

Back to God

Paradise – perfect communion with God

God created the universe, the earth and finally- us. The fact that there is a creator can be seen by observing creation itself – at least if we do it with an open mindset (Romans 1:20). Therefore it should be natural, that his creatures obey him (Colossians 1:16). The wonderful thing is, that God is love (1. John 4:16) and full of joy (Psalms 16:11). He created us to be part of his family, in order to share his love and overflowing life with us (John 10:10).

Crash – from freedom to slavery

Unfortunately people rejected God's rulership, in order to take this position for themselves (Genesis 3:5). This rebellion is called „sin“ (missing the mark). Because of this decision, mankind became a slave to sin (Romans 6:16). This state of bondage is passed on from generation to generation. The empowerment of sin separated mankind from God, his love and his life. Since then everyone is doomed to eternal death and darkness. Deliverance by our own strength is simply impossible.

Therefore God does not ask us to „live sinless“. He knows, we just cannot. To be born as a sinner is not God's objection against us. It really becomes a problem when we love our sinful life and therefor reject God's way of escape from the bondage of sin. Here we become fully responsible for our decision. His question is „Will you leave sin if I set you free?“. Are we willing, allowing God to pull us out of the mire of sin or will we remain in rebellion?

Jesus pays – we receive freedom and righteousness

In order to be set free from a life separated from God, we actually need to be born again. To continue this life will ultimately lead to eternal death (Romans 6:23). But how can this happen? Everyone can die. But resurrection from death into a new life is simply impossible.

But because he loves us, God sent his son Jesus to earth – as a man. He had no ancestors submitted to sin, so he was free to choose a life of obedience and righteousness. Although he was sinless, people crucified him. On that cross every sin was put on Jesus. A wonderful exchange took place: Jesus was righteous – but took our sin and the consequences. We were guilty – but received his righteousness and eternal life (1. Peter 2:24). After three days Father God raised Jesus from the dead by his power, the Holy Spirit. Now he is at God's side and will one day judge the world (Acts 17:31).

How to be set free from sin ...

- a) **Believe** on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. (Acts 16:31)
- b) He died for all, that those who live should **live no longer for themselves, but for Him** who died for them and rose again. (2. Corinthians 5:15)
- c) 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) – This is valid for sins of the past, present AND future.
- d) 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 2:38)

Baptism in water

By baptism in water we confess publicly our separation from the old way of life and the beginning of a new life under the Lordship of Jesus – a kind of birth certificate. It confirms our redemption, we received by faith in Jesus and the liberation from the power of sin. It shows that from now on we believe and obey Jesus, because baptism is the first command Jesus gave us.

- ✓ Baptism is for everyone who is willing to follow Jesus. (Matthew 28:19)
- ✓ Baptism is the next step after conversion. (Acts 8:36-37 and 22:16)
- ✓ Baptism shows, that our old sinful nature died with Jesus and that we have been raised with him into a new identity and nature. (Romans 6:3-7)
- ✓ By baptism we join the body of Christ – the church. (1. Corinthians 12:13)

Be free - stay free

Separation from our old life should be practical and radical. Maybe we need to quit certain things and habits. In Acts 19:19 people left their old life and burned their books of witchcraft. When we tolerate sin and demons to stay, we will have problems in order to receive the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit. So, even before baptism we should cut every connection with the kingdom of Satan. Entanglement with other religions, curses, witchcraft should be renounced. If people have wronged us, we should forgive (Matthew 6:14-15).

Baptism will also seal our separation from the kingdom of darkness and we will command all darkness to go in prayer. Sometimes we carry those things with us into our new life. The later we cut them off, the more difficult and painful it can get.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

At conversion the Holy Spirit is already working inside of us. He convicts us of our need for Jesus (John 16:8-13). He gives birth to the new inner nature, that is able to have fellowship with God (John 3:8). But then, in order to walk with Jesus, we need power – first to grow into the nature of Jesus (Galatians 5:22), and then to share the good news of Him with authority, boldness and miracles (Acts 1:8 und John 14:12). According to Acts 2:38-39 God promises to give us his Holy Spirit as an answer to repentance and baptism. This promise is not just given to the first century church but to all disciples of Jesus.

Therefore, after baptism in water, we will lay on hands, asking Jesus for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Some call it the baptism of the Spirit. If powers of darkness have been broken before, there should be no hindrance. How people receive the Holy Spirit can be very different (joy, tears, peace, other manifestations).

When the Holy Spirit fills us he will bring gifts and tools and give them to us. In 1. Corinthians 12:7-10 we find a list of some of the most known gifts of the Spirit. They will manifest in our lifes according to our callings and individual commissions. The most common sign is your personal prayer language (tongues, e.g. Acts 19:6). As soon as the Holy Spirit is invited by the laying on of hands, start to release the (probably unknown) words that come out of your mouth. Don't be fearful, don't try to analyse. If it is your prayer language, it will flow (John 7:38-39). The more you step into it, the more the Holy Spirit will flow through you. It is very likely, that you will not understand what is spoken. But Father God will – it is a secret communication between your spirit and God. In doing so, you will be strengthened. You can control when and how long you are going to pray in tongues. It does not happen automatically or by force. Don't wait for your mouth to open by itself. Opening your mouth and speaking out are your steps of faith. Then the Holy Spirit takes over. After a while you will recognize a true language with rhythm and melody – except that you do not understand the words.

If God wants to use your prayer language to bless other he will give an interpretation to you or somebody else. This is no translation, but rather a supernatural knowledge of the general meaning and content (1. Corinthians 14).

While walking with Jesus, it is a good idea to make much use of speaking in tongues. It strengthens and refreshes you. But also it enables you to pray even when you run out of words or do not know how to pray. Spending time with God in prayer is one of the most important things for spiritual growth.

New Identity

When we enter our new life in Christ, we receive a **new identity**:

- ✓ Our past is definitely gone! We now live for Jesus. (2. Corinthians 5:15+17)
- ✓ We received righteousness before God through Jesus. (2. Corinthians 5:21)
- ✓ No more fear and bondage – we are now God’s children. (Romans 8:15-16)
- ✓ Jesus lives **in** us and gives us **his** authority. (Galatians 2:20, Luke 10:19)
- ✓ We are called to do the works of Jesus. (John 14:12, Mark 16:15-20)
- ✓ We don’t have to sin. If it happens, Jesus is our advocate. (1. John 2:1)
- ✓ We grow into a lifestyle of holiness. (Hebrew 12:14, Galatians 5:22)

Spiritual family

We cannot survive being lone rangers. We have to find our place within the body of Christ – the church. Only then we can reach our destiny. Nevertheless we will also face problems and irritations. This is by design, so we will grow. What is church like?

- ✓ Taking communion together is now our privilege. (Acts 2:42)
- ✓ We strengthen and encourage each other by prayer, teaching, spiritual gifts and fellowship. (Acts 2:42)
- ✓ Fellowship takes place during services, as well as within small groups and partnerships. So we can celebrate and grow together. Also Jesus sent his disciples to preach the gospel by forming small teams (e.g. Luke 10:1).
- ✓ People will recognize Jesus in us by our love for each other. Love will be our greatest tool for evangelism. (John 13:34-35)
- ✓ Jesus told us to **directly** confront each other **in love**. (Matthew 18:15-20)
- ✓ In order to equip God’s people and meet the needs, we support our home church with our tithes, which belongs to God. Originally the regular practice of tithing goes back to our spiritual ancestor Jakob. He gave God his tithe as an outward sign of God being his provider and protector. Jesus encourages people to not quit giving tithes. (Malachi 3:8-12, Ephesians 4:11-14)