

Week 10:

What does it mean to become a Christian?

In Preparation:

1. Listen to the message given at Kettlebrook on April 11, 2010 either live, on the web at: <http://www.kettlebrook.org/resources/index.htm>, or via podcast at iTunes.
2. Read chapter 13 (pages 90-94) in Wayne Grudem's *Christian Beliefs*.
3. Prepare your responses to the questions presented here in this study.

From Sunday:

What was the main point of the message?

How will this practically change your life?

From Your Perspective:

When someone states that they have become a Christian what do you interpret that to mean?

What life experiences have led you to feel this way about what it means to become a Christian?

Do you know two people in your life that call themselves Christians, but their understanding of what that means is vastly different? Describe the differences below.

From the Skeptic:

Below are some thoughts or comments that a skeptic may have regarding becoming a Christian.

- “I accepted Christ as my Savior over and over and it never seemed to work.”
 - “I hear people say they have become Christians but nothing ever changes in their life.”
 - “Becoming a Christian is all about rules and regulations. It’s about what I can’t do.”
 - “I’m a good person and do a lot of good things, why do I need to become a Christian?”
 - “Yeah, I’m a Christian because I’m a good person.”
 - “Christians are the same as all the rest of us, I see it everyday with the people I work with....what’s the point?”
 - (create your own here) “
-
- .”

Have you ever made any of these above comments? Why?

Each of the above comments makes some assumptions. Pick two of them and try to discover the underlying assumptions.

From the Bible:

Scripture has given us the roadmap to becoming a Christian including the well known verse of John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world, that he gave His only Son, that

whoever *believes in Him* should not perish but have eternal life.” But is that all it takes to become a Christian? Let’s look at some passages to find out.

Read Ezekiel 36:26-27. What role does God play in our becoming a Christian?

Romans 10:9. What role do we play in becoming a Christian?

Read Acts 20:21. Paul preaches here that to have true saving faith there must be _____ and _____. Why not just one or the other?

Read Galatians 5:19-26. According to this passage, how is our faith evidenced?

Based on this description, how well is your faith evidenced in your life? Would your spouse/kids/friends/ agree?

From the Book

In chapter 13, Grudem states “it is the job of the believers to explain the Gospel message; it is God’s job to make that message or call effective.”

Discuss the ways in which you have seen the Gospel message presented. How have they been consistent with this? How have they differed?

If you were to explain the Gospel to someone who has not heard it how would this change your approach? How would your description of the Gospel be different in light of this chapter/message?

Moving Forward

Is it possible that you thought you had become a Christian and have not? Reflect on what is missing or holding you back from having true saving faith.

Many times we think we need all the “answers” when sharing the Gospel. How has this study altered your view of this, if at all?

What holds you back from sharing the Gospel?

Who is the one person that needs to hear the message of the Gospel that you can share it with? Is it you? Can your group help you with this?

Digging Deeper:

Some other passages that you may want to explore include:

- Romans 10:14-17- How faith comes
- 1 Peter 1:23 - The seed which gives birth to spiritual life
- John 5:24 - The promise to those who trust in the Lord
- Acts 16:14 - Lydia’s story of God opening her heart

Some other messages that you may want to listen to include:

- Voddie Baucham from No Regrets at Elmbrook February 2010 available at: http://www.noregretsconference.org/MP3/2010/NR10_999.mp3
- Becoming a Christian by Alistair Begg available for download at: <http://www.truthforlife.org/resources/message/becoming-a-christian/>

Two books that you may want to explore:

Finally Alive by John Piper (ISBN # 1845504216)

The Gospel for Real Life by Jerry Bridges (ISBN # 1576835073)

Special Assignment:

For the next small group meeting, please (on a separate sheet of paper) write out your responses to either #1 or #2. You will be encouraged to share these responses with each other next week.

1. If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, briefly tell how & why you became a fully devoted follower of him.
 - How you came to see your condition as a sinner & your desperate need for a Savior.
 - Your awareness of your reception of God's grace.
 - A brief description of your life that is not "in Christ" & the difference Jesus has made in your life.

OR

2. If you have not yet placed your faith in Jesus Christ, rather than answer the above questions please feel free to express where you are currently at in your journey of faith below. The below spectrum may be helpful for you in determining where you may be in your journey and help you to put words to it.

Not Interested: Aware but no interest, Negative view of God and Christianity, believes all religions are the same

Curiously Seeking: Open to spirituality, attend Christian events out of curiosity, may still struggle with negative view of Christianity, questioning

Assertively Seeking: Taking positive steps to find needed answers, beginning to understand the difference between religion and Christianity, motivated by a need for answers, responding

Appendix

What is Baptism?

In Preparation:

1. Prepare your responses to the questions presented here in this study.

From Your Perspective:

Why in your opinion do people get baptized?

Have you been baptized? If so, describe your baptism. Was it significant to you? Why or why not?

Verbatim:

Below are some thoughts or comments that you may have said or heard regarding baptism.

- “Of course I’m a Christian; I got baptized when I was a baby.”
- “Why would I need to be baptized if I already was baptized as a baby?”
- “We need to get our child baptized so that they don’t go to hell.”
- “Baptism is kind of like heaven insurance for babies.”
- (create your own here) “

_____.”

Have you ever made any of these above comments? Why?

From the Bible:

Below are some texts (from the NIV unless otherwise noted) that reference baptism in the New Testament. Please take some time to read these different texts. As you read, be looking specifically for what you can learn about baptism from each text. In the space provide after each text, summarize what you learn about baptism from that text.

Matthew 28:19-20

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Acts 2:37-41

When the people heard this, *they were cut to the heart* and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "***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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ***Those who accepted his message were baptized***, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”

Acts 8:12

But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Acts 8:36-38 - NKJV

Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch *went down into the water*, and he baptized him.

Acts 16:14-15

One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Acts 16:27-34

The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved* — you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God — he and his whole family.

Acts 18:8 Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized. NIV

Acts 22:15-17

You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

What are some of the themes that emerged from your study of these texts regarding baptism? Did you learn anything new?

Overview of Baptism:

Below is a brief overview of baptism, trying to address the how, who, what & why of baptism.

Mode of Baptism (How is it performed?)

- Baptism comes directly from the Greek word “baptidzo” which means “to immerse” or “to dip.”
 - The word was often used for material being dipped and saturated in dyes.
 - There are other Greek words that are not used when referring to baptism:
 - Rantidzo = “sprinkling”
 - Epicheuo & Proschusis = “pouring”
- Early New Testament Jews baptized their converts by means of immersion
 - John the Baptist used immersion as he baptized in the Jordan River
 - It would seem clear that in the New Testament context baptism by immersion is the way baptism was performed by Jesus and his followers in the New Testament church.
- Immersion is symbolic and illustrative of one’s identification with Jesus:
 - Immersion → Death of Jesus
 - Submersion under water → Burial of Jesus
 - Emergence from water → Resurrection to new life of Jesus

Recipients of Baptism (Who is to be baptized?)

- The New Testament reveals that believers in Jesus were baptized
 - All the relevant passages discussing baptism reflect that faith in Jesus was the indispensable pre-requisite to baptism.
 - F.F. Bruce notes that “The idea of an unbaptized Christian simply was not entertained in the New Testament.”

Meaning of Baptism (What does baptism mean?)

- Two uses of the word “baptism.”
 - **Spirit Baptism** = the act by which the Holy Spirit places believers within the Body of Christ
 - 1 Corinthians 12:13--For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.
 - Spirit Baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit happens at the moment of conversion

- Matthew 3:11 - Jesus came to baptize with the Holy Spirit
- Romans 8:9b – “And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”
- **Water Baptism** = the visible and outward symbol of previous occurrence of Spirit baptism
- Things to Note regarding the meaning of baptism:
 - Water baptism is not necessary to receive the Holy Spirit (see Acts 10:43-48 of Cornelius)
 - Water baptism is not necessary to receive God’s forgiveness of sins
 - Baptism does not save a person from the penalty of their sins
 - A person is saved thru faith alone in the completed work of Jesus
 - Baptism is the outward visible confession of faith, expressed in action
 - In the absence of saving faith in Jesus, baptism is an empty ritual
 - Baptism Illustration: Baptism is symbolic like a wedding ring
- Baptism symbolizes:
 - that one has entered into a personal relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord
 - that one possesses an assurance of their salvation in the saving work of Jesus
 - that one becomes a member of the Body of Christ (the Church of all true believers in Jesus throughout time and space)
 - that one has been released from slavery (mastery) to sin. They will still sin, but are no longer enslaved by it.

Reasons for Baptism (Why get baptized?)

- Jesus commands it in Mt 28: 16-20→ He relates it directly to becoming a disciple
- Baptism is ordered by apostles for believers: Peter ordered Cornelius in Acts 10:48
- Baptism was universally practiced by early church—no such thing as unbaptized believer
- It is a wonderful symbol of obedience & identification with Jesus as one’s Savior & Lord

Have you learned anything new about baptism from this discussion?

If you have not yet been baptized as a follower of Jesus Christ, what is keeping you from doing so?