



HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER

QUEST LESSON F-6

The Problem: What qualifies us to be members of the church? Is membership merely a matter of being accepted by a local congregation? Is being a member of the church the same as being a member of a club? Does a person just decide to belong to a particular group of religious people, and then apply for membership as he would to any secular organization?

Some organizations in our world have initiation rites that a prospective member must submit to. Are there initiation rites for people who want to become members of the Christian church? Some churches will not accept people for membership who have not been baptized. Does this mean that baptism is an initiation rite?

Anyone is qualified to be a member of the Christian church if he is a Christian. What makes a person a Christian? Are people committed Christians because they have been baptized? Or are they baptized because they are committed Christians? Does baptism make a Christian, or publicly declare that a person is already a Christian? What is the purpose of baptism?

Suppose a person genuinely believes in Christ and has accepted His message as presented in the Bible. Is he a Christian? Is it necessary for him to be baptized? If so, why? What does baptism do for him? Does baptism make him a member of the church, or does it announce to the church and the world that he has accepted Christ as Savior and Lord?

There are some Christians who think that baptism makes a person a member of the church. They treat baptism as though it were an initiation rite. Are they correct in their attitude? What did Jesus teach on these three questions: (i) What makes us Christians? (ii) What is the significance of baptism? (iii) What qualifies us to be members of the church?

As Christians we want to live as Jesus did and do the things | He asks of us. He asks us to pay tithe and keep holy the | Sabbath day. Does that mean that paying tithe and keeping holy the Sabbath day make us Christians? Of course not! We do these things because Jesus has come into our hearts. Obedience to His will is a pleasure because He loves us infinitely and we love Him. There is always a good reason | for the things He asks us to do. We do them not to earn salvation, but because we have already received His salvation | as a free gift.'

What does Jesus ask us to do in regard to baptism and membership in the church? What He asks is what we want, because we love Him with all our hearts! We turn to His Word for the answers to our questions.

Objectives

First, we shall learn the Bible's teaching concerning the baptism that makes us Christians.

Second, we shall study about the baptism that proclaims us Christians.

Third, we ask, who should be baptized?

Fourth, what is the Bible's method of baptism?

Fifth, we note what the Bible says about the baptism that tests us as Christians.

I. The Baptism That Makes Us Christians

What makes us Christians, qualified to be members of Christ's church?

The Word

1. When do we become children of God? John 1:12.
2. What does the Lord bestow upon us when we become His children? Galatians 4:6.
3. To what are we introduced by the baptism of the Holy Spirit? 1 Corinthians 12:12-18, 27.

Explanation: When we receive Christ, believing in Him sufficiently to allow Him to live out His life through us, we become children of God (John 1:12). At the point at which we believe, we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 4:6). It is this gift that makes us members of the "body of Christ." "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). It is the baptism of the Holy Spirit that makes us members of Christ's "body." That "body" is the church of Jesus Christ. This is Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 12.

It is possible to be a member of some local church but to lack the Holy Spirit in your heart. Then you do not belong to the body of Christ, even though your name is listed as a church member. It is also possible to belong to the body of Christ without being a member of any church organization. But, as we have already seen in past studies (Lesson F-1), and will discover again in this study, anyone who belongs to the body of Christ will wish to have fellowship with others who belong to the body of Christ. The proverb, "No man is an island," is very appropriate when we are discussing the Christian church. One of the most important teachings of the New Testament is that those people in whose hearts the Holy Spirit is dwelling will fellowship together because they are parts of Christ's body that cannot live separately from the other parts.

Relevance: The only initiation that makes us Christians is provided by the Lord Jesus Christ. When we receive Him, He bestows upon us His Holy Spirit, and we become members of His spiritual body. Because Christ is now living out His life through us (Galatians 2:20), we want to do whatever He asks of us. And what He asks of us is clearly revealed in His Word.

II. The Baptism That Proclaims Us Christians

The baptism that publicly proclaims us Christians is water baptism.

The Word

4. When a person is baptized, what truth is he publicly proclaiming he believes? Romans 6:3-5; compare 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.
5. What experience does baptism declare to be enjoyed by the candidate? Galatians 3:27; (compare 2:20); 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:11, 18, 22.
6. What resolve is the baptismal candidate publicly expressing? Philippians 3:13-14; Hebrews 12:1-23 (compare Luke 9:62; 2 Peter 2:20).

Explanation: Water baptism declares to the church and the world that the candidate has received Christ as Savior and Lord. As he enters the waters of baptism he is making three declarations: (i) I believe that Jesus Christ died for my sins, rose again, and lives in heaven as my Mediator. (ii) I believe that Christ has given me His presence in my heart by the Holy Spirit. Since I have enjoyed the new birth experience I am a child of God and want Jesus to direct my life henceforth. (iii) By Christ's grace, I resolve to press on towards total victory over sin, allowing Him to complete in my heart that work which He has so well begun.

Water baptism does not wash away sin. It proclaims publicly that the candidate has already received Christ's forgiveness and cleansing. Water baptism does not make a person a Christian. It declares that he is already a Christian because he has received Christ as Savior and Lord. It proclaims that Christ has taken possession of His life. Water baptism does not make a person a member of the church. It announces to the world and the church that the candidate is already a member of the spiritual body of Christ and so is qualified to be admitted to membership in the visible church

organization. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward spiritual experience that was given by Christ when the person accepted Him as Lord.

Relevance: Baptism is not the means by which we are saved from sin. It is the outward declaration that we are enjoying present salvation in Christ. It is not some kind of initiation rite. It is a public avowal that the Holy Spirit has initiated this believer into fellowship with Jesus Christ. If Jesus asks you to enter into the experience of water baptism as a public testimony of your faith in Him, are you willing to respond positively?

III. Who Should Be Baptized?

Does the Bible teach that infants should be baptized? Or is baptism for adults? Should all new believers be baptized?

The Word

7. What did Jesus command in regard to baptism? John 3:53 Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:16.
8. In the ten references to baptism in the Book of Acts, who are mentioned as the ones baptized?
 - a. Acts 2:47
 - b. Acts 8:12
 - c. Acts 8:13
 - d. Acts 8:36-38
 - e. Acts 9:17-18
 - f. Acts 10:47-48
 - g. Acts 16:14-15
 - h. Acts 16:31-33
 - i. Acts 18:8
 - j. Acts 19:4-5

Explanation: Jesus commanded those who believe in Him to receive water baptism. And He commanded believers, having taught others the Gospel, to baptize them "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). Water baptism is practiced by the church because Jesus asked us to practice it. He said, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14). The obvious implication is that you are not one of Jesus' friends if you refuse to follow His commands. He asks believers to be baptized so that, in that way, they can give to the church and the world the testimony that Christ has delivered them from sin.

There are always great blessings in doing what Christ asks of us. And there is always a loss of His presence when we refuse to follow His commands.

Of the ten references to baptism in the Book of Acts, there is not one that mentions infant baptism. Infant baptism is not taught anywhere in Scripture. In fact, there is no evidence of infant baptism in the Christian church before the last quarter of the second century A.D. It was not a general practice until the fifth century. In the New Testament, people are baptized in water because they have already been born of the Spirit. As the spiritual significance of the new birth experience was gradually deemphasized in the church, and the performance of rites and ceremonies as a means of earning God's grace became more common, it was incorrectly assumed that baptism is the act by which people are born of the Spirit. The rite was thought to be the means of the experience instead of the experience being proclaimed by the rite. Hence, it was very natural that the church should take the next step in the wrong direction by baptizing infants. Baptism ceased to be a personal confession of faith in the Lord Jesus and became a sort of magical ceremony to make infants into Christians. Augustine capped the process by teaching that infants are born guilty. Their guilt must, therefore, be washed away by baptism; otherwise, they would be lost if they died in infancy.

The Bible knows nothing of inherited guilt or infant baptism. In Scripture, the only people mentioned as ever being baptized were believers in Jesus Christ. They had heard the message of truth, received the Savior as their Lord, and they entered the waters of baptism as a declaration of their faith. Jesus commanded it, and they obeyed His command!

Relevance: Are you one of Christ's friends? Have you received Him into your heart, resolving to follow all of His will for your life? Have you experienced water baptism? Jesus asks you to enter into this ceremony, not so that you can be magically saved by an outward service, but so that others can see what a thrilling spiritual experience you have received from your Lord.

IV. What Is The Bible Method Of Baptism?

Was baptism in Jesus' day and the apostolic era performed by sprinkling, pouring, or placing the person right under the water (immersion)?

The Word

9. What method did John the Baptist use when he baptized Jesus? Matthew 3:13-17.
10. Why did John baptize at Aenon? John 3:23.
11. How was the Ethiopian eunuch baptized? Acts 8:36-39.
12. To what is baptism likened in Scripture? Colossians 2:12; (compare Romans 6:3-5).

Explanation: The two Greek verbs meaning "to baptize" used in the New Testament [baptizo and bapto] both mean "to dip" or "to immerse." When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, He was dipped right under the water. It was baptism by immersion. John baptized people at Aenon because "there was much water there" (John 3:23). He would not need much water for sprinkling or pouring. Philip and the Ethiopian both went down into the water and came up out of the water (Acts 8:38-39). It was baptism by immersion.

The only method of baptism that adequately illustrates its meaning is baptism by immersion. Paul spoke of believers being "buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead" (Colossians 2:12; compare Romans 6:3-5). Just as Jesus died, was buried, and rose again, so the believer has died to sin (Colossians 3:3), is buried in the water of baptism, and rises to newness of life with Christ. Baptism represents the burial of the old life of habitual sinning, and the resurrection of the new life that is lived by faith in Jesus. Only baptism by immersion could adequately illustrate that experience. The New Testament knows of no other method by which believers were baptized.

Relevance: Are you willing to enter the waters of baptism as Jesus did? Even though He was spiritually perfect, He felt it important that He should be baptized "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15), and to set us an example. Now He asks you to follow in His steps and enter the waters of baptism. Are you ready to do that?

V. The Baptism That Tests Us As Christians

Having accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, having been baptized as a public avowal of your experience with Him, you are now received into membership of the visible church organization. Jesus qualified you by His Holy Spirit, baptism declared to everyone that you were qualified, and so the church votes to admit you as a member. The baptism of the Spirit made you a Christian; water baptism declared you to be a Christian. Then comes a walk with Christ that will inevitably involve the baptism that tests you as a Christian.

The Word

13. What baptism did Jesus predict for His disciples? Matthew 20:20-23.
14. According to the Apostle Paul, what is inevitable for the Christian? Acts 14:22.
15. What should be our attitude when our faith is tested? 1 Peter 4:12-16.
16. What is awaiting the believer who by faith in Christ endures the test? Romans 8:18; 2 Timothy 2:12; (compare Matthew 10:32-33).

Explanation: It is a mistake to imagine that, once you have given your heart to Christ, life will be always rosy and unruffled. Such is not the case, and Jesus never promised that it would be. For the disciples, Jesus predicted suffering

and death. Paul stated that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Peter urged Christian believers to rejoice at being permitted to suffer for Christ's sake. No one likes to be tested and tempted, and no one enjoys persecution. But there are evil demons roaming around our world trying to destroy the faith of God's people. They will use any demonic means they can devise to drive you away from Christ. They will work through human beings, some of whom may be your friends and relatives, to depreciate your religious faith and bring you back to the lost state that you once knew.

The promises of the Lord to protect us from such trial and persecution are really wonderful. He says, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5). The Bible teaches that nothing happens to you that God has not made provision for (Romans 8:28). And when you are tempted to give in, "He is able to keep you from falling" (Jude 24).

The faithful Christian who walks with Jesus always, allowing Him to direct his life and give him righteousness and peace, has the thrilling assurance of a place in the heavenly Kingdom. Paul wrote, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

But what wonderful joy there is now for the committed Christian. Jesus wants every one of us, even in this life, a rive joy unlimited. (See John 16:24; 17:13; Romans 4:17).

Relevance: The questions that we want to ask you at this moment are very relevant to what this lesson teaches. Have you experienced the baptism that makes you a Christian? Are you willing to enter the waters of baptism, as a declaration of your love for Christ? Will you commit yourself to remaining true to Him despite the baptism of tribulation that will come to you? We pray that you will answer yes to all these questions and join us in the great task of leading other souls to the thrill of Christian baptism.

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. Infant baptism is taught in the Bible.
 - b. Baptism may be by sprinkling, according to the New Testament.
 - c. The Holy Spirit's baptism is what makes us Christians.
 - d. Water baptism proclaims publicly an experience we have already had.
2. Discuss: If baptism is really so important why did Paul thank God that he had only baptized a few? (1 Corinthians 1:12-17; compare John 4:1-3).