

How to Become a Christian (Part 2)

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In John's account of the gospel Jesus first appears to us as a grown man where John the Baptist refers to him as 'The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world'. Then we see Andrew who had heard John the Baptist refer to Jesus as the lamb of God go to his brother Simon (Peter) and pronounce to him 'we have found the Messiah'. Thus indicating that some, perhaps many, were anticipating the arrival of the long awaited Messiah.

But what exactly was the Messiah to do once he arrived? This is where what many had anticipated did not match what came to be.

The Hebrew writer tells us why Jesus came and what he did in Hebrews 10:5-10

"Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,

but a body you prepared for me;

with burnt offerings and sin offerings

you were not pleased.

Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—

I have come to do your will, my God.'" (Psalm 40:6-8)

First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them"—though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

The words of the Hebrew writer just prior to this passage above explained that the Law, or part of what we refer to as The Old Testament, was only a shadow of the good things to come. Those with the expectation of a coming Messiah knew from Scripture that this entailed the forgiveness of trespasses and sins. But just how that was to be brought about confused many back then, as it still does today. That being that the Messiah would die on a cross for mankind's sins and trespasses.

But Jesus' death was not the end but rather the beginning. Let me say that again!

But Jesus' death was not the end but rather the beginning.

Jesus died, was buried, and rose to life as Scripture tells us.

I think most, if not all, who refer to themselves as Christians would agree that we are called upon to be like Jesus Christ whom we call our Lord and Savior. Simply put we are to become Christ like.

But how do we do this? What would even make that possible? Anyone who has tried on their own to lead a sinless life has soon found out the reality is that we are in fact sinners. Paul using himself as an example in Romans chapter 7 describes the battle of sin going on within his own life. He concludes he is in a wretched state and asks - who can save us from this? The answer he gives is - *thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Jesus informed his own disciples of this when he had told them of God's plan. *"Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

And as Paul informed the church at Ephesus - Ephesians 4:4-6 - *"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."*

So why the apparent confusion over how to respond to God's invitation or calling, even among those who call themselves Christians today?

The simple answer is that much is said about the subject of answering God's calling in Scripture. And in several places where the subject is brought up only part of what it entails is spoken of in that particular passage or set of passages.

Several years ago our late brother in Christ Nyle's Royce presented a sermon on the subject of coming to Christ which to this day is the best example outside of Scripture for explaining it that I have heard. I paraphrase his lesson below -

He said if someone were to call you and ask how to get to the church building so they could worship with you on Sunday what would you say? Well You would ask - Where will you be coming from? You see if they are down the street you would give them a somewhat different answer than if they were coming from across town or another state. Same arrival point just a more detailed complete set of instructions to assure they arrived at the building. This is necessary because someone might be near while others might be far away. If you study Scripture you will see that every time the question arises of 'what must I do to be saved' the same answer is given but more details are given depending how far away that person or persons are from God.

For example in Acts 2:29-39 we have what is probably one of the most recognized passages concerning responding to God message. In the scene presented there the people to whom Peter was speaking already knew several things about the subject.

Here is that account from Acts 2 -

“Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

“The Lord said to my Lord:

*“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet.”*

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Here we see Peter speaking to fellow Israelites.

People who knew some scripture.

They knew about God existing

They knew about King David and the promises made to him

They had some knowledge of a coming Messiah

They knew it involved the forgiveness of sins and transgressions

And once they learned that they had killed the long awaited Messiah, the one who came to save them they were, as it says, cut to their hearts.

So they asked what do we do now!

We should note that the answer given here is said also to apply to those ‘who are far away’.

Far away here refers to being far away from God, knowing little if anything about God. Paul uses the same Greek word in Ephesian 2:17 while speaking of Christ where he says - *“He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.”*

Or to use Nyle’s Royce example of physical distance - Not just those down the street or across town but from others states as well!

Last week we looked at an article presented in The Chronological Life Application Study Bible based on The New Living Translation titled 'How to become a Christian'. The way presented there involved praying a prayer and asking Jesus to come into your life. To be sure the article did mention one must have some knowledge of God's plan. It involved having knowledge of who Jesus is - the Son of God. It also involved confessing His name.

Note* The article in the Chronological Life Application Bible also described prayer as talking to God.

Now let us consider an account that may seem unconnected with what we have been talking about so far. But is it really?

I will be using the New Living Translation of the Bible for this account.

Matthew 8:28-32

"When Jesus arrived on the other side of the lake, in the region of the Gadarenes, two men who were possessed by demons met him. They came out of the tombs and were so violent that no one could go through that area. They began screaming at him, "Why are you interfering with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torture us before God's appointed time?" There happened to be a large herd of pigs feeding in the distance. So the demons begged, "If you cast us out, send us into that herd of pigs." "All right, go!" Jesus commanded them. So the demons came out of the men and entered the pigs, and the whole herd plunged down the steep hillside into the lake and drowned in the water."

I have a few questions for us about this account -

1. Did these demons know Jesus?
2. Were they aware He was The Son Of God?
3. Did they confess him to be so?
4. Were they aware of God's plan and the Judgment to come?
5. Were they aware of their fate in that coming judgement?
6. Were they aware that God sets the appointed time for that judgement?
7. Were they aware of Jesus' power over them?
8. Did they talk to Jesus and make requests of Him?
9. Did they follow His commands even to the point of death?

Now I have a two more questions for us -

1. Do you or I believe these demons are saved?
2. If you say No, then why not?

Something is missing!

Isn't there something fundamentally missing here? Something elementary!

Notice the state of the people or audience the Hebrew is addressing below -

Hebrews 6:1-3 *“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, (Baptism’s -baptismos) the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.”*

Elementary things like foundation of repentance, faith (belief) and Baptism...

In. Last week’s lesson we looked at this passage from Luke 6:46-49. Let’s look at it again -

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

Laying a foundation - In Scripture we read of a cornerstone, capstone and stumbling block. We also understand Jesus Christ is all 3 of these things to different people. To some He brings salvation and others trip over Him and fall.

1st Peter 3:18-21 - *“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits — to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.”*

Don’t ask me what Christ Jesus proclaimed to those spirits long ago. I do not know! I might guess The Gospel!

But I do learn from this passage that those eight were saved. And that water symbolized baptism that now saves us. And that Baptism is a pledge off a clear conscience on our part towards God.

The word Baptism does not appear in the Old Testament, but there are plenty of examples where washing to make something clean is presented there, and it was often required under the Law. In the New Testament there are also passages where washing is to be understood as Baptism. For instance -

The Greek word for 'Washed' = apolouō pronounced ap-ol-oo'-o is used in the following two passages -

1st Corinthians 6:11 - *“And that is what some of you were. But you were **washed**, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

And Acts 22:16 *“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and **wash** your sins away, calling on his name.”* (Here Paul is recounting his own Baptism.)

Baptism is also described as being buried with Christ. Romans 6:1-10

“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have 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. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.”

Here the Greek word for Baptism is baptizō pronounced bap-tid'-zo. Defined as - to immerse, submerge; to make whelmed (i.e. fully wet); used only (in the New Testament) of ceremonial ablution, especially (technically) of the ordinance of Christian baptism. This word and variants of it appear over 100 times in The New Testament. And as mentioned above in Acts 22:16 and 1st Corinthians 6:11 there are other words and phrases which describe Baptism such as being washed.

Notice what Jesus commanded following His own resurrection from the dead - *“Then Jesus came to them and 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)

Mark 16:15-16 - *“He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*

Believing is a prerequisite to being Baptized not a replacement for it.

Concerning life Jesus told the leaders of Israel -

*“Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? **He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!**” (Mark 12:24-27)*

Once again Romans 6:4 -

“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.”

Jesus died, was buried and rose again. We die to our old way of life, are buried with Christ in Baptism, and rise to walk in the newness of life.

Ephesians 2:1-10 explains it clearly -

*“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, **made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions**—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

Have you ever seen the dead raised? - Have you seen a Baptism?

Titus 2:11 - *“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.”*

Have you heard God’s message for the salvation of mankind?

Do you believe it?

Do you know who Jesus is?

Have you confessed His name?

Have you repented of your sins?

Have you followed His command to be Baptized in the name of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of your sins?

If so then Scripture tells us you are added to those being saved. (Acts 2:41 & 47)