

LESSON 8 — WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT BAPTISM?

Big Question

If I believe in Jesus, have repented of my sins, and confess Him as Lord, what does the Bible teach me to do next?

Purpose of This Study

We have spent the first lessons building toward this question.

We have learned:

Who Jesus is.

Why Jesus came.

Why we need Jesus.

What Jesus asks of us.

What it means to believe.

What it means to repent.

What it means to confess Jesus.

Now we come to baptism.

Baptism is one of the most discussed subjects in Christianity. People have different traditions, practices, and understandings concerning baptism.

“What does the Bible teach about baptism?”

Our goal is not simply to learn what baptism is.

Our goal is to understand:

- Why Jesus commanded it.
- Who should be baptized.
- What baptism means.
- What the Bible says baptism accomplishes.
- How baptism relates to faith, repentance, forgiveness, and salvation.
- Why baptism is connected with beginning a new life in Christ.

DISCUSSION STARTER — “THE INSTRUCTIONS”

Think about assembling something important—a piece of furniture, a new appliance, or perhaps following directions for a complicated project.

Sometimes the instructions contain a step that seems unnecessary.

You might think: **“Why do I have to do that?”**

But if the person who designed the product gives the instruction, we have a reason to pay attention.

Discuss:

1. Why do people sometimes resist instructions they don't understand?
2. Is it possible to obey something before completely understanding why?
3. What is the difference between obeying because someone tells us to and obeying because we trust the person giving the instruction?
4. If Jesus gives an instruction, what should our attitude toward that instruction be?
5. Why should we let Jesus define baptism rather than our traditions?

Transition; This is especially important with baptism. We don't want to begin by asking: **“What do people say baptism does?”**

We want to ask: **“What did Jesus and His apostles say baptism means?”**

1. JESUS COMMANDED BAPTISM

Matthew 28:18–20

After His resurrection, Jesus tells His disciples: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

Then He commands them to: “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 then: “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Questions

1. What does Jesus say has been given to Him?
2. Why is Jesus' authority important when considering baptism?
3. Where did Jesus command His disciples to go and do?
4. What place does baptism have in making disciples?
5. What comes after baptism?
6. Does Jesus present baptism as optional?

Key Thought

Baptism is not an invention of the church. **Jesus commanded it.** And He commanded it in the context of making disciples.

2. JESUS CONNECTS BELIEF AND BAPTISM

Mark 16:15–16

Jesus tells His disciples to preach the gospel to all creation.

Then: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Questions

1. What was the message Jesus wanted preached?
2. What two responses are mentioned together?
3. Why would baptism make sense as a response to genuine faith?
4. What is the ultimate issue in the second half of the verse?

Important Observation

Jesus does not describe faith as merely accepting information. We have already learned that genuine faith responds to Jesus. Here we see that response moving toward baptism.

Our Progression

Hear the gospel

↓

Believe in Jesus

↓

Repent of sin

↓

Confess Jesus

↓

Be baptized

The sequence is becoming clearer.

3. BAPTISM AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Acts 2:36–41

This is one of the most important baptism passages in the New Testament.

Peter has preached Jesus. The people hear the gospel. They are deeply affected by what they have heard.

Verse 37 says: “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart.”

They ask: “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter answers: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”

Questions

1. What had the people just heard? What did Peter accuse them of doing?
2. What did they realize about Jesus now?
3. How did they respond emotionally?
4. What question did they ask?
5. What two commands did Peter give? How are these two connected?
6. How does this passage connect with our study of repentance?

Verse 41 says: “Those who accepted his message were baptized.”

The Pattern - Notice the progression:

They HEARD.

They BELIEVED the message.

They were CUT TO THE HEART.

They asked WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

They were told to REPENT.

They were told to BE BAPTIZED.

They were added to the community of believers.

Key Thought: Baptism is not presented as a random religious ceremony. It is part of the response to the gospel.

4. BEFORE MOVING ON, WHAT DOES “FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS” MEAN?

This phrase deserves careful attention. **Acts 2:38** Peter says: “Repent and be baptized ... for the forgiveness of your sins.”

The question is: **Does baptism have anything to do with forgiveness?**

The answer from this passage is clearly **yes**. But we must also keep the larger message of Scripture in view. Forgiveness is ultimately the work of God's grace through Jesus' death.

Baptism does not mean: **“I save myself by performing a religious ritual.”**

Rather: **God saves by grace, and baptism is part of the obedient response of faith to the gospel.**

Ephesians 2:8–10

Paul emphasizes that salvation is: “by grace ... through faith” and: “it is the gift of God.”

Questions

1. What is the source of salvation?
2. Can we boast that we saved ourselves?
3. What place does God's grace have?
4. What does verse 10 say about the life that follows salvation?
5. How can we hold together grace and obedient faith?

Key Balance:

We are not teaching: **“Baptism earns salvation.”**

We are teaching: **“God saves us by His grace, and He calls us to respond to that grace with trusting, obedient faith.”**

Baptism is not a payment we make to God. It is a response of faith to God's saving work in Christ.

5. BAPTISM CONNECTS US WITH JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Romans 6:3–5

Paul asks: “Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”

Then he says: “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead ... we too may live a new life.”

Questions

1. Into whom are believers baptized?
2. What does Paul connect baptism with?
3. What happens to a person who is baptized into Christ?
4. What does the word “buried” suggest?
5. What does resurrection suggest?
6. What does baptism symbolize concerning the old life and new life?
7. Why is baptism much more than simply getting wet?
8. How does this passage prepare us for Lesson 10?

Picture It

Paul gives us a powerful picture:

Christ died.

Christ was buried.

Christ was raised.

And in baptism:

I die to my old life.

I am buried with Christ.

I am raised to walk in newness of life.

Key Thought

Baptism is not merely about water. **Baptism is about Jesus.**

It connects the believer with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

6. BAPTISM IS INTO CHRIST

Galatians 3:26–29

Paul says: “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

Questions

1. How does Paul describe those who belong to Christ?
2. What does baptism have to do with being “into Christ”?
3. What does it mean to be “clothed with Christ”?
4. How does this connect with our earlier lessons about becoming a disciple?
5. What does baptism say about our new identity?

Illustration — PUTTING ON A NEW UNIFORM

Imagine a person joining a team. Before becoming part of the team, he may watch from the outside. But eventually there is a moment when he puts on the team's uniform. The uniform doesn't magically make him a player. Rather, it visibly identifies him with the team he has joined. Paul uses similar imagery:

“You have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

Baptism puts us into Christ but also identifies us with Christ. Both are significant in my coming to know Jesus as my Savior.

7. BAPTISM IS A BURIAL AND RESURRECTION

Colossians 2:12

Paul says believers have been: “having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God.”

Notice something extremely important.

Who is doing the work? **God.**

Paul says we are raised: “through your faith in the working of God.”

Questions

1. What two images does Paul use?
2. What happens in baptism?
3. What does faith have to do with baptism?
4. Whose work is ultimately taking place?
5. Does this passage present baptism as human achievement or dependence upon God?
6. How does this help us understand the relationship between baptism and grace?

Key Thought

Baptism is not: **“Look what I have done for God.”**

It is: **“I trust what God is doing through Christ.”**

8. BAPTISM AND SALVATION

1 Peter 3:18–22

Peter describes Christ suffering for sins, being put to death, and being made alive.

Then he discusses Noah and the flood. Verse 21 says: “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.”

Questions

1. What event from the Old Testament does Peter use?
2. What did the water of the flood accomplish?
3. What does Peter say the water symbolizes?
4. What does Peter specifically say baptism does?
5. What does he say baptism is **not**?
6. Why is the resurrection of Jesus important to this passage?
7. What does Peter mean by a response or pledge of a clear conscience toward God?
8. How does this passage keep us from viewing baptism as merely an external washing?

Important Clarification

Peter explicitly says baptism is: **not merely the removal of dirt from the body.**

In other words, biblical baptism is not about water alone.

The power is not in the physical water.

The power is in **God's saving work through Christ**, received through faith.

(If the group has time, it might be valuable to connect the concept of the Ark with Christ. There are other ideas some hold, including the ark symbolizing possibly the church, but the easiest and clearest connection is to Christ himself. In Christ we are saved and just as with Noah, God uses water today to separate the saved from the lost.)

9. WHAT HAPPENED WHEN PEOPLE HEARD THE GOSPEL?

Let's look at several examples.

Acts 8:26–39 — The Ethiopian

He hears Jesus taught.

He believes.

He wants to be baptized.

He is baptized.

Questions:

Looking at this story give a yes or no answer to each of what we can learn from this story:

1. Being baptized can only occur in a called church gathering. Y / N
 2. It takes a large crowd to witness a baptism. Y/ N
 3. A baptism can occur with just a male Christian to baptize and a repentant sinner. Y / N
 4. Angels can share the gospel with lost people. Y / N
 5. The Holy Spirit alone can share the gospel with lost people. Y / N
 6. God works through saved people to share the gospel with the lost. Y / N
 7. Despite being sincere and traveling many miles on his journey to Jerusalem and now headed back home, along with his searching heart, the Ethiopian Eunuch still needed to hear the gospel, believe, repent, confess and be baptized to be saved. Y/N
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Acts 16:25–34 — The Philippian Jailer

The jailer asks: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Paul and Silas answer: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”

Then verse 32 says: “Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.”

The jailer responds: He washes their wounds. He and his household are baptized. He rejoices.

Questions

1. What did the jailer initially ask?

2. What did Paul and Silas tell him?
3. Did they stop with the word “believe”? What could the Jailer know without someone telling him about Jesus?
4. What happened after they taught him the Word?
5. What did the jailer do? Do you see repentance in his actions of washing their wounds?
6. What did the jailer and his household do next?
7. What happened to his attitude afterward?

Important Observation

“Believe” was not the end of the conversation. The jailer could believe a miracle happened with an earthquake and the inmates not escaping, but he needed to be taught about Jesus. Then and only then could the jailer's faith lead him to respond.

10. THE QUESTION OF INFANT BAPTISM

At this point it is appropriate to ask: **Who should be baptized?**

If baptism is connected with:

- Hearing the gospel,
- Believing,
- Repenting,
- Confessing,
- Responding in faith,

then we should ask whether the biblical examples describe infants receiving baptism.

Questions

1. What do the people being baptized in Acts have in common?
2. Do they hear the gospel?
3. Do they believe?
4. Do they repent?
5. Do they make a conscious response?
6. Can an infant understand the gospel and make that response?

Key Observation

The New Testament consistently presents baptism as a response of people who have heard the gospel and chosen to follow Christ. That is why the biblical pattern is:

Faith first → baptism as a response of faith.

11. DOES BAPTISM SAVE US OR DOES JESUS SAVE US?

This is one of the most important questions we can ask.

The Bible says: **Jesus saves us.** Jesus died for us. Jesus shed His blood for us. Jesus was raised for us. God offers grace through Christ.

And yet the Bible also says: **“Be baptized ... for the forgiveness of your sins.”**
And: **“Baptism ... now saves you.”**

How do these fit together?

Think about it this way:

A drowning person is rescued by a lifeguard. The lifeguard does the saving. But the person still has to respond to the lifeguard. If the lifeguard throws a rope and says: **“Take hold!”** the person who trusts the lifeguard reaches for the rope. The person isn't saying: **“I saved myself by grabbing the rope.”** The lifeguard saved him. But trusting the lifeguard included responding to the lifeguard's instruction.

Apply the Illustration. Jesus is the Savior. Grace is the source. The gospel is the message. Faith is trust in Jesus. Repentance is turning toward God. Confession acknowledges Jesus as Lord. Baptism is an obedient response of faith into Christ. The new life belongs to God.

12. BAPTISM IS NOT A MAGICAL RITUAL

We should be equally careful on the other side. Baptism is not magic.
A person can enter water without genuine faith, repentance, or commitment to Jesus.

The Bible never presents salvation as merely: **“Get in water and everything is automatically fixed.”**

The entire response matters. **The biblical response is not: Water + words = salvation**

It is: **Gospel + faith + repentance + confession + obedient response to Christ = the biblical response of faith.**

And underneath all of it is: **God's grace through Jesus Christ.**

13. WHY IS BAPTISM SO IMPORTANT?

Let's summarize what we have seen.

Jesus commanded it. Matthew 28:18–20

It is connected with believing the gospel. Mark 16:15–16

It is connected with repentance and forgiveness. Acts 2:38

It is connected with entering Christ's death. Romans 6:3–5

It is connected with new life. Romans 6:4

It is connected with being clothed with Christ. Galatians 3:27

It is connected with God's work through faith. Colossians 2:12

Peter connects it with salvation. 1 Peter 3:21

So baptism is not an insignificant detail. It is deeply connected with the gospel response.

PERSONAL REFLECTION (These are just questions for you to think about in private)

1. What did you previously understand baptism to mean?
2. What have you learned from these passages?
3. Why is it important that Jesus commanded baptism?
4. What does Acts 2:38 connect baptism with?
5. What does Romans 6 teach baptism represents?
6. What does it mean to be “baptized into Christ”?
7. Why does Paul connect baptism with faith in God's working?
8. What does 1 Peter 3:21 teach about baptism?
9. Why is baptism not simply a physical washing?
10. Why is it wrong to say that baptism means we save ourselves?
11. Why is it also wrong to treat baptism as an insignificant or optional ceremony?
12. How does baptism fit into the progression we have studied?
13. If someone believes in Jesus, has repented of sin, and confesses Jesus as Lord, what question naturally comes next?

FINAL THOUGHT

Imagine the people on Pentecost. They had heard Peter preach about Jesus. They had come to realize something terrifying: **The Jesus they had rejected was actually the Christ.** They were cut to the heart.

They asked: **“What shall we do?”**

Peter did not simply tell them: **“Feel sorry.”**

He did not simply tell them: **“Believe something.”**

He told them: **“Repent and be baptized ... for the forgiveness of your sins.”**

Why? Because the gospel demands a response. And the response isn't about earning something from God. It is about trusting the God who has already acted for us in Christ. Jesus died. Jesus was buried. Jesus was raised. And now He calls us to die to our old life, be buried with Him, and rise to walk in a new life.

Baptism is therefore not the end of the story. It is the doorway into a new life with Christ. And that raises our next question: **“How does a person actually receive salvation?”**

In Lesson 9, we will put everything together—**grace, faith, hearing, belief, repentance, confession, baptism, forgiveness, and salvation**—and ask how all of these biblical teachings fit together without contradiction.

Addendum for Study Leader:

THE BIG PICTURE — OUR JOURNEY SO FAR

Let's review the entire journey.

LESSON 1 Who is Jesus?

Jesus is the Son of God, the Word made flesh, and Lord.

LESSON 2 Why did Jesus come?

He came to seek and save the lost and give His life for us.

LESSON 3 Why do I need Jesus?

Because sin separates us from God and we cannot save ourselves.

LESSON 4 What does Jesus ask of me?

He calls me to follow Him, surrender myself, and obey Him.

LESSON 5 What does it mean to believe?

Faith means trusting Jesus in a way that responds to His Word.

LESSON 6 What does it mean to repent?

Repentance means turning away from sin and turning toward God.

LESSON 7 What does it mean to confess Jesus?

Confession means openly acknowledging Jesus as the Christ, Son of God, and Lord.

LESSON 8 What does the Bible teach about baptism?

Baptism is the obedient response of faith in which a believer is baptized into Christ, connected with His death, burial, and resurrection, and receives the forgiveness God offers through Christ.

THE JOURNEY

Put the pieces together:

HEAR

↓

BELIEVE

↓

REPENT

↓

CONFESS

↓

BE BAPTIZED

↓

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Now we are ready for one of the most important questions of the entire study:

How does a person receive salvation? That will be our next study.