

# Marking Your Commitment to Follow Christ

Take time to thoroughly read and think through the passages. We hope this study will prove to be an invaluable exercise for you as you prepare for baptism.

## Our Need for Grace

Some people assume that they are not that much worse than anyone else, so they don't need any special help from God. How would you put in your own words the message of the following verses to those who think themselves morally "acceptable"?

*Romans 3:10-18, 23: As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes." Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.*

*Galatians 3:22: But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. (See also Isaiah 59:2 and Isaiah 64:6)*

Sometimes, we can be too proud to make such an admission of moral failure. How would you describe the relief God stands ready to offer so that we do not have to shy away from being utterly honest admitting our sinful condition?

*1 John 1:8-9: If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (See also Matthew 11:28-30, Isaiah 1:18, and Romans 8:1)*

Sometimes, we're afraid to admit our sinfulness because to do so feels so hopeless. Many of us react to the sense of despair and decide to become "religious" – we try to change our behaviors so we feel (and appear) better. The truth is, though, that we can't save ourselves by our own good works. Read the following passage and re-phrase what it means to you personally in your own words.

*Titus 3:4-7: But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

To forgive someone literally means to release that person from indebtedness. But if you forgive a debt, the money must then come from somewhere else – usually you, the debt-forgiver. In the spiritual realm, God's forgiveness means we're released from spiritual debt. But our sins don't just vanish into thin air. How are our sins taken away according to these verses?

*1 Peter 2:24-25: He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (See also Hebrews 10:10-14)*

# Our Response to God

Once we're at the position where we've been honest about our need for God's help and forgiveness, what does the Bible say is the next step? Rephrase these passages in your own words.

*Romans 10:9: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

*Galatians 2:16: We know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (See also Acts 16:30-31, John 1:11-12, Ephesians 1:3-6)*

## Baptism: The Outward Sign of Grace Received

At Journey we believe in marking and celebrating certain spiritual milestones in the lives of people who are seeking God. The most significant milestone that anyone can reach is the decision to appeal to God for His grace and to begin a new life in Jesus Christ. Baptism is a way of marking this very important decision that a follower of Christ makes. We want you to be informed about the biblical meaning of Baptism, and nothing would give us greater pleasure as a church than to celebrate your Baptism with you as a symbol of a spiritual change that has happened in your life.

In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus commands his followers to *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit..."* Baptism is the means by which disciples of Christ are identified. And because Christ Himself commanded it, all Christians ought to be baptized.

In other passages like Acts 2:41, 8:12, and 10:47-48 it is evident that the act of Baptism came after an individual's decision to trust Christ for salvation. It was an outward sign of something that had occurred in a person's life. No one should be baptized unless they have made a decision to identify with Christ, and no one can make that decision for another person. The New Testament records the Baptism of adults who are believers, but never infants. Baptism can't give a person anything, spiritually speaking. It can only signify something that has already happened.

Romans 6:1-11 is a passage about Baptism. In these verses, the apostle Paul explains how the immersion mode of Baptism identifies the believer with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Going under water pictures Christ's death. Coming out of the water illustrates His resurrection. At Journey, we baptize people by immersion because of its symbolism and because it is the biblical model through the New Testament.

A good illustration of Baptism has to do with marriage. In a wedding, a bride and a groom stand side-by-side in front of a group of people. They make solemn vows to one another, each one pledging their life to the other. To signify the unseen union that these two have with one another, they exchange rings. These bands of gold tell the world that they are now married, that a permanent change has happened to them. The marriage depends on a commitment, not on the bands of gold that people wear on their fingers. The same is true of becoming a Christian. You can't go through the symbol of being baptized without having made a commitment to being a Christian. The symbol would mean nothing. And, you don't have to be baptized in order to have Christ, anymore than you must exchange rings in order to be really married. But if the inner commitment to trust Christ alone has been made, then the outward sign of Baptism should be as valued and as visible as the gold ring on a newlywed's finger.

What about infant Baptism? In the Bible, we read stories of parents bringing their children to Jesus. He held them, prayed for them, and blessed them... but he never baptized them, nor did he tell anyone else to. Baptism is appropriate only for those who have made a personal decision to trust Christ alone for their salvation. If you were baptized as a child, it was no doubt the intent of your parents that you would one day be a follower of Christ. Your Baptism as an adult can be viewed as the fulfillment of your parents' wishes. It in no way cheapens or nullifies the ceremony of Baptism that you received as a child.

## **To sum up, we believe that the Bible makes the following points about Baptism:**

- Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Christ.
- Baptism symbolizes the spiritual cleansing through divine forgiveness and newness of life experienced by believers by virtue of their identification with Christ in his death and resurrection.
- Baptism provides an opportunity for believers to make a formal profession of their faith before the church.
- Baptism initiates new Christians into the church.