

SESSION 6

THE DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Leader pages on pp. 152-155

THE POINT:
WHEN WE ARE FORGIVEN BY GOD, WE SHOULD LET EVERYONE KNOW IT.

ACTS 10:44-48; 16:30-34; 19:1-5

^{10:44} While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues and declaring the greatness of God. Then Peter responded, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone withhold water and prevent these people from being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" ⁴⁸ He commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for a few days.

MEMORY VERSE

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^{16:30} He escorted them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ **They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household."** ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him along with everyone in his house. ³³ He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds. Right away he and all his family were baptized.

³⁴ He brought them into his house, set a meal before them, and rejoiced because he had come to believe in God with his entire household.

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^{19:1} While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions and came to Ephesus. He found some disciples² and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" "No," they told him, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³ "Into what then were you baptized?" he asked them. "Into John's baptism," they replied. ⁴ Paul said, "John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people that they should believe in the one who would come after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

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KEY WORDS

Circumcised Believers (v.45)– Were Jewish Christians. One of the issues in the early church was the question if Gentile believers had to be circumcised and follow the Jewish laws and customs in order to be a Christian.

Baptized (v. 47)– The Greek term (*baptizo*) means literally to immerse or submerge.

John's baptism (v. 3)–When people were immersed, they were identifying with and committing themselves to the repentance of sin in the expectation of the coming Messiah. It was a "baptism of repentance" (Acts 19:4). John's baptism differed from the baptism in the name of Christ. Nor did they possess the Holy Spirit.

HOW DOES WATER BAPTISM REPRESENT AN OUTWARD SIGN OF AN INWARD CHANGE?

Many people look for souvenirs that they can take home after completing some fun and exciting activity. Whether they have gone on vacation, attended a concert, visited an amusement park, or even eaten at a certain restaurant, they want to remember the experience. Even more than that, they want to let others know what they have done. You probably have worn a shirt letting others know about an activity in which you have participated. When something great happens to us, we naturally want to let other people know about it.

Receiving God's forgiveness in salvation through Jesus is the greatest thing that can happen to us and for us. Just as we want to let others know about the fun things we can do, we should want to proclaim what God has done in our lives. When we are baptized, we do just that. This has been the case since the earliest believers in Jesus came to faith in Him. This lesson looks at three scenes where baptisms occur. While there are some differences in each scene, one thing remains the same: through baptism, believers celebrate the fact that their sins are forgiven and new life has begun!

We Testify to Others

// Acts 10:44-48

The passage describes what has been termed the "Gentile Pentecost." The experience shares similarities with what occurred in Acts 2. As was the case on the day of Pentecost, Peter is preaching the good news about Jesus and a powerful response follows. While in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit fell on devout Jews, in this passage it is clear the power of the Spirit is available to all people, regardless of ethnic origin. Having accepted the invitation from Cornelius, a Roman centurion, to come to his home, Peter had come to understand the universal appeal of the gospel. After hearing the background story on why Cornelius invited him, Peter said, "now I truly understand that God doesn't show favoritism, but in every nation the person who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him" (Acts 10:34-35).

As Peter is preaching, the Holy Spirit falls on all the people listening to him and they begin speaking in tongues, or other languages. The Jewish believers are amazed by this, like the amazement of the people who heard the believers speaking in various languages on Pentecost (Acts 2:6-7). Speaking in



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tongues is one sign of the Holy Spirit's power, but it is not the only sign. The tongues are connected with praising God and testifying about the gift of salvation He has given. This scene demonstrates the fact that salvation is available to everyone who hears the gospel of Jesus Christ and believes. Writing to believers in Rome, the apostle Paul makes this clear when he says, "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 (Rom. 10:9).

Having received the Holy Spirit, there is no reason for the people hearing Peter's message not to be baptized. Water baptism occurs after receiving salvation, not as a step to be saved. Similar to the story of the eunuch in Acts 8, the baptism of believers occurs very soon after they hear and accept the gospel. It is truly amazing how the gospel breaks barriers. Baptism serves to identify believers with Christ and other believers regardless of race, gender, or class. In Christ, these distinctions do not cause division (Gal. 3:28). Just as circumcision had been a sign of belonging to the community under the old covenant, baptism is a sign of belonging to the community under the new covenant. These new believers are baptized in the name of Jesus, reflecting His power and authority. This fits with the Great Commission instruction in Matthew 28 because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, sharing the same attributes and character.

Peter recognizes their common faith and unity. He stays with them, likely eating with them, which he previously had been reluctant to do. This also testifies to the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the early believers.

HOW DOES WATER BAPTISM AFTER A CONFESSION OF FAITH TESTIFY TO GOD'S WORK IN YOUR LIFE?

We are Initiated into the Family of God

// Acts 16:30-34

In this passage, we move from Peter to Paul and Silas. The story of Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail is a familiar one to many people. Paul is in the midst of his second missionary journey when he arrives in Philippi. Acts 16 records the events of his stay there, including the conversion of a businesswoman named Lydia and Paul's casting out of a spirit in an enslaved girl, which enrages her owners. This act resulted in Paul and Silas being beaten and thrown in prison. Despite the trying circumstances, Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns to God. Around midnight, there was a violent earthquake that shook the prison, opening its doors and losing all of the prisoners' chains. The jailer, thinking the prisoners he was supposed to guard had escaped, was about to kill himself, when Paul told him not to harm himself because everyone was still there in the prison.



DIGGING DEEPER IN THE NAME OF JESUS

A well-known congregational song declares that "in the name of Jesus, we have the victory!" In the lesson passage, we find new believers being baptized in the name of Jesus. Jesus's name is synonymous with His, power, authority, and glory, so being baptized in His name means that believers are aligning themselves with Him and submitting to Him. This submission is to be a regular part of our lives. Many of us were taught as children to pray "in Jesus's name," but more than this just being a phrase to conclude our prayers, it proves we recognize that we must yield our requests and desires to Him, and that whatever we ask for is done in His power, not our own. Jesus told His followers that we will have what we ask for in His name (John 14:13).

How can you live your life in the name of Jesus?

Having witnessed the power of God, the jailer wants in on the experience of Paul and Silas. He may have been paying attention to their prayers and songs and wants to be saved! The jailer was been in charge of Paul and Silas, but now shows he recognizes that the God Paul and Silas serve is truly in charge. Paul and Silas reply with words that remain true across generations: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (v. 31). The jailer and everyone in his household hear the gospel.

After tending to the wounds of Paul and Silas, the jailer immediately is baptized, along with his family members. While baptism does not save people, after being saved believers are baptized in submission to the command given by Jesus. Though the baptism in this passage is a communal event, it requires personal decisions. Each person must accept the gospel and believe in Jesus on an individual basis. While speaking in tongues is reported as a sign of receiving the Holy Spirit in Acts 10, its occurrence is not recorded in this story. The ability to speak in tongues is not experienced by all the believers mentioned in Acts. Tongues are also not noted in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8.

The fact that the jailer has been saved is also demonstrated by the change in his treatment of Paul and Silas. Certainly, the jail where they were placed in the inner part and their feet fastened in stocks was not hospitable. Now the same jailer extends hospitality, no doubt because of his inner change and his gratitude for their role in it. He had earlier been of the mind to take his life but now experiences new life in Christ and a new family, because of his belief in Jesus. His faith in Jesus, his baptism, and his subsequent actions signify that he has been born into the family of God.

HOW HAS BEING A PART OF THE FAMILY OF GOD IMPACTED YOUR LIFE?

We are Baptized in the Name of Jesus // Acts 19:1-5

As Paul undertakes his third missionary journey, the scene moves from Philippi to Ephesus. Prior to the events in this passage, Paul had traveled

through several regions spreading the gospel. In Ephesus, Paul finds some disciples and asks if they received the Holy Spirit when they believed, but they reply that they have not heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul’s phrasing of his question indicates his understanding that believers receive the Holy Spirit at the time they accept Christ, not at some later point. Receiving the Holy Spirit indicates that a person is living a life in line with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and is bearing spiritual fruit (Gal. 5:22-23).



Though these followers of John the Baptist had been baptized, their baptism was not Christian baptism because it was not centered in Christ. It is possible that they may not have known about Jesus because John had indicated Jesus would baptize people with the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, they may simply be unaware of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. John’s baptism stressed repentance and helped people see the need for the gospel. Repentance involves coming into agreement with God about one’s sin and need for salvation. This is an important part of salvation but is not the complete gospel. Apollos, whose ministry is mentioned in verse 1 also initially had a partial understanding and “After Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God to him more accurately” (Acts 18:26).

Baptism in Jesus announces one has heard and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ. John’s baptism was for repentance and looked forward

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to the work of the Messiah (Matt. 3:11). Christian baptism looks back to the finished work of Christ and identifies the believer with Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection. When these disciples hear about Jesus, they are baptized in His name. God graciously allows Paul to encounter them and expand their understanding so that they have a complete picture of the ministry of Jesus including the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. After hearing and receiving the word, they too became full members of the community of believers.

Subsequent to the verses in the lesson passage, Paul lays hands on these disciples, the Holy Spirit falls on them, they speak in tongues and prophecy (Acts 19:6). The Holy Spirit falls on these disciples after they hear about Jesus and believe in Him, just as has happened for the believers beginning on the day of Pentecost. While speaking in tongues is a sign of receiving the Holy Spirit seen in some instances, it does not always occur. The ability to speak in other languages or unknown languages is not a gift given to every believer and is certainly not a requirement for salvation! Believing in Jesus Christ, signified by being baptized in His name is what matters.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BEING BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF JESUS?

DID YOU KNOW?

Being baptized does not save us, but it does proclaim we have been saved. The repentant thief on the cross is often used as an example of a biblical character who was saved without baptism. He asks Jesus to remember him when Jesus comes into His kingdom and Jesus replies, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Thus, an inability to be baptized does not prevent believers from going to heaven. If we can be baptized however, we should do so, in obedience to Jesus's command. Followers of Jesus should be known for following His instructions, including being baptized if not prohibited from doing so. "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, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20).

Biblical Truth: Baptism is a symbol that believers are followers of Christ.

How would you explain the importance of baptism, since it does not save us?

LIVE IT

Have you experienced water baptism as a step in your faith journey after accepting Christ?

We are commanded to declare and demonstrate God's work of forgiveness in our lives.

We do that first and foremost through baptism. If you have trusted in Christ but have not been baptized, make an appointment with your pastor or someone on your church staff to discuss this important step of obedience. If you have already been baptized, share your experience with someone else this week. Use the opportunity to give God glory for what He has done in your life.

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- **Be baptized.** If you have accepted Jesus, but have not yet been baptized, do it! Talk with your church leadership about taking the steps necessary for you to fulfill Christ's command.
- **Be bold.** Share the news that you have accepted Christ and been baptized. Our faith is meant to be a witness to others.
- **Be a blessing.** Our love for Jesus is demonstrated by the love that we show to others. Being willing to serve other people is a sign of the change that has taken place in our hearts.

DAILY READINGS

1. BAPTISM POWER // ACTS 10:44-48

A woman was recently baptized after giving her life to Christ. She was so grateful that she cried and thanked God profusely as she stood beside the baptism pool. This was no show. It was real, precious. She radiated gratitude and couldn't wait to profess her faith before the congregation, that the "old her" no longer existed and that she'd follow Jesus forever. The gravity of this public testimony was so strong that others began giving their lives to Christ as well. That day, her baptism was the altar call. Just as it was with the early church, baptisms can still be powerful invitations to the lost.

Our baptism is an outward expression of our inward change in Christ.

2. BE THE INVITATION // ACTS 16:30-34

Ever felt like someone was tap-dancing on your last nerve, and though you wanted to explode, you chose not to? During these moments, it's important to remember that others are watching to see if we'll respond like the world. But, when we allow our response to show them Jesus instead, we profess His strength and love to those around us. These private moments are often the hardest, but they often speak the loudest. Consider Paul and Silas who had just been beaten and were now in jail. Instead of being angry, they sung to God, and a jailer and his family were saved. If we'll let Him, He'll use our lives, too, as an invitation.

We must never forget that our private profession can draw others to a public one.

3. NO EXCHANGES // JOHN 14:6

Many years ago, I heard a young Muslim woman tell a young Christian woman that they both served the same God and that there was no difference. She stated that she simply reached God through Muhammad. The problem with this type of deception is that it bypasses Jesus to get to God. In John 14:6, Jesus was clear, "I am the way, the

truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." There is no other way. Jesus is the salvation picture, so our profession of faith must be grounded in Him. Denying Jesus negates His sacrifice and power and, ultimately, removes the path to salvation.

Jesus must always be acknowledged as the one and only center of our salvation.

4. #ISTANDWITHJESUS // 2 TIMOTHY 2:12

Our society is big on awards and achievement honors are built into society to acknowledge stars and activists as "the best of us." That said, our society also enjoys casting aspersions on wrongdoers, calling them out and "canceling" them. The problem is that Jesus's name is increasingly associated with wrongdoing. It's grown taboo socially and professionally, and there is mounting pressure for us to abandon Him altogether. But, the Bible is clear: if we deny Jesus, He will deny us. Eternity is much longer than our time here on earth, so for us, profession must be the only option.

Cancel culture or not, we must still to boldly proclaim the name of Jesus.

5. BOUNDLESS FORGIVENESS // 1 PETER 3:9

Welcome to the age of technology! Everything is at our fingertips. Research, games, consumerism, dating, knowledge—anything we could want. But, for all technology gives, it also takes. Behind the screens, we're less connected and more isolated. With increased distance, desensitization has increased so that online users feel emboldened to attack and tear down others at will; causing widespread havoc and damage without apology. But in a landscape of seemingly boundless cruelty, we must respond with Jesus's boundless forgiveness and grace. Peter reminds us "not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult..." (1 Pet. 3:9)

Our broken world needs a Savior, and we get to share Him with it.