appointed for you.' Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, 'And what shall we do?' So he said to them, 'Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages'" (Luke 3:11-14).

It was common for the tax collectors to charge more for taxes than was provided for by law, greedily pocketing the difference. Soldiers augmented their income by extortion, intimidating and abusing the very people they were supposed to protect. Because these public servants failed to recognize their own failings, John chose examples that hit home to them, asking for evidence of repentance from the heart. He demanded personal sacrifice, given willingly, that showed genuine concern for others. He told them to look inside themselves and examine the motives driving their attitudes and actions.

The specific fruit John called on these people to produce was a change in their outward behavior. However, he chose examples from their behavior that typify the self-centered, self-serving nature in all of us.

Jesus makes it clear that the changes needed most come from the heart, from our thoughts. He said, "'What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts . . .'" (Mark 7:20, 21). He then listed ways these inward attitudes show themselves: "Adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts,

## Grace, Works and Obedience

Like John, Jesus Christ said we must bear fruit. "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit . . . By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (John 15:5, 8).

Some are confused because Jesus clearly expects us to produce fruit. They interpret this to mean that we somehow earn our salvation. Earning our salvation, of course, is impossible. Salvation is a free, undeserved gift from God. We could not earn salvation in a hundred lifetimes of performing good deeds.

We are not saved by our works. Only the sacrifice of Christ's shed blood can cleanse us from our sins. Our thoughts cannot accomplish this, nor can any other actions we can take. Because Christ is alive and actively involved in converting us, we will be saved by His life.

Paul made this clear: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:8-10). Christ living in us enables us to do good works (Galatians 2:20).

Grace, works and obedience are

complementary rather than contradictory terms. The word *grace* comes from a Greek word that means "gift" or "favor." Salvation, or eternal life, is a gift we receive by grace (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8, 9). No amount of works or effort on our part could ever earn us eternal life. However, eternal life is not free. Christ paid for it with His life so we could receive the gift of salvation (Acts 20:28).

### Conditions for eternal life

But there are conditions. The first is that we repent. Repentance earns us nothing; we deserve no favors because we repent. But repentance is required. Why? Repentance is a condition for forgiveness (Acts 2:38). God simply will not forgive those who willingly continue in sin. Paul wrote: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Romans 6:1, 2).

We must change the direction of our lives as a prerequisite for receiving God's gift of salvation. That is what both Christ and the apostles taught. Paul "declared . . . [we] should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance" (Acts 26:20). Works demonstrate our repentance to God, but they will never earn us the right to demand anything from God so we

could boast that we deserve eternal life. That can never be.

God expects us to include good works in our lives to demonstrate repentance and the love and faith of God in us. James explicitly states that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:20, 26), and Paul makes it plain that God saves us by grace through faith for the very purpose of producing good works, even though those good works cannot earn our salvation.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*" (Ephesians 2:8-10). Why should this be so difficult for people to believe and accept? It is simply walking in Christ's footsteps, following His example (1 John 2:6).

### Purpose of good works

What is the purpose of good works? Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Though works do not earn us eternal life, they do glorify, or honor, God, and God requires that we honor Him by the way we live. People who refuse to include works in their lives are, whether they realize it or not, dishonoring God. "They profess to know God, but in

works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work" (Titus 1:16).

Do works ever earn us anything? Revelation 20:12 says the dead are going to be judged "according to their works." In John 14:2, 3, we find Jesus explaining that He would "prepare a place" for His followers. In the coming Kingdom of God there will be various positions of authority and rulership that God will grant to those who overcome (Revelation 2:26, 3:21). The resurrected saints will rule with Jesus Christ in His Kingdom (Revelation 20:4, 6). Through submission to God, allowing His Spirit to lead us, and living a life of good works, we build righteous, godly character that will enable us to rule with Jesus Christ.

Though our works will not earn us salvation, they will determine our reward in His Kingdom. Jesus explained this in His parable of the talents (Matthew 25:20-29). Our Lord also made this clear in Revelation 22:12 when He said, "I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."

In verse 14 John further says, "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter through the gates into the city." Through God's grace, the gift of eternal life is given to those who demonstrate their faith in God by their obedience.

covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man” (verses 21-23).

To some, the change God wants in us can appear so overwhelming that repentance and conversion to God’s way of thinking seem impossible. And that’s the point. Without God’s help, they *are* impossible. When Christ compared entering the Kingdom of God to passing a camel through the eye of a needle, the disciples asked in amazement, “Who then can be saved?” (See Mark 10:23-26.) Jesus replied, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible” (verse 27). To truly repent, we must learn to trust and rely on God more than on ourselves.

In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus contrasted the attitude of an outwardly righteous Pharisee who trusted in himself for his righteousness with the attitude of a repentant tax collector who correctly perceived his own spiritual inadequacy and looked to God for help to become righteous. Jesus explained that God’s forgiveness (justification) is extended to those who humbly look to God rather than to themselves for the power to repent and change their behavior.

### Seek God’s help

If you sincerely desire to commit your life to God, ask Him for His gift of repentance. Tell Him your intentions in prayer. Seek His help. Don’t rely on your own ability to perceive your sins and change them all by yourself. If you have not yet developed the habit of regular prayer and feel awkward about praying, understand that God will help you. Jesus promised, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). If you sincerely want to follow His commandments and instruction from the Bible, tell Him.

Faith in Him is the key. Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Your part is to act on faith, then trust God to answer your prayers. This is one of the most important steps in your entire life. Don’t delay! Take the time now—talk to God.

Let’s now examine the significance of baptism.

# Water Baptism and Laying On of Hands

*“But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12, NIV).*

**A**fter one repents, one’s next step is water baptism, a primary principle of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 6:1, 2). Those who wish to travel the road to eternal life must understand and take part in two basic ceremonies—water baptism and laying on of hands—to receive the Holy Spirit.

The words *baptize* and *baptism* are derived from the Greek verb *baptizo*, meaning “to dip or immerse.” *Dip* means “to immerse and then quickly take out.” *Immerse* means “to plunge under, so as to cover completely.” From these definitions, it is clear that immersion is the biblical method of baptism. Baptism by immersion symbolizes our death and burial. Rising out of the baptismal water symbolizes a resurrection to a new life in Christ (Romans 6:3-5).

Notice how Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. The two men had stopped by a river, “and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.” They then “came up out of the water” (Acts 8:38, 39). Why did they both go into the water? So

Philip could baptize the eunuch by immersing him completely under the water. Then, rising from the water, the eunuch could begin a new life in Christ.

Jesus instructed His followers, “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” (Matthew 28:19). The Greek word here for “in” can also be translated “into.” When a minister of God submerges a new believer under the water, performing the symbolic burial of the “old man,” he performs the act in the name of, or by the authority of, Jesus Christ. He also puts the person in, or into, a new relationship with God.

### Death and burial

Baptism symbolizes our being united with Christ in death. It pictures Christ’s death, as well as our own symbolic death and burial. “Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death . . .” (Romans 6:3, 4).

In God’s eyes we are “united together in the likeness of His death . . . 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” (verses 5, 6).

Before the miracle of repentance, we are slaves of sin. Paul explained to the Romans that, once we are baptized into Christ, we are no longer trapped in sin (Romans 6:3, 4). “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 [through the symbolic death of baptism] has been freed from sin” (verses 6, 7).

But we are redeemed—bought back—from enslavement to sin by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:18; Revelation 5:9). Having been purchased by God, we now belong to Him. “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Being converted from slaves of sin to slaves of righteousness, we no longer serve sin (Romans 6:18). Our new way of thinking is one that bears the fruits of repentance (Galatians 5:22, 23). As Galatians 5:24, 25 puts it: “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh

with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

### Resurrection to newness of life

Baptism not only pictures our death to sin, it also pictures our being resurrected to a new life in Christ: “. . . Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). Once we are baptized and have hands laid on us, God gives us His Holy Spirit as a “deposit” of our ultimate change to spirit and eternal life (2 Corinthians 1:22, NIV). Baptism, then, is the symbolic burial of our old self and the beginning of a new life as an obedient servant of God.

Paul compares our newness of life to a change of clothing: “For all you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:27, NIV). We put on, or clothe, ourselves with Christ by replacing wrong attitudes, actions and habits with right ones. Colossians 3:12 says, “As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly

## Should Children Be Baptized?

In Colossians 2:11, 12, repentance is compared with circumcision. “In him [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism . . .” (NIV). The apostle Paul also said, in Romans 2:29, that circumcision is “of the heart.”

Physical circumcision—the surgical removal of the male foreskin, or prepuce—demonstrated for Abraham’s descendants that they were in a covenant with God. Circumcision of the heart serves a similar purpose.

When we change our way of thinking and behavior, we demonstrate our submission to God and our New Testament covenant with Him.

Even though Paul likened baptism to the practice of physical circumcision, he did not mean that children should be baptized. Jesus did bless little children, but this was quite different from baptism (Mark 10:13-16). Unlike physical circumcision, which is best performed in infancy (Genesis 17:12), baptism must wait until we are mature enough to understand repentance. The seriousness of baptism clearly makes it a decision for those who are mature.

loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (NIV).

Our new life starts us down the road that ultimately leads to eternal life and our entrance into the Kingdom of God at the resurrection, when Jesus Christ returns to this earth. “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Romans 6:5).

Notice that our resurrection *shall be* in the *future*, at which time we will be changed into spirit (1 Corinthians 15:51, 52). Even though we may not comprehend what it means to be changed into spirit, we can rely on John’s words in 1 John 3:2: “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

### Laying on of hands

The next step on our road to eternal life is the receiving of God’s Holy Spirit, which comes through “laying on of hands,” as described in Hebrews 6:2. From the Scriptures, we find that water baptism is followed by the ceremony of laying on of hands, at which time we receive the Holy Spirit. Acts 19:6 says, “And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them . . .”

Acts 8:12 shows that “both men and women” in Samaria understood, repented and were baptized. However, the Holy Spirit was not given until Peter and John prayed and laid their hands upon them. Verses 15-17 say: “When they arrived, they [Peter and John] prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John *placed their hands on them*, and they received the Holy Spirit” (NIV).

We see that the Holy Spirit is given to us by the *prayer* of and *laying on of hands* by God’s ordained ministers, serving as His representatives.

### Why we need the Holy Spirit

What is the role of God’s Spirit in our lives? On our own, we may strive, struggle and pray earnestly for victory over a sinful habit, but still come up short. After baptism and the laying on of hands, the same

Spirit that leads us to repentance continues to work in us even more powerfully to help us see and overcome our sins and shortcomings.

Because it is impossible to be overcomers by keeping God’s law in its full spiritual intent on our own, Jesus said He would send the Holy Spirit to guide and help us (John 14:16-18). When we do all we humanly can to be obedient, God gives us, through His Holy Spirit, the additional help we need to obey His truth and have a sound mind reflecting godly love (Acts 5:32; John 16:13; 2 Timothy 1:7).

His Spirit helps us overcome the weaknesses and selfish desires of human nature (Romans 7:13-20). It enables us to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24). It provides us comfort during trials and allows the mind of Christ to work in us (Philippians 2:5). Through it God inspires and leads us, and makes us His very own children (Romans 8:13, 14; 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11).

Overcoming our habitual sins and selfish nature does not happen instantly. It is a lifelong process, often involving great effort. The apostle Paul, more than 20 years after his miraculous conversion, described his continuing struggle to overcome the evil desires within himself. Those selfish pulls were so strong that he called them another “law” working within himself: “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing . . . So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members” (Romans 7:18, 19, 21-23, NIV).

But Paul also noted that, with the help of God’s Spirit, that sinful nature can be subdued: “For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13).

Some mistakenly believe that, once a person is baptized, God takes over and does everything. This is a misleading and dangerous concept. God expects us to resist sin and strive to make His Spirit an active part of our daily lives. In 2 Timothy 1:6, Paul urged Timothy to “stir up the

gift of God [the Holy Spirit] which is in you through the laying on of my hands,” showing that we have a personal responsibility in our salvation. Timothy needed to “stir up” God’s Spirit—not just sit back and let God take over. Paul restated, in Philippians 2:12, that we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

### The miracle of transformation

God’s Spirit working within us helps us change and begin

## Should We Want to Be Baptized With Fire?

John the Baptist proclaimed that the Messiah would come and baptize “with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matthew 3:11). Some believe they need to receive this baptism of fire. To understand what John was saying, let’s take a closer look at this passage. In verse 8 John demanded evidence from the Pharisees and Sadducees of their repentance from sin, making use of two metaphors to drive home his point. First, he noted that, when a tree does not bear good fruit, it is cut down at the roots and burned up (verse 10). Jesus repeated this principle in Matthew 7:19.

John’s second metaphor was of winnowing wheat. Winnowing means separating the wheat from the husks, stalks and chaff. John this time was picturing how Jesus will deal with people who bear no fruit. “His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will

burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:12).

Both examples show the major theme of the Bible, that God wants us to become like Christ and produce fruit! For this, Jesus promises us eternal life, which is the message of the gospel. Those refusing to repent and change their way of thinking will be consumed by fire (Malachi 4:1).

Speaking of attitudes of sin, Jesus proclaims: “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). Revelation 20:15 adds, “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

This lake of fire is the second death, the baptism of fire, for the unrepentant, and is certainly not something that we should desire to experience.

producing right fruits in our lives. Galatians 5:22, 23 lists the fruits of God’s Spirit—love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness and self-control, among others—that become increasingly evident in us as we grow spiritually.

Producing the fruit of righteousness is important. It is also important for us to understand that the credit for that fruit goes to God. Paul expressed to the Philippians his desire to be acceptable to God by “not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Philippians 3:9). Notice that Paul trusted God to produce righteousness in him, knowing “it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

When God calls us to be His children, He initiates a change in us from our formerly proud, selfish, disobedient ways. He transforms us by the renewing, or changing, of our mind. Paul told the Romans, “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). Paul explained that this transformation is not instantaneous. It requires ongoing changes in our thinking and outlook that permanently affect the way we live. We become “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (verse 1).

Paul also admonished, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). He described both the attitude and behavior that would be evident in the converted mind: “Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (verses 2-4). Having the mind of Christ is what makes the miracle of transformation possible.

The symbolic meaning of baptism is profound. It represents both forgiveness of sins and a newness of life in Christ. It should change our lives forever. However, these blessings have come at a great price. Jesus Christ sacrificed His own life so we may gain ours through the forgiveness of our sins.

# Forgiveness of Sin

*“And Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins . . .’” (Acts 2:38, Revised Standard Version).*

**H**ow are we forgiven, and where do baptism and Jesus Christ fit in? The Bible says God forgives our sins and mistakes. Through faith in Christ’s sacrifice, we have all of our sins and the guilt we harbor entirely removed. We are then completely clean in God’s sight (Acts 22:16). God is perfect, and He can forget perfectly. It is comforting to know that He not only forgives our sins, but totally forgets them. “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more” (Hebrews 8:12).

David was awed by God’s complete mercy and forgiveness. He wrote, “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalms 103:11, 12).

Through the prophet Isaiah, God tells us of the forgiveness that follows when we repent and turn to Him: “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good . . . Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:16-18).

Paul made it clear that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom

of God (1 Corinthians 6:9). He then explained how we are cleansed and made right with God: “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (verse 11). Jesus Christ cleanses the church “with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26).

This washing away of the accumulated filth of our sins is symbolized by baptism. Before Paul was baptized, Ananias said, “Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). By plunging our entire body under water, we are symbolically cleansed throughout.

The water is only a symbol. In reality, the cleansing and reconciliation to God are by the blood of Jesus Christ, our Savior (Romans 5:8-10; Acts 20:28). Without His sacrifice, our sins cannot be washed away.

## Leaving guilt behind

Fortunately, God does not keep a scorecard with good deeds on one side and bad ones on the other. Our slate is wiped clean of every sin if we confess and repent of our sins and ask for His forgiveness. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1: 9). No good deeds, no physical effort of our own, can ever repay God for the precious gifts of forgiveness and the cleansing of our guilt.

It is normal for us to feel guilty when we sin, and the pain of penalties for past mistakes often lingers. Guilt, however, need not remain as debilitating baggage dragging us down. Guilt can spawn needless feelings of inferiority and bitterness. After we repent, God totally forgives our sins, and there remains no reason to feel guilty unless we sin again. Even then, we should immediately repent, ask God to forgive us and put the guilt behind us. God, in His infinite mercy, applies Christ’s sacrifice to cover and remove our sin and guilt.

Being confident of God’s forgiveness, we are told to “draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22, NIV). A clear conscience is one of the most wonderful gifts God gives His children.

King David was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). He was not perfect, but he did strive to prevent sin from separating him from God. In Psalms 139:23, 24, David prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." He also prayed: "Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalms 51:9, 10).

### How is sin forgiven?

Sin is the transgression of God's sacred law (1 John 3:4). The penalty we all have earned for sinning is death (Romans 6:23). This cause-and-effect relationship is absolute and automatic. The penalty of death must be paid. We cannot jump out of a 10-story building, futilely trying to break the law of gravity, without paying a penalty for our actions. In the same way, when we break God's spiritual law, the death penalty for doing so must be paid. Forgiveness does not mean removing the penalty for our sins, but the transferring of the penalty from us to someone capable of accepting and paying that penalty in our place. The question is, who pays that penalty?

Because all have sinned and the death penalty hangs over everyone, God knew that a Savior was needed to die for the sins of the world. Notice Peter's words: ". . . You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1 Peter 1:18-20).

The apostle John spoke of God's great love for us and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that pays the penalty for our sins, making forgiveness possible. "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:2); and, "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9, 10).

Because He set a perfect example and, as the very Son of God,

lived a sinless life in the flesh, Jesus Christ became the *perfect sacrifice* for humanity's sins.

### Perfect love and sacrifice

The incredible truth is that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Even more amazing is that God loved us when we were still sinners; we were still under the death penalty when He called us to conversion (Romans 5:8).

Jesus Christ has a deep, burning desire to help mankind share eternity with Him (Matthew 23:37). Paul said we should be "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

It was anything but joyous to go through scourging and crucifixion, an incredibly brutal and torturous form of execution. Isaiah 52:14 prophesied that Christ's appearance would be "disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness" (NIV). Psalms 22:1-20 describes some of the thoughts and feelings of anguish and pain Jesus faced when enduring His betrayal and death. Yet He had the spiritual vision to look past His own suffering to the joy of spending eternity with others who would choose the road to eternal life (Hebrews 12:2).

He willingly accepted the curse, the death penalty meant for us, "having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')" (Galatians 3:13).

Jesus Christ's sacrifice was so complete that no sin ever committed is too big or small for God to forgive (Psalms 103:3). Paul called himself the chief of sinners, yet God used him powerfully after his conversion (1 Timothy 1:15). Throughout the book of Psalms, King David praised God's mercy. He saw God's mercy as endless, filling the earth (Psalms 119:64).

Such examples inspire great hope. No matter what our background or past mistakes, upon true repentance and baptism God promises complete forgiveness.

Humanly devised teachings of psychology can make us feel good

about ourselves and seek to improve our self-image. None of these human efforts, however, can forgive sin and completely remove the spiritual penalty associated with it. Only Christ's sacrifice can permanently cleanse and forgive us.

### Burying the past

As God forgets our old sins, so should we. With our old sins now buried in the grave as pictured by baptism, we should not go back and dig them up. Considering the symbolism involved, this would be akin to grave-robbing. God is not a grave robber, and He does not want us to be.

For some, grave-robbing in the form of continuing to fret about past sins may seem like repentance. However, God wants repentance, not penance. God does not want us to throw old sins back into His face by continuing to hang onto them. He expects us to trust Him and His desire to completely forgive and forget.

We need to learn from our mistakes, but, once we have done so, we need to leave them buried in the past. We are to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). An individual who does this, in God's eyes, becomes a new person, someone completely forgiven as though he never sinned.

It is important that we see ourselves this way. We must focus on the future. Paul expressed this concept in Philippians 3:13, 14 when he said, ". . . 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."

Now that we have seen how forgiveness is possible through Christ's perfect sacrifice, we need to understand how we can stay the course. In the next chapter we will see how to stay on the road to eternal life.

## Staying the Course

*"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).*

**B**aptism and the related steps we must take are only the beginning of the road to eternal life. Before we arrive at our ultimate destination, however, there are miles of road to travel. In this chapter we take a look at some of the aspects of our journey revealed by our road map, the Bible. Remember that we are traveling a narrow road (Matthew 7:14, NIV). A clear sense of purpose and direction can help us stay the course.

When we respond to God's calling through repentance and baptism, many blessings and opportunities await us. Our minds will change. We will grow in wisdom, knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 2:1-11). We will learn to think and act as God thinks and acts.

Trials will come and sacrifices will be required (Matthew 10:35-39). These tests help us build godly character. James, half brother of Jesus Christ, said: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4, NIV).

Jesus Christ cautions us to count the cost of traveling this road: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid

## Baptized Into a Spiritual Body

One is not baptized into any sect or denomination. Rather, one becomes a member of the spiritual Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 2:19-22).

In 1 Corinthians 12:13 we find that "by one Spirit we were all baptized into *one body*—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit."

This body is called the Church of God (Acts 20:28). Membership in this Church is granted by God upon genuine repentance and baptism and is not determined by men or human organizations. The Greek word for "church" is *ekklesia*, meaning "called-out ones." Simply put, God calls those He chooses out of this society to be part of His spiritual Church.

Jesus said His disciples, or followers, would need to be taught (Matthew 28:19, 20). In Ephesians 4:11-13 Paul also said, "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

We see here that the Church,

as the body of Christ, has an obligation and responsibility to help Christians grow spiritually, which requires working together under the guidance of called and faithful ministers of God. God admonishes us to strive for unity and recognize the need we have for each other (1 Corinthians 12:12-25; Ephesians 4:1-3).

Finding a church, or a called-out group of believers, in which we can learn sound doctrine and fellowship with people of like mind is important in staying on the road to eternal life.

Hebrews 10:24, 25 tells us, "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 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."

We in the United Church of God recognize the need to provide opportunities for God's people to assemble and receive biblical instruction and fellowship. Meeting regularly with God's people will be a vital aid to your spiritual growth.

Information on how to find the nearest congregation of the United Church of God can be found at the end of this booklet. Visitors are always welcome.

the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish." (Luke 14:28-30). Speaking to one potential follower who wanted to impose conditions on his commitment, Jesus said, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Jesus expects His followers to finish what they start.

Just as a small child learns to walk, we may be wobbly at first, stumbling in this new way of life. The temptations and trials we face will sometimes cause us to stagger and fall. But remember that God and Jesus Christ are there to comfort and help us each step of the way. Our job is to keep trying and to become mature Christians. Paul said: "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5: 13, 14, NIV).

Living God's way must always remain our priority. We must continually "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). Keys that can help us remain oriented to God's way of life include regular prayer and the study of God's Word. As already noted in this booklet, fellowshiping with other believers can be a tremendous encouragement in living our new lives dedicated to God. In Matthew 7:21 Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

Exercising free will, we choose what we will do, but Jesus clearly expects that we do our part in remaining faithful to Him. As explained earlier, we must produce fruit in our lives that is pleasing to God.

### The end of the road: the Kingdom of God

Now let's notice a few things about the coming Kingdom of God and eternal life, the end of our spiritual journey. We should remember that the Kingdom of God is the heart of the gospel message Jesus Christ taught. Mark 1:14, 15, says that "Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.'" When Jesus briefly came back to earth

after His resurrection, He continued to speak to His disciples about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

Jesus Christ will return to earth and establish the Kingdom of God. “Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’” (Revelation 11:15).

The Kingdom of God will be a literal kingdom ruling over the earth, replacing all human government and authority. “. . . ‘The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever’” (Daniel 2:44).

The early Christians fixed their eyes firmly on the future Kingdom of God. Paul said, “And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom . . .” (2 Timothy 4:18). And Acts 8:12 explains that this was a major reason for people believing God’s truth and choosing to be baptized: “But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.” We, too, should “believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

### **We will inherit all things**

Today, if we remain faithful to God throughout our lifetimes, we will share with Christ the role of kings and priests in His coming Kingdom (Revelation 1:6). We can look forward to becoming spirit and living forever (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54). As His resurrected children, we will inherit all things from God (Matthew 5:5; Revelation 21:1-7; Hebrews 2:6-8).

Even though it is always possible, in this life, for us to deny God and lose out on salvation, God speaks as if our salvation is sure. For those willing to commit their lives to Him, God offers this wonderful perspective in Ephesians 1:13, 14: “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise . . . the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

As long as we actively seek God’s will and allow His Holy Spirit to work in our lives, our eventual salvation is guaranteed. Yes, God promises to help us every step of the way, through every turn in the road, if we will repent, have faith in Him for the forgiveness of our sins, be baptized and look to Him and His coming Kingdom.

### **Now what?**

Now that you know what to do, will you act on it, or will you let this precious calling from God go unheeded? Through the prophet Isaiah, God gives us an invitation and a promise: “Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6, 7).

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14, Paul writes, “But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God *chose you to be saved* through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter” (NIV).

If God is calling you, will you respond?

The apostle Peter also wrote, “Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:10, 11, NIV).

*This is the only road to eternal life.*

## MAILING ADDRESSES

### UNITED STATES:

United Church of God, *an International Association*  
P.O. Box 661780  
Arcadia, CA 91066 U.S.A.  
Phone: (818) 294-0800 Fax: (818) 294-0808

### AUSTRALIA:

United Church of God–Australia  
GPO Box 535  
Brisbane, Qld. 4001  
Australia  
Phone: 075 5 35 6030 Fax: 075 5 35 6106

### BAHAMAS:

United Church of God  
P.O. Box N8873  
Nassau  
Bahamas  
Phone: (809) 324-3169 Fax: (809) 364-5566

### CANADA:

United Church of God, *an International Association*  
9251-8 Yonge St. #303  
Richmond Hill, ON  
L4C 9T3 Canada  
Phone: (416) 231-9379, (800) 338-7779 Fax: (416) 231-8238

### SOUTH AFRICA:

United Church of God  
P.O. Box 4345  
2125 Randburg  
South Africa  
Phone: 011 792-4601 Fax: 011 791-0711

### SPANISH-SPEAKING AREAS:

United Church of God  
P.O. Box 458  
Big Sandy, TX 75755 U.S.A.  
Phone: (903) 636-4928

### UNITED KINGDOM:

United Church of God (U.K.)  
P.O. Box 5929  
Thatcham, Berkshire RG19 6YX  
United Kingdom  
Phone: 01635-528063 Fax: 01635-522797