

Session 8

THE CHURCH CALLS FOR BAPTISM

Acts 10:44-48

Memory Verse

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, each 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, CSB



The Church Calls for Baptism

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Acts gives us a model for baptism: When we receive salvation, we make a public profession of faith through believer's baptism. Baptism is not necessary for salvation, but it is an act of obedience and a proclamation of following Jesus.

CALL TO ACTION: Be saved! Be baptized!

When Jesus commanded His followers to, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19), He was creating something new. He was creating something distinct from the Jewish faith many of His followers devoutly practiced. Jewish men were set apart through the act of circumcision, a sign of covenant with God dating back to the days of Abraham (Genesis 17:10-14). Jesus gave a new command for converts: baptize.

Baptism is an outward symbol of an inward change, and Christians have been practicing believer's baptism since the days of Jesus. Not all denominations practice baptism in the same way, but Baptists interpret Scripture to call for believer's baptism, baptism as a faithful step following the decision to accept the gift of salvation and follow Christ. Baptism is a way to publicly profess our faith.

It's important to note that **baptism isn't necessary for salvation**. We are saved by God's grace through faith in His Son Jesus alone. Salvation isn't something we earn through acts like baptism (Ephesians 2:8-9). We don't need to be baptized to be

saved, but Scripture does present baptism as a faithful step after a believer has come to follow Jesus. In our study today, we're going to explore a couple of passages that mention baptism in the book of Acts, and the apostle Paul's baptism in Acts 9.

 What are some questions or possible misunderstandings you've had about baptism in the past?

 Have you been baptized before? If so, when? If not, what has kept you from this?


Session Summary

Following the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter stood up to deliver a powerful sermon that resulted in thousands being saved. His sermon culminated in a simple call to action: Repent and be baptized. Those who accepted the gift of salvation responded with a public profession of faith through baptism.

Later, in Acts 10, Peter shared the gospel with a group of Gentiles who heard his message, believed in Jesus, received the Holy Spirit, and then were baptized. In both cases, we see clearly that baptism isn't necessary for salvation, but it is an outward symbol of our choice to follow Jesus.

Saul's conversion and baptism is recorded in Acts 9. Luke noted that after being saved and baptized, Saul *immediately* began preaching in Jesus's name. His story reminds us that believing and being baptized isn't the end of our story; it's just the beginning. We're called to go and make disciples and act as Jesus's witnesses, just like the members of the early church.

1. Repent and Be Baptized (Acts 2:37–41)

 Peter told those listening to repent and be baptized. Why are these two steps linked?



What does this passage teach us about the connection between belief in Jesus and baptism?

After Jesus's followers received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter delivered a sermon to the stunned crowd. In this sermon, Peter explained the outpouring of the Holy Spirit using Old Testament Scripture, acted as Jesus's witness by proclaiming the truth about Him (Jesus is the risen Messiah), and explained how Old Testament prophecy pointed to the truth about Jesus (Jesus is the Messiah the people had been waiting for). At the end of his sermon in today's passage, Peter issued a call to repentance.

The Holy Spirit used Peter's sermon to stir the hearts of those listening (v. 37). With the Holy Spirit's guidance, they realized they needed Jesus, and they asked the apostles what they should do next. Peter gave a threefold response.

"Repent" (v. 38): Peter first urged them to repent. In the process of salvation, we first recognize our reality as sinners in need of a Savior (Jesus) and actively repent (Romans 3:23). When we repent, we turn away from the sin in our lives and turn toward Christ as our Savior.


"Be baptized" (v. 38): Next, Peter urged them to be baptized as a public declaration of faith in Jesus. Baptism is a symbol of our following Jesus, but it isn't what saves us. When we accept the gift of salvation in Christ, we tell others about it.

"Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38): Finally, Peter told them they would receive the Holy Spirit. When we accept the gift of salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us permanently. The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual gifts, molds us to look more like Jesus, helps us live a life that glorifies God, leads and guides us, helps us see sin in our lives, helps us understand Scripture, and empowers us to share the gospel. Notice that Peter urged his audience to first repent and then be baptized. This order is important. We first repent and follow Jesus, then we make a public profession of faith through baptism.

Peter urged the crowd to repent and be baptized in verse 38, and in verse 41, we see their response. Luke recorded that those who accepted Peter's message and believed

in Jesus responded in baptism. We also get the sense that this act of baptism took place quickly. This passage makes a clear connection between repentance, belief, and baptism.

The crowd at Pentecost mostly would have been made up of Jews in Jerusalem for the festival. In our next passage, we'll look at a time when Peter urged Gentile converts to be baptized.

 Application: The crowd took Peter's call seriously. Have you considered the importance of baptism if you have placed your faith in Jesus? How might you need to respond?

2. Baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:44-48)

 What do you notice about the order of events in this passage?

 What connection was there between receiving the Holy Spirit and responding in baptism?

During Jesus's earthly ministry, Jewish and Gentile cultures mostly remained apart. Following their return from exile—which was a result of the Jews turning away from God by participating in Gentile culture, namely idol worship—religious legalism emerged among the Jews. Initially, this shift was meant to protect the people from future disobedience.

By the time Jesus arrived, that desire had moved further into a culture that, in many ways, missed the mark of what God intended through His law. We see this through Jesus's teachings, His clashes with the religious leaders, and parables like the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. Devout Jews generally didn't associate with Gentiles.

Despite tensions between the Jews and Gentiles, Jesus was clear in His commands for the early church:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of *all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Matthew 28:19, emphasis added

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, *in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*”

Acts 1:8, emphasis added

God’s gift of salvation wasn’t just for the Jews, it was for everyone. Make no mistake, this would have been a radical shift for a devout Jew. But this radical truth didn’t make cultural tensions go away; it was a very real issue the early church had to work through. This is the context of Acts 10.

While praying, Peter had a vision, where he saw a large sheet spread before him with unclean animals, unfit to eat according to Old Testament law. When the Lord urged him to eat, Peter, a devout Jew, refused. The Lord’s response was powerful and persistent, “What God has made clean, do not call impure” (Acts 10:15b).


The message? God was tearing down the cultural walls between the Jews and Gentiles. Jesus made no distinction between them in the church He was creating. In Peter’s words, “God doesn’t show favoritism” (Acts 10:34). God used the Israelite people to bless all the nations through Jesus (Genesis 22:18), and now, the gift of salvation through Jesus was open to everyone. Gentiles were as much a part of the family as Jews were.

Following Peter’s vision, he visited the home of a Gentile, a Roman Centurian named Cornelius. Cornelius and those in his household feared God (Acts 10:1-2). When Peter delivered the gospel message to these Gentiles, they accepted it. Our passage is the record of what happened next.

Do you notice the order of events here? The Gentiles believed, then received the Holy Spirit. We receive the Holy Spirit when we accept the gift of salvation. At this point in our story, baptism hadn’t entered the picture! These verses give evidence that baptism isn’t necessary for salvation.

Once the Holy Spirit arrived and came down on the Gentile believers, the Jews (“the circumcised believers,” v. 45), were surprised. Remember, the idea that salvation is for everyone, not just for God’s chosen people (the Jews), was radical and new. But they couldn’t deny what they experienced. The Holy Spirit had come, and the Gentile believers reacted much the same way that the Jews did on Pentecost: They spoke in tongues and declared God’s greatness.

After Cornelius’s household believed the gospel, Peter “commanded [the new believers] to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (v. 48). This teaches us an important lesson about who the gospel message is for (Jesus shows no favoritism), and it also teaches us about baptism. They heard the gospel message, believed, received the Holy Spirit, and were baptized as a public profession of their faith. This is believer’s baptism!

 **Application: What can we learn about baptism from this passage?**

3. Saul’s Baptism (Acts 9:15-20)

 **What was the order of events connected to baptism in this passage?**

 **What does this teach us about the way we should practice baptism?**

In this passage, we see the baptism of Saul (better known as the apostle Paul). When we met Saul of Tarsus earlier in Acts, he was an up-and-coming Pharisee who had studied under the well-respected Jew, Gamaliel, and he persecuted the church. In Acts 7, Saul had a front-row seat to the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen. Afterward, with the approval of the Jewish religious leaders, Saul began aggressively working to stomp out Christianity. The chapter heading for Acts 8 in

the CSB Bible, “Saul the Persecutor,” is an accurate description for how Saul was working against the church at that time!

God had big plans for him; Saul is a perfect example that God can work through anyone. After a powerful encounter with the risen Messiah, this man who once ruthlessly attacked Jesus’s church became one of the greatest missionaries the church has ever known. (His ministry still discipled and encourages believers today through his written words in the Bible.)

The Lord sent Ananias to heal Saul, who had been blinded by Jesus on the Damascus Road. (Ananias was understandably nervous to go at first—remember Saul’s history.) Following the model we have seen in the other passages we have studied today, Saul accepted the gift of salvation and was baptized.

Do you notice what he did next? After regaining his strength (Acts 9:9), Luke said, “Immediately [Saul] began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues: ‘He is the Son of God’” (Acts 9:20). What a turnaround for a man who had been “ravaging the church” (Acts 8:3) not long before this.


This passage not only teaches us about baptism, but it also shows us baptism isn’t the end. Baptism is the beginning. After we make a public profession of faith through baptism, we continue to share our faith with those around us. Paul went on to dedicate his life to this mission. Sharing the gospel in our lives may look different than it did for Paul, but our priority should be the same: others coming to know Jesus.




Application: How has obedience in baptism propelled you to share your faith with others? How is baptism a first step in doing that?

Conclusion

 What did you learn about baptism today? Anything new that you didn't know previously?

 How can we encourage and support all who have believed in our group toward baptism? Does anyone feel called in that direction now?

 If you have been baptized, how are you seeking to continue your public profession through sharing the gospel with others?

Memorize

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, each 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, CSB