

YOUR BAPTISMAL CLASS NOTES

INTRODUCTION

For many years I have entertained the idea of putting the lessons that I think necessary for anyone about to undergo baptism into a small, handy booklet, which they could keep even after the baptismal service. When I was baptised in 1980 I was given some notes, which I kept for many years and were only lost as the files in my office began to reach the ceiling. As I recall how handy those notes were for helping me to keep first things first, I have always felt that I should do a similar work for those whom I baptise. Well, in your hands is the first offering in realising this dream. This booklet contains “your baptismal class notes”.

The whole idea behind a baptismal class is to help you understand what has happened to you, now that you have become a Christian. Once you have understood that, our interest is to give you the basics to help you see what lies ahead of you as a Christian, so that you can grow up spiritually healthy. Of course, this being a class meant to prepare you for baptism, we will also need to give you sufficient information about baptism so that you go through it meaningfully. As you will soon see, it is a lot more than just getting wet! Finally, since after baptism it is assumed that you will join the membership of a local church, these lessons are meant to

help you understand the responsibilities and privileges of church membership. Therefore, this booklet will cover four topics, namely:

1. How You Became a Christian
2. How You Grow as a Christian
3. What Baptism Is All About
4. What Church Membership Is All About

After the first edition of these notes, I decided to include questions to encourage further thinking over the issues taught in these pages. The questions can be used for discussion purposes at the end of a teaching session, or they can be used as homework to encourage the candidates to do some personal reflection between lessons. Whichever way you decide to use them, they will certainly challenge you further.

I have written these notes for someone who has just become a Christian, and so I have kept clear of the theological jargon and secondary details that are native air for those who have been walking with the Lord for years. So, those of you who have delayed your baptism until you are spiritually grey-haired will find the notes too simple. The milk in these pages is not tailor-made for you but for those who are getting baptised at the right time. It is a small price you have to pay for eating a meal meant for spiritual babies!

– CONRAD MBEWE
Kabwata Baptist Church, Lusaka
October 2003

HOW YOU BECAME A CHRISTIAN

Becoming a Christian is the most glorious experience anyone can ever undergo on this side of eternity. It is to undergo a total revolution. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are all involved in the making of a Christian. The Bible says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). So, if you are a Christian, you have not just accepted some new teachings and rules to live by. You have been made totally new. How did that come about?

- 1. The Holy Spirit showed you that you were a sinner worthy of damnation in hell.** You obviously learnt this through the Word of God, as it was shared with you or as you read it. Truths like “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23) became very real to you. You realised that the God who created the universe is a holy being, and that, if you were to appear before him on the judgement day as you were, he would without hesitation send you to hell. You knew that you had broken his holy law times without number since you were born, by your thoughts, your words and your actions. You not only realised that you had a bad record in heaven but that you also had a bad heart on earth. You saw as never before that you were a slave to sin (John 8:34). Your heart was a sin factory. You, therefore, realised that you needed a double cure if you were ever to go to heaven.
- 2. The Holy Spirit showed you that in Jesus’ life and death you had a sufficient remedy for your sin.** Again you obviously learnt this through the Word of God. You realised that the Son of God became a son of man, so that you—a son of man—could become a son of God (John 1:1-2, 10-14). Hence, Jesus became very precious to you because you saw that he took your debt upon himself and paid it with his very life (1 Peter 2:24-25). So you saw that your salvation lies not with a formula but with a person—Jesus Christ. You also realised

that your salvation was centred upon the cross where Jesus died for you. As the Bible says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Finally, you sensed that you were being invited to seek pardon from God only through this finished work of Jesus. You realised that there was no other way of salvation (John 3:18). You, as it were, heard Jesus saying, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28, ESV). So, you came!

- 3. You then repented and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.** It is this response of repentance and faith that the Bible refers to as conversion. It was at this point that you were saved. Perhaps previously you tried to do good works in order to please God, but this time you realised that God must save you by grace and by grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). The Bible says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). To repent is to admit that you are a sinner and to forsake everything you know to be sinful in God’s eyes. To have faith in Jesus is to believe everything that God says about his Son and to entrust your life to him as your only hope of salvation. That is what you did. And on that day you became a possessor of eternal life. You passed from death to life!
- 4. God the Father justified you and adopted you as his child.** In response to your repentance and faith, God pardoned you, declared you righteous and adopted you into his family. This pardon and gift of righteousness is not something you experienced subjectively. It took place in your records in heaven. God wiped away all your sins and declared you righteous on the basis of your faith in what Jesus did for you (Galatians 2:15-16). He also gave you a new legal status, and this is true whether you feel it or not. Henceforth, you were to be treated as a son of God, and because you are a son, he has also made you an heir (Galatians 4:1-7). So, although you may not feel

like it, and although the world may not acknowledge that about you, you are a pardoned child of God now!

- 5. The Holy Spirit came to dwell in you and began the process of sanctifying you.** While God the Father was justifying and adopting you, the Holy Spirit was indwelling you and beginning to make you more like Christ (Romans 8:5-14). This is in the realm of subjective experience, and it was because of this that you were able to notice the difference in your likes and dislikes. You lost interest in the music and pleasures of the world, and instead developed an insatiable appetite for spiritual things. You now wanted to read the Bible and pray. You wanted to spend time in fellowship with Christians and to tell the world about Jesus. The Bible says, “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10, ESV). This is only the start of a work of God in your soul that will continue, with your cooperation, until you die.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Describe how you became a Christian, and try to identify some of the stages of conversion you have learnt in this study in your personal testimony.
2. Why is repenting of sin not enough to make God accept us in heaven? Why is it crucial that we should also believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? [Hint: See Jeremiah 2:22.]
3. What would happen to you if, as a Christian, you sinned against God and you died just before you could confess your sin to him? [Hint: See Hebrews 10:11-18.]
4. What are some of the things that make you doubt that you are a Christian? Can you answer those doubts from the Word of God?

HOW YOU GROW AS A CHRISTIAN

Growing as a Christian does not happen automatically. The Bible says, “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:12-13). God works in you as a Christian, but you must work out your salvation by cooperating with him. How? There are a number of activities which are calculated to give the Holy Spirit the raw materials that he needs to make you more and more like Christ. These are:

1. **Reading the Bible:** This is the way in which God talks to you, as a Father talking to his child. It is a very important part of your spiritual growth (2 Timothy 3:14-17). You must read the Bible every day! There are many daily Bible reading guides that are available, and I would strongly recommend that you use one that takes you slowly through large sections of the Bible systematically. If you do not have one, you could read sections of the Bible and then ask yourself the following questions:
 - a. Is there any fact about God for me to know?
 - b. Is there any example for me to follow?
 - c. Is there any command for me to obey?
 - d. Is there any error for me to avoid?
 - e. Is there any sin for me to forsake?
 - f. Is there any promise for me to claim?

Always read your Bible with a notebook beside you so that you can take note of the main lesson(s) for the day. Do not read primarily in order to help others. Read for yourself. As a new Christian, you need food to grow. Begin your Bible reading with a prayer asking God to enable you by his Holy Spirit to understand what he is saying in the portion of Scripture you are reading that day. We would do well to follow the psalmist who understood this need and prayed to God, “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law” (Psalm 119:18).

-
2. **Praying:** This is the way in which you talk with God. It is best to always pray after you have read the Bible and meditated upon it. That way you will be responding to what God has just said to you and what you have already pondered. Most young Christians do not know how to pray. So, I encourage young Christians who are learning to pray to use the acronym A-C-T-S as a guide. Obviously, as they grow in the faith, they will not need these “crutches” anymore. But they are a very helpful start. A-C-T-S stands for:
- a. **Adoration:** This is the time you spend in prayer worshipping God for who he is and for his wonderful works. In prayer we often rush straight to what we want from God. That is wrong! We are not going before a mighty servant, but we are approaching an almighty sovereign. Hence it is important to pause first and acknowledge who he is and the wonderful works that he has done (Psalm 103).
 - b. **Confession:** This is the time you spend in prayer admitting your sin to God (Psalm 51). As long as you live in this world you will always sin against God (1 John 1:8). Sometimes we sin against God through our actions, sometimes it is through the words we speak and sometimes it is through sinful thoughts. Again, sometimes we sin against God by doing wrong things (sins of commission), but sometimes we sin against him by not doing right things (sins of omission). When we pray to God, we should be mindful of our sins and confess them to God. This relationship with God is too important not to take it seriously—you must come to God with honest lips (Psalm 145:18).
 - c. **Thanksgiving:** This is the time you spend in prayer thanking God for all the things that he gives you (Psalm 107:1). This will include life, family, friends, work or school, strength, peace, church, etc. Often we take a lot of God’s blessings for granted, until he takes them away from us—then we start

to grumble. We must be grateful to him for all his blessings while we are still enjoying them.

- d. Supplication:** This is the time you spend in prayer asking God for various things that are on your heart (Philippians 4:4-7). You will want to pray for your family, your church, your friends, your nation, etc. As part of an early discipline, it is good to keep a prayer diary and a prayer calendar. In your prayer diary, you write your prayer requests and take note of the day when the Lord answered them. In your prayer calendar, you write the individuals, churches, etc. for which you pray regularly, *i.e.*, either once a week or once a month.

Let me encourage you to have what has come to be called a “quiet time” or a “personal devotion”. What does this mean? It refers to a daily time, which you set aside as a Christian, for the purpose of reading the Bible and praying alone. Every Christian should have such a time! In order for you to have this, you must fix a time daily for it. Do not leave it to chance. Then you must choose a quiet place where you can get away and spend time alone with God. Then with your Bible, notebook, prayer diary and/or calendar, read your Bible, meditate upon it and pray. You will need a lot of discipline to maintain this, but you can be sure that no one has truly been spiritually strong without such a time alone with God on a daily basis. So, you simply must discipline yourself.

- 3. Having Fellowship with Fellow Believers:** All that spiritual input you receive from your fellowship with God needs some outlet or else it will decay. One way in which this comes out is in your fellowship with other believers. Partly, this is why you should join a local church. It is primarily through the local church that you enter into fellowship with God’s people. To have fellowship with people is to share in their common life. The Bible says, “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up

meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25). You must share with fellow believers the things that God is teaching you through his Word and in your daily experiences. But fellowship is a two-way street. The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, “I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” (Romans 1:11-12). So, you should also be all ears, wanting to learn from the experiences of other believers.

Although I will say more on fellowship under “What Church Membership Is All About”, let me discuss one more aspect of it here. Although fellowship begins on a spiritual level, it hardly ever ends there. It often touches other aspects of life, such as the physical and social aspects of life. Hence, in your fellowship with other believers you must be on the lookout for their physical and social needs. Share with them what God has blessed you with, and be sincere enough to share with them your physical and social needs as well. Thus, part of fellowship is to learn to pray for one another for those specific needs. As you care for other believers in this way, you will grow in your spiritual life.

You also need to learn to develop Christian friends. There are too many young Christians who keep the non-Christian friends they had before they got converted, and so they stunt their own growth. They cheat themselves into thinking that, by being with those friends, perhaps they might be converted. That is not true! Instead they are the ones who end up compromising. They forget that health is not contagious, but disease is. The Bible says:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them,

and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord” (2 Corinthians 6:14-17).

So, leave your close ties with old friends and develop Christian friends.

- 4. Evangelising Sinners and Serving the Lord:** Another way in which your fellowship with God, through the Word and prayer, finds some outlet is by your ministry to God’s needy world. This is like doing exercises in order to keep fit. Spiritually, you undergo these exercises when you make deliberate efforts to share the gospel with sinners. This is not the same as making them your friends; rather, it is to go to them with the good news that Jesus saves sinners. This may be through the programmes that your church has in place for outreach purposes. But it may also be through your own initiative. It is often advisable, whichever the case, to go with another Christian when you go to share the gospel with non-Christians. This is especially the case if they are members of the opposite sex, as such efforts can cause your motives to be misunderstood or questioned, or even cause others to accuse you falsely. When the Lord sent his disciples out for evangelism, he sent them out in pairs (Luke 10:1). When all is said and done, the experience of bringing a soul to Christ cannot be compared to anything else in the world. It is exhilarating!

Also, your church probably has ministries (or departments) in which you can serve the Lord. Perhaps you could run the church library, work with your church’s ministry to the poor, or be part of a youth group or women’s group, etc. Eventually, you may even teach Sunday School. Again, if you are really to grow spiritually, you need to make time to join one or more of such ministries and seek to serve the Lord faithfully through them.

You must take the issue of your spiritual growth seriously. If you stop growing spiritually you will backslide. So, make sure you are ever growing.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the things that are hindering spiritual growth in your life? In the light of what you have learnt, what should you do about them?
2. Think of a place and time when you can have your quiet time, and commit yourself to at least three months of such a time with God before reviewing it.
3. Develop your own prayer diary and prayer calendar and begin to use it immediately. Review its use in three months.
4. Write out a gospel message, about a page long, which you can share with someone who is not a Christian. Remember to include relevant Bible verses.

WHAT BAPTISM IS ALL ABOUT

You only need to be in Christian circles a short time to realise that there is a lot of confusion about almost anything and everything. Unfortunately, even a straight-forward subject like baptism has not been spared this confusion. People do not know whether it is right or wrong to baptise babies. They also do not know whether baptism should be by immersion or by sprinkling. Some think that it does not matter, while others are very strongly opposed to either immersion or sprinkling. So, we need to say something about this subject so as to clear any wrong notions you may have and enable you to see what the Bible really says about this ordinance. Essentially, I want to draw your attention to four basic truths about baptism.

1. **Baptism is an ordinance commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ.** He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I

have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20). Baptism, therefore, is supposed to be the first act of obedience that you perform after you become a Christian. Through it you are telling the world what has happened to you. Jesus wants you to do that if you are truly his disciple! So baptism is an act of righteousness.

- 2. Water baptism is an outward expression of an inward experience.** The inward experience is taught in Romans. The apostle Paul says, “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:1-4). In other words, the reason why a true Christian cannot continue in a sinful lifestyle is because he died to sin. How? By the spiritual baptism he underwent at conversion. Just as Jesus died to this world of sin, was buried and rose again to newness of life, so also every true Christian is identified with that experience. He dies to sin, is spiritually buried as far as that life is concerned, and commences a new life.

Water baptism simply reflects that experience. When you go into the water you are telling the world that you have died to it and all its wickedness. The person you used to be has been buried. He is no more! Then when you come out of the water you are telling the world that the person they are now seeing and relating to is a brand new person—a person whose only desire in life is to obey the Lord Jesus Christ and to live to the glory of God. That is what baptism symbolises. It is important to be baptised because it is important for you to tell the world, in this God-ordained way, what has happened to you.

- 3. Baptism is the immersion of a believer’s whole body in water.** This is because the word baptism comes from the Greek

word *baptizo*, which simply means “to immerse”. That is why it is absurd for a person to say he was baptised by sprinkling. That is equivalent to saying, “I was immersed by sprinkling”! That is a contradiction in terms. You were either immersed or sprinkled. So, only those who have been immersed can claim to have been baptised. In the Bible we have a classic example that shows us that even in Bible times baptism had to be by immersion. It was when Philip the evangelist baptised the Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch was on a journey in the desert reading the Bible. Philip preached to him the good news about Jesus as Saviour. He obviously also told him the importance of baptism because we read that, “as they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?’ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him” (Acts 8:36-38). They had to actually *get into the water* to perform the baptism; that shows the eunuch was immersed, not just sprinkled.

- 4. Baptism is the way in which you join the church of Jesus Christ on earth.** Since you were joined to Christ’s mystical body through spiritual baptism, it only makes sense that you should join the church (Christ’s earthly body) through water baptism. The Bible says, “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Spiritual baptism is the way in which we were joined to Christ. Physical, water baptism is meant to show outwardly what has already happened inwardly. Among other things, it is meant as a symbolic, public testimony of our conversion to Christ. Baptism is the God-ordained way of joining with the people of God in public witness and testimony to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In that way, baptism is the manner in which a person becomes a part of a local group of Christians.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What do you think is going to happen to those people who repent but do not get baptised before they die? Will they go to heaven? Why or why not?
2. In the light of what you have learnt from this lesson, why is it senseless to baptise infants and to do so by sprinkling them with water?
3. Find at least four other situations in the book of the Acts of the Apostles where baptism took place. What do you learn about baptism from these passages?
4. What should you do if you were baptised before your conversion or if you were baptised in a church that did not practice baptism by immersion?

WHAT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IS ALL ABOUT

We have said that water baptism is the way in which you join the church of Jesus Christ on earth. In the book of Acts, we read, “Those who accepted [Peter’s] message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:41-42). Notice the process: response to the gospel, then baptism, then church membership, then commitment to various aspects of the life of the church. Why is that important? It is because as a Christian you are part of God’s spiritual family. Just as the human family can be identified by the homes to which they belong, so also God expects Christians to belong to localised bodies of believers. In those homes, they will learn the basic principles of life in the kingdom of God, they will

be disciplined, and they will learn to live with other believers in a context of mutual care.

Notice that after Jesus said, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”, he went on to say, “and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20). In other words, it is in the local church that you will be taught your spiritual responsibilities. Some of the responsibilities (and privileges) of belonging to a local church are:

- 1. Maintaining a Godly Lifestyle:** You are going to be part of a family, and so you should be concerned about the family's name. Previously, only you would be mocked by the world if they saw your compromise, but now it will be your entire church that will bear your shame together with you. So, seek to maintain the highest standard of godly living. The Bible says, “The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” (Acts 11:26). Why? It was because the world noted how they collectively lived like Christ. It must be so with you.

You must also be mindful that you do not let your Christian freedom become a source of stumbling for your brethren, especially in the area of dressing and friends. Let everything about you be encouraging to your brethren. The Bible says, “Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.... If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil.... We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up” (Romans 14:13, 15-16; 15:1-2). So, from now onwards you should think in terms of the effect your actions will have on your fellow church members. Will it encourage them or just cause them to slander you?

2. **Attending All the Meetings of the Church:** This is perhaps the most obvious responsibility. You are going to be part of a family, and like in the physical family, you must make sure that you are there for family meals and family *indabas*.¹ It is the same with church membership. Previously, you chose which meetings you wanted to attend and which ones you did not care about, and no one bothered you about it because they knew that you were an outsider. But now you are saying that you want to join “the inner circle”, therefore you must deliberately make sure that you make time for such meetings. This will obviously include such meetings as Sunday services, midweek meetings, business meetings, and any special meetings called upon by the elders. If you are unable to attend any of these meetings for any considerable period of time, do not just disappear but inform your church leaders about it. That is part of what it means to be a responsible church member.

Describing the early church, the Bible says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.... All the believers were together and had everything in common.... Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people” (Acts 2:42, 44, 46-47). The Bible also says, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). When you are consistently involved in church meetings it encourages the saints, even if in some meetings you say nothing at all!

3. **Labouring to Extend God’s Kingdom:** One of the pictures of the church in the Bible is that it is an army of soldiers fighting

¹ This refers to the special gathering/meeting of a small community for the purpose of discussing matters that affect their collective welfare.

for the crown rights of its Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 6:10-18). When you were saved, you were recruited into this army. The time you join a local church is the time you are posted to one, specific army unit. You must, therefore, be diligent in that unit to fulfil the mandate of the church on earth. Through the ministries of the church, and according to your gifts, graces and calling in life, you must spend and be spent for Jesus.

The Bible, in encouraging Christians in view of the fact that we will all one day die, says, “Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58). It is primarily through your local church that you can give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord. According to Ephesians 4:7-16, the reason why we have pastors is because God wants them to prepare Christians “for works of service”, and in that way the body of Christ will be built up in quantity and in quality. In that passage, the Bible compares the church to the human body and shows, therefore, how the church grows. It says, “From [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” So, do your part, and the church will grow, grow and grow.

- 4. Financially Supporting the Work of the Lord:** Although the church is a spiritual institution, as long as it is on earth it needs finances in order to function. It needs stationery, electricity, water, telephones, postal services, floor polish, etc. All these cost money. Then, the church also has meetings and outreach efforts, which need publicity, transport, food, etc. All these need money. Then, the church needs personnel whom it must pay, *e.g.*, the church pastor. As the church grows, it begins to also need caretakers, secretaries, missionaries, etc. All these need to be paid. The main source of funding for the church is

the tithes and free will offerings of its members. So, now that you are thinking of joining the church, you must also seriously look at how you can support its various functions financially.

If you are to be a good steward in this area, your financial giving in the church must be systematic and proportionate to your income. Tithing is giving to the church at least 10% of your income. The Bible considers lack of tithing as theft! “Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house” (Malachi 3:8-10). The attitude you display in your giving is very important to God. The Bible says, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:6-7). So, your giving should be generous and cheerful. This is going to be your responsibility as a church member, so make sure you are faithful to it despite the fact that no one will see how much you are giving to the church. God, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matthew 6:4).

- 5. Seeking the Welfare of All Other Members:** Before you became a Christian you went to church the way I go to the post office, if you went at all. You were only interested in the person in front and what he had to offer. You were not interested in who else was in church or sitting next to you. But one proof that you have truly become a Christian is that you suddenly become interested in other Christians. You begin to cultivate a relationship with them. This is what you continue to do when you join a local church. You make a deliberate effort to know the other members and to pray for them regularly (Ephesians 6:18; Hebrews 3:12-13). You also make it your business to respond to their practical and spiritual needs (James 2:14-16;

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15). When other people come to you with juicy stories about them, you refuse to entertain such talk because you know that it is hurtful to them and to your relationship with them (Proverbs 16:28). That is part of your membership responsibility.

- 6. Using Your Spiritual Gifts for the Good of the Church:** As Christians we want to help others in the church and be a source of encouragement to them. Because of this we should give every effort to helping build up the church in godly ways. According to 1 Corinthians 12-14 God has given every Christian a manifestation of God's Holy Spirit for the common good of the church. These gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to each and every Christian, but the actual gifts will differ from one to the other, so that as a church we will need everyone's help and cooperation in order to grow and mature as we should. So, as a new Christian, you should be encouraged by the knowledge that God has given you new abilities or capacities to be used by him in his work of strengthening and supporting and bringing growth to his people. Try to find ways of helping the Christians with whom you meet regularly, as well as ways to aid the general efforts of the church. But do not just assume that you will be most useful to the church in a specific area simply because you have experience in that field, or because you are a professional in some area, or even because you have a real desire for a certain activity. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are distributed sovereignly by God, and whether or not you would have chosen that area for yourself, you can be sure that you will find fulfilment in doing the kinds of activities which God has blessed you to accomplish. By experience, prayer, and the counsel of mature Christians (who will naturally have some experience distinguishing spiritual gifts from natural abilities or desires), you can discover the way that God has fitted you into his church for its growth and support.

7. **Submitting to the Elders and Cooperating with the Deacons:** Although we are saved individually, God expects us to come under his undershepherds so that they can look after our lives. But for them to do this work in our lives, we will need to submit our lives to them. The Bible says, “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Hebrews 13:17). So, this obedience and cooperation is to be given in those areas which will enable them to discharge their duties of teaching and oversight, and administering the ordinary and outward affairs of the church, respectively. So, part of your spiritual growth will take place as you learn to live under Christ’s undershepherds in the local church. Are you ready for it?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What should you do if something that you like to do or wear or eat or drink causes other Christians in your church to talk bad things about you?
2. In what ways can you serve the church now, so that you can begin to discover how you are gifted and in which way you can best serve the Lord in his church?
3. Is “giving” in the church supposed to be only for those who work and so get a steady income, or should it be done by everyone—including those who just get some allowances from parents or college/university sponsors?
4. What, according to Matthew 18:15-17, should you do if you see or become aware of a brother or sister sinning against you or against others?

CONCLUSION

I trust that as you have gone through “your baptismal class notes” you have been helped to understand what really happened to you when you became a Christian. Never underestimate the importance of your conversion to Christ. Your life from that point onwards—for time and for all eternity—will be forever transformed because of it. There are a lot of responsibilities that will become yours from the day you undergo baptism. They are family responsibilities because you will be publicly joining the family of God. Brace yourself for these responsibilities and make sure that you rise to the occasion.

Your baptism, therefore, is the day you will want to fly all your flags high. You will want to tell the world that Jesus saves. Like Paul, on that day you will be saying, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst” (1 Timothy 1:15). Are you looking forward to making such a powerful statement? Then you will find your baptism very meaningful. Once you also take your place of active Christian service in your local church, others will also see that your baptism was meaningful. Do not let your baptism end just with being made wet!

Let me end with the testimony of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, as he recalled the day of his baptism. The day was 3 May 1850. He says:

I was up early, to have a couple of hours for quiet prayer and dedication to God. Then I had some eight miles to walk, to reach the spot where I was to be immersed into the Triune Name according to the sacred command. What a walk it was! What thoughts and prayers thronged my soul during that morning’s journey!

Spurgeon was baptised with two ladies in a river, the River Lark. He continues:

My thoughts were in the water, sometimes with my Lord in joy, and sometimes with myself in trembling awe at making so public a confession.... The wind blew down the river with a cutting blast, as my turn came to wade into the flood, but after I walked a few steps, and noted the people..., I felt as if heaven, and earth, and hell, might gaze upon me, for I was not ashamed, there and then,

to own myself a follower of the Lamb. My timidity was washed away.... Baptism also loosed my tongue, and from that day it has never been quiet. I lost a thousand fears in that River Lark, and found that 'in keeping His commandments there is great reward.' It was a thrice-happy day to me. God be praised for the preserving goodness which allows me to write of it with delight so long afterwards.

Spurgeon ends by saying:

I wish that all other believers were led to make a serious point of commencing their visible connection with the church by the ordinance which symbolises death to the world, burial with Christ, and resurrection to newness of life. That open stream, the crowded banks, and the solemn plunge, have never faded from my mind, but have often operated as a spur to duty and a seal of consecration.

To that I say, amen!