

## What does the Bible Say?

### Lesson 11: God's Promise: Faith and Baptism

In the last lesson, we saw Jesus's deep desire to give his followers power, that they might reveal to others the reality that Jesus is the Lord and Savior of the world. When we are filled with his Spirit, Jesus expects us to heal the sick, raise the dead, drive out demons, and proclaim the good news of salvation in his name through the power he gave us. And he rewards our faith when we live the way he lived. We learned that Jesus is looking for followers who will "Go!" to the neighborhoods, cities, and countries so that the world may know him and see his love and power through us. And if our hearts are devoted to his plans and our prayers "in his name" will lead a person to salvation, then his answer is always "Yes!" Our salvation and spiritual growth are always Jesus's priority, so even his "No" can be for our eternal good or the good of someone else. We saw how the Holy Spirit is at work in those who are learning to follow Jesus even before baptism, and that he promises his Spirit to live inside us when we repent and are baptized. Jesus then wants to *fill* us with his Spirit and anoint us with special gifts through prayer and the laying on of hands to confirm the Gospel and build up the church.

Share any experiences that you had this week as you sought the Lord for the Holy Spirit.

#### God's Promises through Faith

In the last lesson, we also learned that faith in Jesus comes from hearing his message and walking toward his way of life. Today, we can experience and grow in this faith through prayer, worship, reading God's Word, believing and following what we read, and imitating Jesus. When we put our faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, turning away from our old life and following him instead, the Father forgives all our sins and promises us eternal life with him in heaven. Even though faith is demonstrated through our actions, this promise is immediate and begins with our agreement with Jesus's plan and purpose for our life. In fact, Jesus saves us while we are still dead in our sins. Romans 5 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (5:8, NIV), and Ephesians 2 says, "4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions<sup>1</sup>—it is by grace you have been saved."

What does this truth mean to you? Why do you think Jesus saves us while we are still sinners?

Jesus died for each of us even while we were still sinners to show that our own righteousness will never save us. All the good deeds in the world will never make us as holy as God and worthy of heaven. That's not where our confidence comes from. It's only Jesus and his blood that can save and transform us! That's why Jesus doesn't wait for us to clean up our lives and then save us. We need him to save us so that through the power of his blood and the Holy Spirit, we can overcome sin and grow in righteousness. In Ephesians 2, where Paul goes on to say, "8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast." In this way, Jesus receives all the glory for what has and is happening in our lives, and no one can give honor to themselves, only to God and his goodness to us.

<sup>1</sup> "Transgressions" are ways we move away from the truth or righteousness, also called sin. See "3900. Paraptóma," *Thayer's*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/3900.htm>.

Even though Jesus calls us to righteousness, he knows that we were made in weakness, just like Adam and Eve. But that's why God sent Jesus, to pay the full price for our sin: <sup>22</sup>“This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe... <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>and all are justified [made righteous]<sup>2</sup> freely by his grace through the redemption [payment for our sins]<sup>3</sup> that came by Christ Jesus (Romans 3). So, how can we receive this incredible gift from God?

<sup>9</sup> If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. <sup>11</sup> As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame” ... <sup>12</sup> The same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, <sup>13</sup> for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” <sup>14</sup> How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? <sup>15</sup> And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” ... <sup>17</sup> Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. (Romans 10)

What promises does God give us if we put our faith in Jesus? (vv. 9, 11-12)

Looking at each verse, what roles do we have in receiving these promises? How are verses 9, 14-17 similar to what we learned in previous lessons about how Jesus defines faith?

In Romans, Paul explains that we must declare Jesus as the Lord, meaning he is our Master, Owner, and a title also given to God.<sup>4</sup> In other words, he is the One we look to and obey, and we must believe he was raised from the dead. Jesus also calls us to profess our faith in him to others, declaring that he is the Lord of all. We cannot be followers of Jesus and be silent because when we have genuine faith, as Peter and John say in Acts 4, “We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (4:20). Why is this? Our new lives have radically changed! And when we share about our lives, Jesus comes pouring out of our mouths because of this change. This glorifies him and allows others to be saved.

### God's Promises through Baptism

Although Jesus saves us while we are sinners, he doesn't leave us in our sin! With our entire bodies going down into water, Jesus washes us with his blood, buries our sins forever, and raises us into a new life of following him. This is why new believers ran to the waters of baptism! Just as Jesus died for our sins and was raised to glory, we too die to our old life of sin and self, and pledge our new life to Jesus through baptism. Baptism is like a beautiful marriage ceremony between us and Jesus that expresses to him our commitment to follow him. In turn, Jesus gives us these special promises:

Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. (Mark 16:16, ICB)

Change your hearts and lives and be baptized, each 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. (Acts 2:38)

<sup>2</sup> “1344. Dikaioó,” *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, electronic database, Biblsoft, 2011, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1344.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> “629. Apolutrōsis,” *Thayer's*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/629.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> “2962. Kurios,” *Thayer's*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2962.htm>.

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:22, NIV)

What promises does God give us in these verses? How do you feel about these promises?

According to Hebrews 10:22, our assurance comes through faith, but our faith is expressed through baptism, which purifies our conscience and *assures* us of salvation. Why? Although we've been saved by grace even in our sin, we receive the Holy Spirit after baptism, as we learned in Acts 2 when Peter said, <sup>38</sup> "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" (2:38). Ephesians 1 explains: <sup>13</sup> "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance." Faith, baptism, and the Holy Spirit all work together to assure us that we are saved! And we don't need to live in fear of death. This is why I John 5 says, <sup>7</sup> "For there are three that testify: <sup>8</sup> the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement." Many people argue about when people are saved and when they receive the Holy Spirit, and these arguments often lead to divisions and disagreements among believers. But what's important? If we follow what Jesus asks us to do: have genuine faith that leads us to action, then we *will* be baptized, we *will* receive the Holy Spirit, and we *will* be saved! This is a promise, not a question to be answered.<sup>5</sup>

### *When to be baptized*

Throughout the New Testament, we see many examples of baptism. In Acts 8, Philip, an early follower of Jesus, baptizes a eunuch [YEW-nik], or male servant of the queen.<sup>6</sup> In this passage, members of the church are being scattered across Judea and Samaria, regions of modern-day Israel, because of severe and deadly persecution from Jewish leaders. As this is happening, the Holy Spirit leads Philip to a road south of Jerusalem toward Gaza [GAH-zah] where he meets an Ethiopian eunuch. The man is reading Isaiah 53 that prophecies the death of the Messiah as the sacrifice for our sins. Philip asks the eunuch, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (53:30). The man doesn't, so he invites Philip into his chariot where Philip explains to him the meaning of the passage and the message of Jesus:

<sup>36</sup> As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" <sup>37</sup> Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." <sup>38</sup> And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. <sup>39</sup> When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing." (Acts 8)

According to these verses, when does a person get baptized?

<sup>5</sup> There is one exception after Jesus's resurrection where Cornelius (Acts 10) and his household receive the Holy Spirit before baptism. The context appears to be a confirmation to the Jews that Gentiles can also enter the kingdom of God and should be baptized. The general standard after Jesus's resurrection is that people receive and are filled with the Holy Spirit after baptism. Also receiving the Holy Spirit prior to baptism did not excuse a person from baptism, as Jesus himself was filled with the Holy Spirit and was baptized before starting his ministry "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

<sup>6</sup> A eunuch is a male servant who has been castrated so that there can be no accusation of infidelity between him and the queen he serves.

In this passage, Philip takes time to explain the message of Jesus to the eunuch. We don't know all that Philip shared, but we know that he shared the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus through Isaiah 53. We also see that a person must believe in Jesus as the Son of God with all his heart.<sup>7</sup> We see in the New Testament that this level of belief was so strong that believers shared their faith wherever they went and from house to house (Acts 5:42, 20:20) and were even willing to die for their faith in Jesus both in the Bible and history.<sup>8</sup> In other words, an intellectual belief in Jesus does not qualify someone for baptism. Jesus commands us in Matthew 28 to go make "disciples [Jesus followers] of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (28:18-20). In this way, we should baptize people who are ready to be Christ followers, not just Christ believers. Jesus defines a follower in John 8 when he says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples" (8:32). John also says, in I John 2, "We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. <sup>4</sup>Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. <sup>5</sup>But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: <sup>6</sup>Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did" (2:3-6). We already know that we'll never be perfect, because that's why Jesus died, but Jesus and John are expressing the heart of a true follower. Anyone who has this heart should be baptized to express their faith and commitment to Jesus.

### *How to be baptized*

According to Acts 8:36-38, what does baptism look like?

In Acts 8, we see Philip and the eunuch go down *into* the water. The Greek word for baptism [Gk: baptizó] literally means "to dip" or "submerge."<sup>9</sup> In Matthew 3:16, Jesus also goes down fully into water when he is baptized. In Romans 6:2-10, Paul helps us to understand why baptism is performed this way:

We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? <sup>3</sup>Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>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— <sup>7</sup>because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

What do we learn about baptism from this passage? What does going down into the water and coming back up again symbolize? (vv. 4-6)

In what ways does baptism express our commitment to Jesus and his oneness with us?

When we commit our lives to Jesus and are submerged into water, we experience the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, as well as the death, burial, and resurrection of our own lives. Our old life is gone, and we're ready for our new life in Christ! By being buried in baptism, God reminds us that Jesus washes,

<sup>7</sup> In Greek, the word "believe" [Gk: pisteuó] can mean "to think to be true, to be persuaded of," "to place confidence in," "to rely on," and to trust joyfully in such a way that this belief becomes "the law of [our] soul." See "4100. pisteuó," *Thayer's*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4100.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> See the death of Stephen in Acts 7:59-60 and James (son of Zebedee) in Acts 12:1-2, as well as [Evidence for Jesus](#), Lessons 2 and 3.

<sup>9</sup> "907. baptizó," *Thayer's*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/907.htm>.

forgives, buries, and forgets our sins through his sacrifice on the cross and his burial. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we come up out of the water, raised with him into a new life for eternity and empowered with the Holy Spirit!

### *Why we are baptized*

Romans 6 teaches us that through baptism, we are united with Christ in a similar way that we might be united with a spouse through marriage. If you've already placed your faith in Jesus, you might be wondering, "Wasn't I united with Christ when I believed?" Paul explains in Colossians 2 by comparing baptism to circumcision: an ancient Jewish practice that removed the top layer of skin from a male baby's private parts. Circumcision was God's earliest outward sign of his inner spiritual cleansing. In these verses, we will explore what happens to us spiritually *before*, *during*, and *after* baptism:

<sup>11</sup> In [Christ] you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self, ruled by the flesh [or sin], was put off [or removed] when you were circumcised by Christ, <sup>12</sup> having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Colossians 2)

If circumcision is a metaphor for baptism, then what happens to our sin during this process? (For more explanation, see below Galatians 3:27 and Romans 13:13-14.)<sup>10</sup>

According to this passage what is the purpose of baptism? (v. 11) What role does faith play? (v. 12)

Let's continue reading...

<sup>13</sup> When you were *dead* in your sins and in the *uncircumcision* of your flesh, God made you *alive* with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, <sup>14</sup> having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2:11-14, emphasis added)

When we have put our faith in Jesus but have not yet been baptized (*uncircumcised*), what is our spiritual condition? (v. 13a) Even so, what does Jesus do for us? (v. 13b) [See also Romans 4:9-11 in the footnote.]<sup>11</sup>

If we understand these passages, then we know that when we believe and receive Jesus and his teachings *before* we are baptized, Jesus makes us alive with him. That's why we have so much joy! This is truly amazing because we have not yet formally "put off" our sinful nature in baptism. And yet Jesus in his great love doesn't wait for us to make ourselves clean. He saves us just the way we are, simply because of our full faith and trust in him – even to finish the work he started. Yet we know from Colossians 2:11-12 and Romans 6:6, which says, "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 still need our sins removed and be raised into a new life. According to Romans 6:1-7, we surrender our old life of sin at baptism, placing our old self and sinful

<sup>10</sup> Galatians 3:27 "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have *clothed* yourselves with Christ." Romans 13:13-14 "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. <sup>14</sup> Rather, *clothe* yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh" (emphasis added).

<sup>11</sup> Romans 4: 9-11 "We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. <sup>10</sup> Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! <sup>11</sup> And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them."

nature on the cross with Jesus. Jesus then cleanses us by his blood, symbolized by water, removes our sins forever, and raises us into a new life of belonging to him (Romans 6:1-3,6). Now we can be truly one with Jesus as Paul says because our sins have been destroyed! With a pure spirit and body, the Holy Spirit can come in, make his home in our temple, and fill us with his power! For this reason, Paul challenges the Corinthian followers to continue putting off the sins of immorality and impurity because our bodies are now temples of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19).

Now we can understand the words of apostle Ananias [an-nan-I-us] to Paul when Paul puts his faith in Jesus, “<sup>16</sup> And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and *wash your sins away*, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16, emphasis added). Paul wasn’t going to wash away *his own* sins, but he needed to show that he agreed to and was ready to obey what Jesus wanted to do in his life. Peter confirms this important step of baptism when he says, “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,”<sup>21</sup> 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 (I Peter 3:20-22). Jesus is still in charge of the saving, but our role is to pledge our lives to Jesus and give up our sins. We need this step to be saved from the world. That’s also why Peter urges those who are baptized in Acts 2, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation!” (2:40). Paul knows that Jesus does the saving, but he’s telling the new, unbaptized believers to throw off their sin. And how do the people express their response? Three thousand are immediately baptized (2:41)! This is why we see new believers in the New Testament running into these waters, longing to be set free from sin and begin this new life and oneness with their Lord. As we ourselves respond to Jesus, consider these questions:

*If you’ve already been baptized*, do you feel like you were baptized the way the Bible describes? (Were you a true follower of Jesus? Is your old life of sin different from your new life? How are you following Jesus now? Have you received the Holy Spirit? Did you go down into water?) **DISCUSS.**

*If you’ve not been baptized*, do you want to be? If yes, describe your old and current life and sinful nature. Share your hope for a new life of following Jesus and living by his Spirit.

Are there any teachings of Jesus that you still don’t want to follow or any sins you don’t want to “put off”?

There are going to be sins that challenge us, even stubborn ones, and there will be days and even seasons when we don’t feel like following. But Jesus has given us powerful tools to overcome: confessing to God and to others, praying to God and allowing others to pray over you, reading the Word, attending church, being with Christians for strengthening, recognizing Satan’s lies and holding onto Jesus’s truths, and renouncing anything causing temptation. If you’re committed to the fight, Jesus promises that you will overcome because you have the Holy Spirit in you. In this way, your salvation is secure, and these tools allow the Holy Spirit to work in you and through you for that purpose. Romans 2:7 says, “<sup>7</sup> To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.” The key is to persevere.

### God’s Promises through Eternal Peace

Jesus also sets us free from fear, guilt, and social shame because if we follow Jesus and walk in the Spirit, we know that God loves and accepts us and will protect us forever from spiritual harm. For this reason,

we can walk in peace because our Father is always watching over our lives and doing what is best for us. Here's the promise: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:1-4).

The Bible says that one day this world will end. At that time, Satan, his demons, and all those who continue to follow the evil one will be sent into darkness and punishment, where God's love and grace are no longer present. To fully understand this, we've included some passages to read for homework. Yet, the good news is that if we put our full faith in Jesus to do all that he promises to save us, turn from our sins, receive the Holy Spirit through baptism, and persevere in following Jesus and his teachings until the end, we will reign with him in heaven, where we will worship Jesus as God and spend eternity rejoicing with our spiritual family (Revelation 20-22).

That's a promise!

### This Week:

- If you need to be baptized, do it this week!
- If you still need to be filled with the Holy Spirit after baptism, spend time worshipping corporately for the Lord to fill you, or invite elders or apostles to lay hands on you for this purpose.
- If you have not participated in your outreach plan with other faith-filled believers, then set a date when you will go out as a group to pray for the sick and share the Gospel with those who receive you.
- Read the book of I John to understand the heart of a true follower of Jesus. Pray over what you learn. Read also Hebrews 10:19-31 to understand the importance of turning away from sin in our walk with Jesus. Be sure to share with a trusted friend if there is any area where you feel you are not overcoming or growing in Christ.
- To understand more clearly the lostness of our world and what it means for those who do not know and follow Jesus, read Revelation 20:11-15, 21:8, 22:15; II Peter 2:4-10, 17; Matthew 8:12, 25:46; Mark 9:43; Luke 16:19-21; Jude 1:12-13. Be sure to discuss any questions you might have.