

PREPARING FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

When you are preparing for church membership, you should first of all be sure that you are a Christian. This means that you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, and that you have been baptized in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If you are not a Christian, you should first of all turn to God in prayer and ask Him to give you His Holy Spirit. When you have received the Holy Spirit, you should then be baptized in water. After you have been baptized, you should then be prepared to make a public declaration of your faith in Jesus Christ before the church. This is what is known as a profession of faith. When you make this declaration, you are saying that you believe in the Bible, in the teachings of Jesus Christ, and in the church. You are also saying that you are willing to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and to live according to the principles of the Bible. When you have made this declaration, you will then be ready to be received as a member of the church.

by
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~~PREPARING FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP~~
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The following four lessons are not an attempt to teach the new Christian all he needs to know about the Christian life. They are planned to help him have a deeper appreciation of his wonderful salvation in Christ and to find joy within the fellowship of the church.

To get the most help from these lessons, each scripture reference should be found, read carefully, and meditated upon. The student should understand how each verse teaches the truth being discussed in the lesson. These scriptures and truths should be discussed when the class meets for further study.

God has called you for a purpose. May his every purpose be fulfilled in you life. This will be the life of greatest Christian joy for you.

11/13 UN 18 pages

Lesson 1

WHY YOU NEED A SAVIOUR

Sometimes a person may have a disease which causes him to be very ill. He knows he needs a doctor's help. However, there are times when a person may have a disease, not realize it, and fail to seek a doctor's help. My son was once like that. He had not been feeling well, but neither he, nor his mother, nor I knew he had a disease. One day we all went to the doctor for an examination. We were surprised to learn the son had bilharzia and needed the help of the doctor at once. We can agree that my son needed the help of the doctor although he did not know it for a time.

Now it is the same with sin. Some people understand they are sinners and need a Saviour. Others may realize that all is not well in their hearts but fail to understand that the trouble is caused by sin. They also need a Saviour.

In this lesson we are going to learn about your need for a Saviour. Just as the doctor can examine the body and find the disease, God examines the hearts of mankind and tells us in his Word, the Bible, what he has found.

I. God says he has found you to be a sinner

This is not a nice thing to hear, but it is true. God cannot help us until we agree with him that it is true. Open your Bible and read the following scriptures carefully:

Genesis 6:5...this teaches that God sees your sinful thoughts

Isaiah 53:6...we learn that it is sin to refuse God's way and go your own way

Isaiah 64:6...this teaches that your best righteousness is not acceptable to God

Romans 3:10-18...these verses teach about some of the ways you have sinned against God

Romans 3:23...you also have fallen short of the glory of God. This is sin.

1 John 1:8...if a person denies his sin, he is deceiving himself, not God.

These verses and many others teach us very clearly that every person in the world is sinful before God. Do you agree that you are sinful?

II. God speaks of the results of your sins

Now we want to look in the Bible and learn what happens because of your sin.

A. Because of sin you have no fellowship with God

Deuteronomy 31:18...the sinner cannot find God

WHY YOU NEED A SAVIOUR

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Isaiah 1:5...God refuses to hear even the prayers of the sinner
 Isaiah 59:2...your sin separates you from God so that your prayers
 are not heard

Micah 3:4...God will hide his face from you

Ephesians 2:2...here we find that the sinner has no part in the
 promises of God

B. Because of sin you are already under God's condemnation

Many people make the mistake of thinking that they will not be
 condemned until after they die and are judged. The Bible makes it clear
 that the sinner is already under God's condemnation.

John 3:19...God's condemnation is already upon all who love sin and
 do not trust and follow Jesus

Ephesians 2:1-3...the sinner is already spiritually dead.

C. Because of sin you are a slave

Although you are spiritually dead and unable to please God, you
 are a slave to sin and Satan. Some people try to deny this, but when
 they try to leave sin in their own power, they find they cannot. They
 are slaves to sin.

John 8:34; Romans 6:16; 2 Peter 2:19...these all teach of your slavery
 to sin.

D. Because of sin you deserve eternal punishment

Both the Christian and the lost man die physically. But after
 physical death, the sinner experiences eternal suffering in hell.
 This is called the second death.

Matthew 25:46...hell is a place of eternal punishment

Luke 16:19-31...this man was experiencing great suffering after his
 death and burial. There was no hope of escape or help.

Revelation 20:11-15...this suffering in the lake of fire is the second
 death.

It is true that the results of sin are terrible. However it must
 be remembered that the sinner chose to continue in his sin and he
 rejected God's mercy and forgiveness in Christ Jesus.

III. God says you cannot save yourself

Perhaps you are thinking, "It is a terrible thing to be sinful,
 lost, condemned, and certain of eternal punishment. I must do something
 to save myself." God teaches there is nothing you can do to save yourself.

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Romans 3:20...this teaches you cannot be saved by obeying the laws of God.

No one has ever kept the laws of God perfectly except Jesus.

Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:5...these verses show that you cannot hope to be saved by your good works.

John 14:6; Acts 4:12...here we learn that you cannot be saved through some other religion. Salvation is in Christ alone.

In this lesson we have learned that you are sinful, lost, enslaved to sin, and facing an eternal hell. These are hard words, but they are truths from God's Word. You cannot save yourself. That is why you need a Saviour.

In the next lesson we will learn about the Saviour God has sent for us. This will be Good News indeed.

WHAT JESUS DID TO SAVE YOU

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In lesson one we learned that every person is sinful and lost. We also saw that there is no way a person can save himself. If a person is saved, God must save him. There is Good News in today's lesson. It tells how God has provided a way of salvation so that all who truly want it may be saved from sin.

We read in Matthew 1:21 how the angel spoke to Joseph concerning the birth of Jesus. He said, "She shall bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."

The way of salvation which God has provided is in Jesus Christ. There is no other way. Therefore let us hear what the Bible teaches concerning Jesus and the way of salvation in him. In doing this we will be considering four very important facts about Jesus.

I. Who is Jesus?

Some people say Jesus was the best man who ever lived---but just a man. This is not what the Bible teaches. Other people say that Jesus was created by God and was second only to God. This is not what the Bible teaches either. The following are some of the great truths which the Bible teaches about Jesus.

Jesus was God in the flesh. As we read the Bible carefully, we find that the Word of God speaks of the Father who is God. It also speaks of the Son who is God. It also speaks of the Holy Spirit who is God. That is why we speak of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In the scriptures below we will see what the Bible teaches concerning Jesus as the Son of God, God in the flesh.

Isaiah 9:6...notice that the child to be born is called "mighty God" and "Everlasting Father".

Matthew 1:23...his name means 'God with us'. It was an accurate name because God was with us in the Son, Jesus Christ.

John 1:1...the 'Word' is Jesus (^{John 1:}~~see verse~~ 14). Not only was the Word (Jesus) with God from the very beginning but the Word (Jesus) was God.

John 20:26-29...Thomas not only called Jesus his Lord but also "My God". Jesus accepted both names; Lord and God. He also said those who would believe this were blessed.

Colossians 1:19...if all the fulness of God was in Christ, then he could not have been less than God himself.

John 14:8,9...Jesus explained to Philip that when Philip had seen Jesus, he had seen the Father.

WHAT JESUS DID TO SAVE YOU

Recall

II. Jesus had no sin for which he had to suffer

Satan tempted Jesus many times in many ways. If Jesus had failed and sinned one time, he could not have been our Saviour. He would have had to suffer and die for his own sins. However, the Bible makes it clear that Jesus never sinned.

Matthew 3:17; 17:5...when God looked upon Jesus, he was pleased. If Jesus had sinned, God could not have been pleased.

Matthew 26:59,60...we see that the enemies of Jesus could find no fault with him

Matthew 27:3,4...even Judas who betrayed Jesus confessed that Jesus was without sin

2 Corinthians 5:21...we are told here that Jesus knew no sin

Hebrews 4:15...although Jesus was tempted as we are, he never sinned

III. Jesus died in our place to save us from sin

Jesus gave us true teachings about God and showed us how to overcome Satan. But we are not saved by knowing his teachings or by trying to follow his example. It was his death on the cross for our sins which makes possible our salvation.

Isaiah 53:6...this foretells how Jesus would suffer and die for us

Matthew 20:28...Jesus knew it would take his life on the cross to save us

John 10:11...Jesus speaks of his willingness to die for his sheep

Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21...all these verses

emphasize that Christ died for us

Hebrews 9:14,22...it is only through Jesus' death that we can be saved

IV. There is victory over sin and death in Jesus

It is true Jesus died to save us from the eternal punishment of our sins. But he also died to save us from the power of sin and Satan. He gives us power to live a life of victory. This also is a part of salvation. Ephesians 5:6-10...when Jesus saves a person there will be a difference in his life

2 Corinthians 5:17...Jesus makes us new people who want to do God's will

1 John 3:8,9...the work of Jesus was to destroy the work of Satan in our life

1 Peter 1:3-5...Jesus' victory over death assures our victory over death and gives us hope of an eternal home in heaven.

Let us humbly thank God for the love which caused Jesus to die for us on the cross. Also for the power which raised him from the dead and gives us victory.

HOW TO RECEIVE JESUS AS SAVIOUR

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Many people believe they will have salvation if they do some or all of the following:

1. Learn the answers to certain questions the preacher may ask
2. Become a member of the church
3. Receive baptism and the Lord's Supper
4. Leave certain sins such as adultery, smoking, witchcraft, etc.
5. Try to live a better life

All the things mentioned above are good but they cannot save you. We have learned that Jesus died so that you might be saved. Jesus is the only Saviour. No one else can save you.

The important question is, "How does a person receive Jesus as his Saviour?" In Acts 20:20,21 Paul tells some people from Ephesus that his message among them was, "----repentance to God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." We want to consider carefully "repentance to God" and "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ". What do they mean?

I. Repentance to God

When the Bible was first written, the word 'repent' meant 'to change the mind'. It is a change in thinking. The sinner thinks, "Sin is good. It is the way of real pleasure. The way of God is difficult, and I could not be happy following Jesus." When the sinner repents, he changes his thinking about this. After true repentance he thinks, "Sin is bad. It is the way of sorrow and death. The way of God is the only good way. I cannot be happy unless I am following Jesus Christ." Unless a person has this change of thinking, he can never be saved. Luke 13:3

When a person has had this change of thinking, he will surely change his actions. He will feel sorrow in his heart because of what he has done against God and the hurt he has caused people. He will also feel great sorrow and shame for the kind of person he is. Then he will change. He will seek to do God's will. He will want to help people, not hurt them. He will also want to get the evil out of his heart and live a life pleasing to God. This is repentance to God.

II. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ

Faith in Christ means that we look to Christ alone to save us. We understand that there is nothing we can do in our own power to save ourselves. We understand that no person can save us; no church can save us; no thing such as baptism and the Lord's Supper can save us. Only Jesus can save us.

Once I was visiting my brother. He had a son who was two years old. He wanted to show me the faith his son had in him. He took the child and put him on a high place. Then he said, "Now jump! I will catch you." Immediately the child jumped and the father caught him. He would have had a bad fall if the father had failed. This was an act of faith.

HOW TO RECEIVE JESUS AS SAVIOUR

Part 1

It is the same with the sinner. He cannot save himself. He must have that faith which will cause him to cast himself upon the mercy and saving power of Jesus Christ. When he does this, he will find that there is joy and peace in his heart. He will love Jesus and want to do his will.

No one else can repent and have faith for you. This is between you and God alone. Pray to God. Confess your sins and your sinfulness. Tell him of your change of thinking. Trust in Jesus to forgive and save you. Then follow him. This is the way to receive Christ as your Saviour.

Here are some scriptures which will help you understand that it is through faith in Christ that we are saved.

John 3:16

John 5:24

Romans 5:1

Acts 16:31

Ephesians 2:8,9

BAPTISM AND THE CHURCH

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We cannot do a complete study of baptism and the church in this one lesson. However there are some important truths which we need to consider briefly.

BAPTISM

I. The importance of baptism

We have already learned that it is Jesus who saves us; not baptism. But baptism is important. It is an act of obedience to Christ and it is a witness showing how we were saved.

Matthew 3:13-17...Jesus received baptism as an act of obedience to his heavenly Father

Matthew 28:18-20...Jesus commanded those who become his disciples to be baptized

Acts 2:41; 8:12; 8:36-38; 10:44-48...the disciples baptized those who repented and believed in Jesus.

II. The meaning of baptism

Baptism is a picture of what happens when a person becomes a Christian. The book of Romans helps us understand this. It is a book about salvation. The book of Romans teaches very clearly that a person is justified (saved, made acceptable to God) through faith in Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:21-25...justification comes through faith in Christ

Romans 4:1-5...Abraham is given as an example of someone who is justified by faith.

Romans 5:1...the teaching of justification by faith is restated so there will be no misunderstanding

There can be no question about these verses. A person is made acceptable to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Then in chapter six a question is asked about a person who has been saved continuing to live in sin. Paul says it is impossible for a saved person to make a habit of living in sin. He reminds the Christians of what happened when they were saved. They accepted Christ's death as their death to sin. They were given new life in Christ. Baptism pictures this experience of the heart. It shows death, burial, and resurrection to a new life. Romans 6:1-4. The experience in the heart comes through faith in Jesus. The experience is pictured in the water of baptism.

III. The manner of Baptism

There is much disagreement among churches concerning the proper manner of baptizing. Some churches pour water on the head. Some sprinkle a little water on the person. Other churches say there is no need for baptism at all. As Baptists, we say baptism is important because it is a thing which Jesus commanded us to do. And if we are to baptize, then we should do it in the way practiced in the New Testament. We want to call your attention to

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three reasons why immersion is the only scriptural manner of baptism.

- A. Immersion is the proper manner of baptizing because of the meaning of the word 'baptize'.

When the Bible was being translated from Greek into English, the Greek word 'baptidzo' was translated into English as 'baptize'. They did not translate the meaning of the word. If we are to find the real meaning of this word 'baptidzo', we must go to the Greek dictionary. It tells us that the word 'baptidzo' means: to put into water, immerse, dip. The very meaning of the word forbids sprinkling or pouring. We must immerse.

- B. The examples in the Bible show us that immersion is the proper manner of baptizing.

Mark 1:9,10...notice the words 'coming up out of the water'

John 3:23...much water is not necessary ~~if~~ one is only sprinkling or pouring a little on the person.

Acts 8:38...notice that both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water.

- C. Immersion is the proper form of baptism because it is necessary to picture death, burial, and resurrection

Earlier in the study we saw that baptism pictured death, burial, and resurrection. Sprinkling and pouring cannot picture burial. When a person is buried, he is put deep into the ground. We picture this as the person is lowered beneath the water.

Jesus meant for baptism to teach a great truth---the believer's death to sin through Christ, the believer's burial to the old way of life, and the believer's new resurrected life in Christ. This can only be pictured as we immerse the believer into the water and then raise him out of the water.

IV. The candidate for baptism

When we have understood the real meaning of baptism then there is no problem as to who should be baptized. Baptism pictures a spiritual experience with Jesus Christ. only those who have had this experience can truly picture it in baptism. In the New Testament we find that those who repented and trusted Christ were baptized. In his command to us, Jesus says that we are to make disciples, then baptize. Study Acts 2:41 and 10:47.

Lesson 4

BAPTISM AND THE CHURCH

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THE CHURCH

Some people make the mistake of pointing to a building and saying, "That is my church." In the Bible the word 'church' never refers to a building. It always means a group of people. It is a group of people who have been saved, baptized, and are meeting together to worship, to help one another, and to share the gospel with the lost.

You are preparing to become a member of a Baptist church. Later you will be learning many other truths about the church. But before you become a member, you need to understand well the following truths about the church which you plan to join.

1. The church is for people who have truly repented and are trusting Jesus as their Saviour. They want to do the will of Jesus as it is revealed through the Bible and by the Holy Spirit. If this is true in your life, you are eligible to become a member. Acts 2:47b.

2. Christ is the head of the church. As the head directs each member of the body, Christ, as head of the church, directs each member. Each member of a body has a work to do. It is the same with the church; each member has a work he can do for Jesus. No one else can do his work for him. If we fail, the entire body suffers. When we do well, the entire body is strengthened. Study carefully 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

3. There are certain positions of leadership in the church such as pastor, deacon, and teacher. The people of the church are to choose the ones who are to fill these places but they must be careful to choose those who are qualified according to God's Word. Only those who are truly qualified will do the work they are supposed to do. Study Ephesians 4:11-13 and 1 Timothy 3:1-13.

4. The members of the church should love, help, and strengthen one another. You will be able to help many people in their physical and spiritual needs. Be such a good member that you will be an example to all the others.

5. Remember, Satan will always try to bring trouble to your church. As you pray, read the Bible, and help one another, you will be able to guard against Satan's tricks and lies.

It is my hope that as you follow the Lord in baptism and become a member of the church, you will honour Jesus in all that you do. Just as someone helped you to know Jesus, now you can help others to trust Jesus, find eternal life in him, and know the joy of serving him. May God bless you richly.