

Why Should You Be Baptized?

by

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Have you ever wondered if it is really possible for a person to change his life? Many psychologists have said that it is impossible for a person to change. They say that a person's goals in life can be redirected and he can be given a better education, but his basic character will still be the same. Their theory is that his life will always take a certain direction because of his genes at birth and the environment of his early childhood years.

According to human wisdom, this theory sounds good. It makes sense to people who do not believe in God, but who believe that life is ruled by blind chance and the forces of nature. It is also very popular with those who are not interested in changing their lives.

But Christians know that this idea is totally false. There are thousands of people in the world today who can testify that a person's life can be radically turned around and pointed in a new direction by coming into contact with the life of Jesus Christ. Concerning this new direction in life, the Bible says:

2 Corinthians 5.17 - Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Therefore, the promise of the word of God is that we can be transformed into new people,

regardless of what our lives may have been like in the past.

Are you at the point in your life where you want to experience that change? Do you want to become a Christian, a disciple of Jesus Christ? Do you want to have your sins forgiven and know that the guilt of your past mistakes has been removed?

How does a person become that "new creature" in Christ? Maybe you have started reading the Bible, especially the New Testament, and have seen many Scriptures on the subject of baptism. The natural question that should be asked at this time is: "Should you be baptized?" If baptism is necessary for salvation, then all sincere people would want to be baptized immediately. The question is crucial and must be answered before a person can know for certain that he is saved and has become a child of God.

The Apostle Paul

When we read through the New Testament, perhaps the best illustration of conversion is the Apostle Paul. His life was the classic example of how someone can be transformed by Jesus Christ. And yet, if the Christians of Paul's day had taken a vote on the most unlikely man ever to obey the gospel, he would have certainly won.

We know from the Scriptures that Paul was born in the city of Tarsus in the province of Cilicia (in the country we know today as Turkey). Tarsus was a “free city,” meaning that Paul was born a Roman citizen. But he was also a Jew, born to Jewish parents from the tribe of Benjamin. He was raised to speak both Hebrew and Greek and was highly educated, having studied under Gamaliel, a famous Jewish teacher.

Paul’s original name was Saul (it was changed to Paul in *Acts 13:13*). He became an outstanding Jewish scholar and was one of the rising stars of Judaism.

Details of His Conversion

Let us study Paul’s conversion to Christ. This event was so important that the Bible has three accounts of it: *Acts 9*, *Acts 22*, and *Acts 29*. Let us look at the account in *Acts 22:1-21*.

In this passage, Paul was telling his story under very difficult circumstances. A mob of Jews had just tried to kill him. The Roman army had rescued him, and he was now on the steps of the Roman barracks addressing the crowd, telling them how he became a disciple of Christ. Notice the details which he related about his conversion.

He said in verse 3 that he was zealous for God. The truth is that Paul could have easily been considered a fanatic for Judaism, a violent man, almost a psychopath. He felt that it was his destiny in life to stamp out the Christian religion. According to verse 4, he had bitterly persecuted the church. He had personally held the coats of the men who had killed the gospel preacher Stephen. Paul was a man who was totally dedicated to stopping a movement, and he was a vicious enemy of the Lord’s church.

But as Paul was on the road to Damascus, where he was going to arrest more Christians, he was suddenly stopped by a blinding light:

Acts 22:7-11 - ...and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And I answered, “Who art Thou, Lord?” And he said to me, “I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.” And those who were with me beheld the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. And I said, “What shall I do, Lord?” And the Lord said to me, “Arise and go on into Damascus; and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.”

Why didn’t Christ tell Paul right then what to do? The answer is that salvation was never presented directly from God. The message of the gospel was always presented through a fellow human being. Every case of conversion in the New Testament followed this pattern. In Paul’s case, the gospel was going to be presented by a Christian in Damascus named Ananias.

Today, it is the same. No one hears the gospel through a vision or the voice of the Holy Spirit. Rather, he must study the Bible, discuss it with someone who is a Christian, and hear it preached, or in some other way have it explained to him.

Paul then was blind and had to be led into Damascus by hand. After fasting and praying for three days, he met the Christian Ananias.

In verse 13, Ananias addressed Paul as his brother, since they were both Jews by race. Then Ananias told Paul what he had to do in order to be saved:

Acts 22:16 - "And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name."

In the parallel account of *Acts 9:18*, we read that Paul did not delay, but immediately went out and was baptized. He realized that he had made a terrible mistake in his life, that all of his tremendous energy and enthusiasm had been going in the wrong direction. Later in his life, Paul wrote that he had been the foremost of sinners (*1 Timothy 1:15*).

Christ took this man who had persecuted the church so intensely and gave him the job of taking the gospel to the Gentile world. After all, Paul had an excellent background, since he was a Roman citizen and at the same time was a Jew and a scholar in the Old Testament. Thus began the life of Paul as a Christian.

What Did Not Save Paul?

Let us notice some things about Paul's conversion that did not save him.

First, we see that he was not saved by being religious. When we read through the book of *Acts*, it is interesting to notice the cases of people who were already religious and very sincere in their faith, yet who were still lost. Consider the Jews of *Acts 2:37*, the Ethiopian eunuch of *Acts 8:25-39*, and Lydia in *Acts 16:14*.

Many people think it doesn't really matter what they believe, as long as they are sincere. Then God will accept that sincerity and grant them salvation. In fact, many people today would have argued with Christ and would have said, "Lord, didn't you stop the wrong person? You must have made a mistake. After all, I'm already religious. I'm sincere, and I go to church. I already

believe in You, God – I don't think I need to be converted."

Yes, Paul was totally dedicated in his religious fervor, and he had devoted his life to his beliefs. But he was badly mistaken and was in a lost condition.

Secondly, notice that having a vision did not save Paul. Some religious groups today teach that a person must have some kind of spiritual experience in order to be saved. They teach that a person has to speak in tongues, or have a miracle performed in his life, or have the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Others teach that a person must be "slain in the Spirit." But who can argue with what happened to Paul, since Christ personally spoke to him? Yet, that did not save Paul. He still had to go into the city and follow the instructions of Ananias.

In the third place, please consider the fact that recognizing Jesus as Lord did not save Paul. In the conversation with Christ, Paul twice referred to Him as Lord (*Acts 22:8, 10*). Almost all of the TV and radio evangelists today teach that one is saved by accepting Jesus as Lord. In fact, there is a prayer that people are taught to pray if they want to be saved. One of the TV evangelists of our day has written the following:

"Pray this prayer and mean it with all of your heart:

'Dear Lord Jesus, I now realize I am a sinner. I accept the fact that you died for me on the rugged cross of Calvary. I now open my heart's door and receive You as Savior and Lord of my life. Please take full control of me and help me to be the kind of Christian You want me to be. Amen.'

If you prayed this prayer in all sincerity, you are now a child of God."

But didn't Paul open the door of his heart and receive Jesus as his Savior and Lord? It was obvious that he did and that he was willing to do anything that Jesus asked him to do. But Paul still was not saved! Ananias had to tell him to do something else to wash his sins away.

Finally, notice that a period of fasting and prayer did not save Paul. Paul prayed three days. If praying could save a person, then surely Paul would have been saved. There would have been no need for Ananias to tell Paul to do something else. The truth is that we don't "pray through" to be saved, and we don't go to the "prayer altar" to be saved, and we don't fast to receive salvation.

What Did Bring About Paul's Salvation?

How then was Paul saved? Please read once again those magnificent words that Ananias preached to Paul:

Acts 22.16 - "And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name."

Paul had to get up and be baptized.

Why couldn't Paul have been baptized right there? Ananias could have brought a little bottle of water and sprinkled a few drops on Paul's head. But Ananias didn't do that because baptism is not sprinkling. Paul and Ananias had to go somewhere else with enough water for Paul to be immersed in.

Other Scriptures on conversion in the New Testament also clearly support this. When the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized, both he and the preacher went down into the water for baptism (*Acts 8:38-39*). In *Romans 6:4*, baptism is referred to as a burial. This

shows that immersion is the only method that the Bible has authorized.

Therefore, Paul did not have his sins washed away until he had been baptized. We know this for certain because Ananias would not have told him to wash his sins away if Paul did not have sins any longer. We don't tell someone to wash the dirt off his hands unless there is still dirt on his hands. Paul still had his sins until he was immersed in water by Ananias. Only then did he become a saved person.

God's Plan of Salvation

It should be pointed out that being baptized is one of several commands that Paul had to obey to be saved. Remember that in *Acts 22:10*, Jesus said that Paul had to do all that was appointed for him to do.

Back in the early 1800's, a gospel preacher named Walter Scott was teaching God's plan of salvation to a group of young people. He illustrated this plan by holding up his hand and letting each finger represent a part of that salvation. The five parts were: hear the gospel (*Romans 10:14*), believe in Jesus (*John 3:16*), confess Jesus as the Christ (*Matthew 10:32-33*), repent of one's sins (*Luke 13:3*), and be baptized (*Acts 2:38*).

Paul did these five things. He had heard the gospel preached by Ananias. He believed in Christ; we know this because of his attitude in sending for Ananias. It is obvious that he confessed his faith, because he must have told Ananias that he believed in Christ. Paul then repented of his sins; this is seen by his prayer and fasting for three days – he was sorry for the way he had lived. Then he was baptized.

This former persecutor of the church was now converted and became a defender of the

Lord's people. He became the apostle to the Gentiles and dedicated the rest of his life to preaching the gospel.

Should You Be Baptized?

Let us now consider the original question of this tract: "Should you be baptized?" The answer has to be "yes," if you want your sins forgiven. Any answer other than that would be wrong.

But at this point, many people will begin to make excuses to keep from being baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Let us look at some of these excuses.

First, some will say that this is merely "water salvation." The truth is that the water is not sacred or holy. It is just plain, ordinary water. We are not saved by the water itself; we are saved by the grace of God. However, that grace is conditional. God's grace covers our sins on the condition that we obey Him, and that initial obedience is completed in baptism. In fact, baptism is the step that puts us into the body of Christ, His church:

Galatians 3.27 - For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

When people try to dismiss baptism by calling it "water salvation," they are similar to the management of a large hospital located in a major Midwestern city. The newspaper recently carried the story that officials of the hospital had just discovered that the firefighting equipment in the hospital had never been connected to the city water supply. For 35 years, people in the hospital had placed their confidence in the hoses throughout the building in case of fire. But now they had found that the water pipe for the hoses went four feet into the

ground and stopped. For all those years, they had had a false sense of security in the costly equipment and polished valves and well placed outlets, but it was worthless. They had overlooked what really counted – the water. How tragic it is for people to assume that everything is well, when really they are in great danger.

Other people have refused to be baptized because if it is necessary for salvation, they wonder how God could condemn all the people in churches that do not teach this. In *1 Corinthians 5:12*, the Bible expressly forbids us from judging those who are not baptized and thus are not covered by the blood of Christ. God will be the final judge concerning the eternal destiny of those people. We can only urge all people to obey the commandments of God.

There is an emotional excuse that some use to avoid baptism: "My dear mother was the finest person I ever knew, and she was not baptized. If I am baptized, it will mean that she is lost." To that, we must again say as kindly as possible that God is the final judge.

But let us look at the two possibilities concerning one's mother. If she is lost, the one thing she would want for her children is that they would be saved. In *Luke 16.19-31*, we have the account of the rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus was saved, but the rich man was lost. What tormented the rich man most was the thought that his five brothers might come to that place of punishment. He said to Abraham:

Luke 16.27-28 - "Then I beg you, Father, that you send him [Lazarus] to my father's house – for I have five brothers – that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment."

If someone's mother is lost, the only thing that may give her comfort is knowing that her children are saved.

On the other hand, if a person's mother is saved, again she would want her children to be saved also. They can be saved by obeying God.

These excuses then should not keep a person from being baptized.

Several years ago, there was an exhibit of some of the great art of the world. One man left the exhibit in disgust and said on the way out, "There's nothing in there worth seeing." The doorkeeper heard him and replied, "If you please, sir, the pictures are no longer on trial, but the spectators are." In the same way, baptism is not on trial; rather, we are on trial and must conform our lives to God's requirement.

There is another question that should be asked at this time:

When Should You Be Baptized?

Ananias said to Paul that he should not delay in being baptized. Paul was to be immersed as soon as he learned the truth and agreed to obey it. There was to be absolutely no delay, because he was in a lost condition up to the moment of his baptism into the body of Christ.

Throughout the book of *Acts*, whenever people learned what they had to do to be saved, they did not delay for any reason. They did not eat or sleep or consult their relatives or anyone else. In every case, they were immediately baptized, no matter what hour of the day or night.

Delay is one of the most effective tactics that Satan uses to cause people to be lost. We are all familiar with the old saying, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." Unfortunately, that saying is still true.

Our prayer is that you have now heard the gospel – through this tract or the person who presented it to you, or through your own reading of the Bible. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and are willing to state that belief, and if you are sorry over your past life and, with God's help, will change from that sin, then you are ready to be baptized. Find a preacher of the gospel or another Christian who will baptize you, just as Paul did. May God be with you as you make the greatest decision of your life.

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