

How Can I Be Saved?

Lesson 3: Love in Jesus (Part 3)

Vocabulary:

| | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| to baptize (n. baptism) | to rely on | to submerge | to long to (do something) |
| eunuch | level | to unite (adj. united) | branch |
| to scatter | to imitate | to symbolize | to bear fruit |
| chariot | intimacy | circumcision (v. circumcise) | vine |
| to stand in the way of | assurance | private parts | to wither |
| to rejoice | to draw near | cleansing (n.) | life-long |
| to persuade | sincere | indebtedness | |
| confidence | intellectual | boast | |

Discussion:

In this study series we've seen that from the beginning of time, all men have chosen to live a life of sin, rather than a life loving God and people. Even as we try to do good, sin is always there with us. We've realized that no sacrifice – animals, food, time, kind acts, or services to God – could ever make us holy when we consider the holiness and genuine love of our Father in heaven. Yet God our Father did not abandon us in our sin. He himself provided a perfect sacrifice for our sins on a cross, a sacrifice that buried the sins of our past, present, and future. If we place our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and welcome his teachings and truths into our lives found in his Word, then Jesus saves us. It's that simple. Whoever believes and receives Jesus is given the right to become children of God, and no one can take that promise from us because this promise comes from God (John 1:12-13).

When we begin following Jesus, we realize very quickly how we cannot live a life of love without his help. We need his Word daily, we need his Spirit inside us, and we must bring our needs and the needs of others to the Lord in prayer. As we pray, the Lord's Spirit moves in our hearts and lives. Our heavenly Father pours his love and mercy into our hearts and fills our minds with wisdom and guidance. He touches our hearts with love for people around us and even around the world! There is no greater love than the Father's, and there is no greater life than one lived in love. In fact, Jesus sets us free from sin so that we can be free to love and give our lives away to serve God, encourage his children, and to share his love with those who don't yet know him. Are you ready to begin your new life of love? In this last study, we will explore how to begin this new life and eternal journey that awaits you.

Do you feel ready to start a new life of love in Jesus? Share your thoughts and feelings about this.

Loving Jesus through Commitment

When we decide to accept Jesus's sacrifice for sin and follow him with a heart of love, Jesus asks us to show our love for him 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 two 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)

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

We can see that through baptism, we are promised salvation, forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit. If you've already placed your faith in Jesus, you might be wondering, "Aren't I already saved and forgiven?" The answer is yes! But baptism is the formal way that Jesus asks us to respond to his love for you. In this lesson, you'll learn *when*, *how*, and *why* Jesus wants us be baptized.

When to be baptized

In the New Testament, we see many people being baptized. In Acts 8, Philip, an early follower of Jesus, baptizes a **eunuch [YEW-nik]**, or male servant of the queen.¹ In this passage, members of the church have been **scattered** across Judea and Samaria, regions of modern-day Israel. The Holy Spirit leads Philip to a road south of Jerusalem toward Gaza [GAH-zah] where he meets a eunuch from Ethiopia. The man is reading the Isaiah 53, a chapter in the Old Testament that prophesies the death of the Messiah as the sacrifice for our sins. Philip asks the eunuch, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (30, NIV). The man does not, so he invites Philip into his **chariot** where Philip explains to him the meaning of the passage and the message of Jesus:

³⁶As 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?" ³⁷ Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ 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**." (NIV)

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

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 do see what Philip says that a person must believe in Jesus as the Son of God with all his heart. 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."² In the context of the New Testament, this **level** of belief is so strong, that we see believers giving their lives completely to Jesus, rather than living by their own desires and will. Their desires are to obey Jesus's teachings and **imitate** his life.³

This strong desire comes from our faith in God's love for us and our trust in his promises for our lives. Such faith grows into increasing **intimacy** with God, dependence on his direction for our lives, and **assurance** of our salvation.⁴ This is why the writer in Hebrews says to those who have already been baptized: "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). We see that these Christ followers are still working on their intimacy, dependence, and assurance, even though these promises were given to them when they placed their faith in Jesus and committed to him in baptism. This word "believe" in Greek and in the New Testament has a much deeper meaning than the word "believe" in English. In English, to believe is an **intellectual** act. But in the New Testament, "believe" means to surrender our lives out of a sincere faith, trust, and desire to obey Jesus. For this reason, the writer of Acts adds the words "believe with *all your heart*."

¹ 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.

² 4100. pisteuó," *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, electronic database (BibleSoft, 2011), <https://biblehub.com/greek/4100.htm>.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* See the book of I John as an example of faith that results in obedience to Christ's teachings.

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.”⁵ In Matthew 3:16, Jesus also goes down fully into water when he is baptized. In Romans 6:2-10, Paul, a leader of the early church, 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? ³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We 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. ⁵For 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. ⁶For 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— ⁷because 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 are ready for our new life in Christ! By being buried in baptism, God reminds us that Jesus washes, forgives, buries, and forgets our sins through his sacrifice on the cross, his burial, and his resurrection. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we come up out of the water and are raised with him into a new life for eternity!

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 the difference between these two events – faith and baptism – 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 early sign of his spiritual **cleansing**. In these verses, we will explore what happens to us spiritually *before, during, and after* baptism:

¹¹ 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, ¹² 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.)⁶

⁵ “907. Baptize,” <https://biblehub.com/greek/907.htm>.

⁶ 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. ¹⁴ Rather, *clothe* yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (emphasis added).

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

Let's continue reading...

¹³ 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, ¹⁴ 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.]⁷

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. This is amazing because we have not yet formally “put off” our sinful nature in baptism. This is why Paul says, “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** (Ephesians 2). In other words, we absolutely do not deserve Jesus’s forgiveness before baptism because we are not even spiritually clean. And Jesus doesn’t wait for us to make ourselves clean. He saves us just the way we are, simply because of our faith in him and trust him with all our hearts. When we respond to Jesus’s love in baptism, he then removes our sins. This is true grace!

In baptism, we surrender our old life of sin, placing our old self and sinful nature on the cross with Jesus. Jesus then cleanses us by removing our sins and raising us into a new life of following Christ (Romans 6:1-3,6). This is why the believer Ananias [an-nan-I-us] said to Paul when Paul put his faith in Jesus, “¹⁶ 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 what Jesus wanted to do in his life. For this reason, new believers in the New Testament ran quickly into these waters, **longing to** be set free from sin and begin this new life and relationship with their Lord!

If you’ve already been baptized, how has your life changed? Describe your old life and sinful nature. (For a list of sins, see *Faith in Jesus—Part 2*).

If you’ve not been baptized, do you want to be? If yes, describe your old and current life and sinful nature (For a list of sins, see *Faith in Jesus—Part 2*). Share your hope for a new life.

In either case, are there any teachings of Jesus that you still don’t want to follow or any sins you don’t want to “put off”?

Loving Jesus through Remaining

Just as in marriage, Jesus asks us to remain in our relationship with him. He commits himself to us when he says, “Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). In turn, Jesus asks the same of us:

⁷ “We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. ¹⁰ Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ¹¹ 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.” (Romans 4, NIV)

³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No **branch** can **bear fruit** by itself; it must remain in the **vine**. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and **withers**; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. (John 15:3-6)

Once we are made clean by trusting in Jesus's words, what does Jesus ask us to do. Why? (v. 4-5)
How is a commitment to Jesus like a marriage?

What happens if we do not remain in Jesus? (v. 6) Why do you think this happens?

Jesus promises that he will never leave us, and he won't allow anything to separate us from his love (Romans 8:38-39), but we must remain with him in that relationship. In other words, placing our faith and hope in Jesus and even committing to him is just the beginning. Like a marriage, following Jesus is a **life-long**, daily commitment to live by his teachings of loving God and loving others. That's why we need daily encouragement and strength from his Word, prayer, worship, and relationships in the church. This is why we confess our sins to the Lord and to each other and seek help when we struggle. And when other believes struggle, we need to offer that encouragement to them so that they can stay strong and faithful to Jesus. These acts are no longer tasks to be saved, but offerings of thanksgiving to God, expressions of our love for him, and ways to keep our relationship with Jesus strong and alive!

Loving Jesus through his Word

Every day we have a chance to experience, learn from, and spend time with Jesus through his Word. While Jesus's words are full of grace, they are also full of truth. Jesus loves all people and wants everyone to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4), but he cannot save people who do not accept his Word. True love is a choice, so he will never force this choice on anyone. Those who do not believe and receive his love will pay their own price for sin after death. In John 12, Jesus promises to rescue us from God's judgment of sin if we chose to obey his plan of salvation:

⁴⁶I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness...

⁴⁷"If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. ⁴⁸There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.

What role will Jesus's words have in God's judgment of this world? (v. 48) How do Jesus's words give us hope? (v. 46, 47b) Why do you think reading the Bible often is important?

If you died today, would you feel ready for Judgment Day? Explain. How can you be ready and confident on that Day?

Jesus promises that if we accept his words, his love, his sacrifice, and salvation, we will be saved. Our faith and hope is not in what we do for him, but in what he has done, will do, and will continue to do for us as we remain in him. By reading Jesus's words, praying over them, and putting them into practice, we are strengthened in joy and transformed into becoming more like him. His words turn our hearts away from the world and from sin and toward Jesus, his light, and his love. We learn in the book of Revelation that Jesus will return one day for his followers. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and bring

them into his glorious heaven to live forever with him (Revelations 21). In John's description of heaven, we see Jesus ruling as the King of kings and the Lord of lords: "And with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers" (17:14). This is his promise for all who believe.

Share any decisions you have made from this study.

Who do you know that needs this study? Would you like to share it with them?