

CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE POSTAL COURSETutor's Name: Date: Student's Name: Ref No.: **LESSON 31 • BAPTISM**

Reading: John 3

After he had risen from the grave, and just before he went up into heaven, the Lord Jesus said to his apostles: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16).

Two things are very clear from these words-

1. Before anyone can believe and be baptized, he must know the gospel that Jesus taught, and understand the good news of the Kingdom of God.

2. No-one can please himself about baptism - it is not something that we can do if we feel like it. It is essential. Unless a man believes and is baptized, he is condemned to death, and has no hope of a future life.

Repentance comes before baptism

When a man hears the Gospel and understands it, it changes his thinking. He begins to turn from his own way to God's way. Baptism is the way God has chosen for us to make a new start. When we turn to Him, and obey His commandment to be baptized, our sins are forgiven, and we are able to start a new life.

Jesus gave us an example

Jesus never did anything wrong. He did not need to be baptized so that his sins might be forgiven, because he never sinned. In Matthew 3:13-17 you can read how Jesus came down to the River Jordan, and was baptized in the river by his cousin John. John knew Jesus had never sinned, and said he was unworthy to baptize him. This was true; but Jesus said, "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

In being baptized, Jesus set us an example to follow.

What do we mean by Baptism?

Did you notice in the passage in Matthew, that Jesus was baptized in Jordan, and afterwards he "went up straightway out of the water"?

'Christening' babies by sprinkling them with water is not taught in the Bible

We taught quite clearly that belief must come before baptism. How can a baby believe, before it is old enough to understand?

The Greeks used the word 'baptize' when they were dyeing cloth. The cloth was 'baptized' or immersed completely in the water. No part of the cloth could be left out of the liquid, or the dyeing would be patchy. In the same way, when the Bible speaks of baptism, it means a complete immersion in water. There is a beautiful meaning to this act of being buried in the water, and then rising again, as we shall see later.

"Repent and be baptized"

As we have already seen, this was the message of John the Baptist. The Gospel calls men to change their thoughts and their ways, and to turn back to God. This is what the Bible means by 'repentance'.

Peter gave the same message to the Jews on the day of Pentecost. They had gone the wrong way; they had not recognised that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, whom He had sent to them. They had been responsible for his death. When they realised what they had done, they said to the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

You can read the answer of Peter in Acts 2:38:

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."

The baptism of the apostle Paul

The apostle Paul is a good example of the way in which repentance leads to baptism. Paul had been going the wrong way. He had been persecuting the followers of Jesus; he did not believe that Jesus was really the Son of God. As he was travelling to Damascus to persecute the Christians there, the Lord appeared to him and spoke to him. When Paul saw Jesus, he had to think again. He realised at last who Jesus really was.

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When he saw how wrong he had been, he was ready to give the rest of his life to following Jesus. Jesus sent a disciple named Ananias to him, and Ananias helped him to regain his sight, and told him to be baptised (see Acts 9:17-18). So when Paul believed the truth about Jesus, he was sorry for his past ways, and started a new life by being baptized.

There are many accounts in the Acts of the Apostles of men who believed, turned to God's way and were baptized.

The story of the Ethiopian eunuch

Read this in Acts 8:26-40. The eunuch was an important official. He had been to Jerusalem to worship God. As he travelled back home, he was reading from Isaiah 53, which tells of the suffering and death of the Messiah. He did not understand when he read -

"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away, and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth" (Acts 8:32-33).

Suddenly he was joined by a disciple called Philip, whom God had sent to help him. Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading, and the eunuch answered, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" So Philip explained the passage to him, and preached to him about Jesus. Soon they came to water, and the eunuch said: "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?"

Notice the reply carefully. Philip said:

"If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest."

Then they both went down into the water (so it could not have been a matter of sprinkling). Then Philip baptized the eunuch. After this, we are told that when they were come up out of the water Philip was taken away and the Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing. He had found the way of life.

The story of the Roman centurion

Read this story in Acts 10. Cornelius the centurion was a "devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always". You might think there was nothing more he could do. But there was something else to be done. God sent an angel to Cornelius, and the angel told him to send for the apostle Peter. The angel said, "He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do".

Now Peter, being a Jew, would never have gone into the house of a Gentile. But God had spoken to him in a vision, and told him to go with the men sent by Cornelius. Up to this time, only Jews had been called by the gospel.

When Peter arrived at Cornelius' house, he found the centurion waiting for him with his family and friends. He welcomed Peter, and told him about the angel who had visited him. "Now therefore," he said, "are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God" (verse 33). Peter told the people there about Jesus; his life and death and resurrection. Before he had finished speaking the special gift of the Holy Spirit which had been given to Jewish converts fell on those who were listening. No-one could doubt then that God had accepted them. So the necessary step ., was taken. Peter said:

"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (verses 47-48)

The lesson is plain - even good living, God-fearing men can only become a member of Christ's church by being baptized.

The message is -

People must first hear the gospel message.

They must believe it with all their heart.

They must turn from their own way to God's way.

They must then be baptized.

And so they begin a new life in Christ.

The meaning of baptism

The Lord Jesus was crucified. His dead body was laid in a tomb.

Three days later, God brought him to life again.

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

When we understand that the Lord suffered and died for our sake, we shall say as the Jews did on the day of Pentecost, "What shall we do?" The answer is the same today: "Repent, and be baptised".

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What is the true meaning of baptism?

As the body of Jesus was buried in the tomb, so in baptism our body is buried in water. We are "buried with him". In this way, we confess that we are worthy to die because of our sins. Being buried in water is, in a figure, dying with Christ. And as he came out of the grave, so we come out of the water. This is a new birth, and a new life begins.

Being born again

A Jew named Nicodemus once came to Jesus at night to ask him about his teaching (John 3). Jesus said to him, "Ye must be born again". Nicodemus thought that was impossible - and, of course it is, if you take the words of Jesus without understanding his meaning. But Jesus was speaking about the new birth that takes place at baptism. He said to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

Remember the words we started with - "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." All men are sinners, and sin brings death. Death is an end of life, and there is nothing to look forward to. There is no hope - unless we are born again by being baptized.

The new life

Deciding to be baptised is the most important decision any man can ever make. It is not a decision to be taken lightly.

Before baptism - we must understand and believe the true teaching of the Bible.

After baptism - we have to fight against our sins, and try to obey God's commandments and serve Him.

We can only do this if we read His Word. We will have to stop doing things which we know will displease God. This will mean spending less time with people who have no concern for God, even though they may once have been friends, because they may lead us away from God. It will be a daily struggle, but it will bring rich rewards. Jesus once said: "Everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matthew 19:29).

Summary

1. God has commanded us to be baptized.
2. Baptism is a complete burial in water.
3. In a figure, we die with Christ and rise out of the water to a new life.
4. When we are baptized, we begin a new life "in Christ" (see Romans 6:3,4).

Chapters to read: Read again the stories in Acts 8, 9 and 10. Also, Romans 6

A verse to learn: Romans 6:3,4

"Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also would walk in newness of life."