

Free! Take one!

That They all May Be One



John 17:21

Chapter two
Becoming just a Christian

Clarence W. Fell

Chapter Two

Becoming Just A Christian

Different groups have different ideas about how a person becomes a Christian. Some teach that all a person has to do is say a simple prayer, while others teach that a person is saved only after many long hours of prayer. Some teach that baptism is a part of becoming a Christian, but others teach that it is not. Some even say that God has already decided if you will be saved or lost. These conflicting ideas confuse people. Tragically, many fall victim to Satan's *divide and conquer* strategy.

We can cut through the confusion, defeat Satan's strategy, and just be Christians. We do this by following the simple plan of salvation found in the New Testament. When we follow that plan then we are safely on the path that leads to heaven.

Another benefit of being just Christians is that we will be working for the unity that Jesus prayed for in John 17:20,21. Jesus prayed, "*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.*" We can stand together in unity. We can stand together on the common ground of a solid book, chapter, and verse foundation and successfully fight Satan's divide and conquer strategy. We can stay focused on the simple truth of God's Word and gain victory for ourselves and our loved ones. Together we can make a difference.

Grace and Salvation

Grace makes salvation possible. Without God's grace we would be hopelessly lost. We simply don't have the ability to create our own plan of salvation (Jeremiah 10:23). Only God can make a plan of salvation.

To properly understand the role of grace in salvation we need a solid Bible foundation. We don't need the theories and speculations of man. Our aim is to understand grace the way God meant for it to be understood. To do this let's consider some of Bible examples.

Noah and Grace

Noah's experience is an excellent example of God's grace. In Genesis 6:7,8 we read, *"So the Lord said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord."* Noah's escape was a gift of God's grace. It came in the form of a special plan that God designed. In Genesis 6:14 we read about this plan, *"Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch."*

Noah and his family stood together united upon the common ground of God's plan. Their escape was by God's grace. It was a gift from God. Yet, Noah and his sons had to follow God's plan. They had to build the ark to escape the coming destruction. Grace did not exclude work on their part. God did not build the ark for them, but rather He supplied the plans for the ark. In this way Noah and his family were saved by the grace of God.

God offers us a way to escape eternal destruction, but we must follow His plan. The Christians of the first century followed God's plan and were saved. Today we must choose whether to follow that same plan or follow a plan designed by man. One will save, the other won't.

Joshua and Grace

Joshua is another example. God gave Joshua the city of Jericho. God said, *"See! I have given Jericho into your hands, its king, and the*

mighty men of valor" (Joshua 6:2), yet there was something that Joshua had to do to receive this gift from God. Joshua and his army had to march around Jericho exactly the way God said before they would receive this gift from God. Joshua's obedience does not change the fact that God gave Jericho to Joshua. When we use Bible words in Bible ways there is no conflict between God's grace and man's obedience.

This principle is easy to illustrate. Imagine that you are watching an infomercial that offers you a plan to make a million dollars in one year, guaranteed. Normally such a plan would be expensive to buy, but today, and today only, the plan is absolutely free. Now, because the plan is free, a gift of grace, does that mean it will automatically work without any effort on your part? Of course not. You still have to work the plan. This is the same principle involved in God's plan of salvation. He gave us the plan of salvation absolutely free. It's a gift of grace, but we still have to follow His plan.

Paul taught, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them"* (Ephesians 2:8-10). God's Grace does not exclude man's obedience. There are some things we must do, things that God *"prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."* These things are *"not of yourselves"* but rather are *"the gift of God ... prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."* God freely offers us this plan of escape, but we must follow it. (Other verses of interest are Gen. 19:19, Num. 21:4-9, II Kings 5, Psalm 84:11, Proverbs 3:34, and Jonah 4:2.)

Faith and Salvation

"For by grace you have been saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). If salvation was by grace only, then everyone would automatically be

saved because God does not want anyone to perish (II Peter 3:9), but salvation is not by grace only. It is by grace *through faith*. Faith is required to receive the gift of salvation from God. *“Without faith it is impossible to please God”* (Hebrews 11:6).

What is Faith?

Where can we learn about faith? Do we look it up in Webster’s dictionary, ask just any preacher, or study the Bible? Let’s look in God’s dictionary, the Bible, to learn about the faith that receives the gift of God’s grace.

“But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’” (Romans 10:16). In the Bible the faith that receives God’s grace is the faith that obeys the gospel. Obeying the gospel and believing the gospel are virtually the same thing (See also Heb. 3:18-4:6, I Peter 2:7). Translations vary in how they translate the original Greek. Some use the word *obey* and some use the word *believe*. These variations exist because saving faith and obedience are so intertwined that you can’t have one without the other.

There is a type of faith that does not receive God’s gift of grace. John 12:42,43 records such a case, *“Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”* They believed that Jesus was the Son of God, but they rejected Him and so their faith was worthless.

James wrote about saving faith and worthless faith, *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect. ... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”* (see James 2:14-26).

When we understand that saving faith obediently surrenders to the will of God, then we can easily see how other verses fit into God's plan. Verses such as...

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). A person must actually do what Jesus said to do, not just claim to do it (see also Luke 6:46).

"...taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thessalonians 1:8). Again, we see that God requires our obedience. He clearly states that He will take vengeance on those who do not obey the Gospel. If faith is going to save, then it must be an obedient faith.

"He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (Hebrews. 5:9). People who don't understand how saving faith and obedient surrender blend together are often puzzled by verses like this one. But when they learn that saving faith includes obedient surrender, then verses like this pose no problem.

The faith that receives the gift of God's grace is like Noah's faith; it trusts God's plan and follows God's plan. Saving faith is a firm conviction that God's plan is the right plan. It is a personal surrender to God that changes the way we live. Saving faith is the essential key to accepting the gift of God's grace. To reach the saving blood of Christ we must obediently surrender to His will.

In our effort to stake out common ground, we are calling people to obediently surrender to the will of God, to let go of man-made doctrines, and trust in His Word. In this way we can stand together fighting Satan's strategy of confusion. Our loyalty will belong to Christ, and our goal will be heaven for ourselves and our loved ones.

Repentance and Salvation

The Bible also connects repentance to salvation. Peter taught that God is “...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9). Those who perish are those who don’t repent.

In Acts 11:18 we read, “*When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’*” Repentance is an opportunity “granted” to us by God. It’s a part of God’s plan of salvation (See also Luke 13:3, 5).

In Acts 17:30 we read that God “...now commands all men everywhere to repent.” Repentance is not optional. It is a command.

So, what is repentance? Repentance is a change of direction. In our case it is turning away from sin. This is a natural part of saving faith. If a person does not turn from sin, then there has not been a personal surrender to God. To receive the gift of salvation, a person must stop rebelling against God.

While we can talk about saving faith and repentance separately on paper, the two cannot be separated in practice. A person who does not repent has not exercised saving faith. He has not surrendered to God. He is like the rulers in John 12:42 who acknowledged the truth but refused to accept it in their own lives.

We are calling people to repent, to make a personal surrender to the will of God, to let go of man-made ideas, and turn to the pure Word of God. When we do that, then we stake out common ground, stand together in strength, and fight Satan’s strategy of confusion.

Confession and Salvation

The Bible also connects confession to salvation. “*For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made*

unto salvation” (Romans 10:10).

“But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:33).

What is the confession that we make? It is the good confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. For example, *“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” (Acts 8:36,37, also see John 20:30,31).*

This confession is a natural part of saving faith. If a person refuses to confess, then there is no personal surrender. So, while we can talk about saving faith, repentance, and confession separately on paper, the three cannot be separated in practice. The person who refuses to confess has not obediently surrendered his life to God.

We are calling people to make this good confession, to let go of denominational traditions, and simply trust in the Word. The good confession is a step toward that common ground where we can stand together in strength fighting the divisive schemes of Satan.

Baptism and Salvation

Faith, repentance, and confession are generally accepted by most religious people without much discussion, but when the subject of baptism comes up, disagreements erupt. Why or how Satan has managed to make this a major point of division we cannot say, but he has successfully used baptism to divide and conquer many people. Some preachers say that a person must be baptized and some say that baptism does not matter. Many of these preachers have academic degrees from religious colleges and still don't agree. If preachers can't

agree, then where does that leave you? Should you be baptized or not?

We desire to stand where the Christians of the first century stood. We do not want to defend pet ideas or denominational traditions. We want the pure Word of God to base our eternal hope upon. We want to stand together in the unity that Christ's prayed for in John 17:20-23.

Baptism is from God

Baptism is not something that man created. Baptism is in the Bible because God put baptism in the Bible. The Christianity that Jesus taught includes baptism (Matthew 28:18-20). If we are going to practice that same Christianity, then we must also practice baptism. A Christianity that excludes baptism is something different than what Jesus established.

Man has no right to take baptism out of Christianity or to redefine baptism. To change baptism in any way is to rebel against God (Rev. 22:18,19). If a preacher, any preacher, tells you that you can practice the same Christianity that Jesus taught without practicing the baptism taught in the Bible, then that preacher is wrong.

Baptism and the Blood

Sins are washed away by Jesus' blood (Rom. 5:9, Eph. 1:7, 2:13, Col. 1:20). Our salvation hinges entirely upon coming to the saving blood of Jesus. A person cannot be saved until the blood of Christ washes away his sins. We should ask: *At what point is the blood applied, or how does one come to the blood?* Different people answer in different ways. The only safe answer is a Bible answer and the Bible answers...

"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash

away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). The saving power is not in the water itself, but rather it is during baptism that Jesus’ blood washes sins away. That is why Ananias could say to Paul, “*Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins.*”

Peter wrote, “*There is an antitype which now saves us—baptism*” (1 Peter 3:21). Baptism saves because God set it up as the point where the blood of Jesus washes our sins away.

Perhaps the clearest text is Romans 6:1-11. The essential role of baptism is seen by answering this one question, when are we united together with Christ in the likeness of His death? Read Romans 6:1-11 and let the Bible answer. The Bible says, “*...as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death...For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.*” We are united with Christ in the likeness of His death in baptism. If we are not united with Christ in His death, then we will not be united with Christ in the resurrection.

God’s Plan of Salvation

Hear the Gospel: Romans 10:14-17

Believe: John 3:16; Hebrews 11:6

Repent: Luke 13:3, Acts 17:30,31

Confess: Romans 10:9,10; Matthew 10:32,33

Be united with Christ in baptism: Romans 6:3-5

None of the above steps save in and of themselves. It is the grace of God that appointed these as steps leading to the saving blood of Jesus. To get to the saving blood each step must be taken just as it is presented in the Bible. These steps only have value because God’s grace has so granted. Without God’s grace these steps would be worthless. Have you followed these steps to the saving blood of Jesus?

If a preacher tells you that you can be united with Christ in the resurrection even though you have never been united with Christ in death, then that preacher is teaching something different than what God's word teaches. Don't listen to him (Matt. 15:14).

Obedient Surrender Is Not Optional

Those who take baptism out of their Christian practice or redefine baptism to suit themselves are saying in effect that obedient surrender is optional. Yet, obedient surrender to the will of God is not optional. John tells us that the obedient are blessed and enter the gate leading to the tree of life (Rev. 22:14). If you want access to the tree of life, you must surrender to the will of God, and baptism is a part of His will.

Oddly enough some preachers teach that obedience is optional. Even though Hebrews 5:9 directly states that Jesus *"...became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,"* and Luke reports, *"But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him"* (Luke 7:30). Look at these two verses again. These verses don't require a degree in theology to see that God requires obedient surrender. Consider also Paul's warning that Jesus will take *"...vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (II Thessalonians 1:8). The necessity of surrendering to the will of God is a clear Bible teaching (Matthew 7:21-23). If a person truly surrenders to the will of God, then that person humbly obeys all that God has said. If a person disobeys in some things, then that person did not truly surrender (James 2:10).

If a preacher tells you that obeying God in baptism does not matter, then that preacher is wrong. God said, *"To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin"* (James 4:17). Is Baptism good?

The Apostles Commanded It

The apostles commanded people to be baptized. They did not just suggest it or merely encourage it, but rather “...commanded them to be baptized” (Acts 10:48).

This case of Peter commanding baptism is even more impressive when we go back up to verse 44 and see what occurred before they were commanded to be baptized. In verse 44 the Holy Spirit moved upon these people. Peter saw this with his own eyes and heard with his own ears the effect of the Holy Spirit upon these people. And after seeing the action of the Holy Spirit upon these people, Peter “...commanded them to be baptized.” The action of the Holy Spirit did not excuse these people from baptism. Peter did not merely suggest baptism; he commanded them to be baptized.

If a preacher tells you that God does not care whether or not you are baptized and that you can excuse yourself from baptism, then that preacher is preaching a different gospel than Peter preached (Galatians 1:6-9). Peter did not excuse people from baptism. Even after the Holy Spirit fell upon them he still did not excuse them from baptism. By what right does a preacher today excuse people from baptism? (See also Acts 2:38 and 22:16.)

Why Did the Apostles Command Baptism?

You might wonder why the apostles commanded people to be baptized when just the opposite is commonly taught today. The reason the apostles commanded people to be baptized is because they were under direct orders from Jesus to go into all the world and baptize people. Teaching and practicing baptism was not an option for the apostles (Matthew 28:18-20).

Matthew 28:20 shows us that the apostles' converts were to practice

the same things the apostles practiced. The command of baptism did not end with the apostles but was passed down to their converts and their convert's converts and so on down through time. Thus nearly 2000 years later we are still under that same command. Yet, as unbelievable as it sounds, there are preachers who teach that God does not really care if you are ever baptized or not.

If a preacher tells you that baptism does not matter, then you know that he is following a different teaching than Jesus taught. In which case you will have to decide whether you want to follow Jesus' teaching or some preacher's teaching. (I personally recommend following Jesus' teaching, John 12:48).

YOU ARE INVITED

Come visit with us, look us over, and ask any questions that you have about the church of Christ.

Sunday 9:00 A.M. Bible Study
Sunday 10:00 A.M. & 5:00 P.M. Worship Service
Wednesday 7:00 P.M. Bible Study

If you prefer, you may write or call, and ask us any question that you have. Mail your questions to:

CHURCH OF CHRIST

7115 West 65th Street

Little Rock Arkansas 72219-0062

E-Mail—donmcclain@sbcglobal.net

Call—(501) - 568-1062

Web-Site—http://www.w65stchurchofchrist.org/My_Homepage.html

Elders

George Rumker
Louis Sharp
Bill Wharton

Deacons

Glen Gray
Brady Speer
Bennie Stephens
Karl Vandevender
Kevin Webb

Evangelist

Don McClain

Following Jesus

Followers of Jesus are suppose to follow His teaching and His example. In Luke 6:46 Christ asked, *“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do the things that I say?”* He was disappointed that while some professed Him as Lord they did not obey Him. This same sad situation still exist today. Jesus directly told us to practice baptism. He also set us an example by being baptized Himself, and yet some who claim Him as their Lord refuse to follow Him in baptism.

Jesus’ baptism illustrates the importance of baptism. In Matthew 3:13-15 we read that Jesus was obedient unto baptism in order to *“fulfill all righteousness.”* Now think about this for a minute, if Jesus, the sinless son of God needed to be baptized in order to *“fulfill all righteousness,”* then how much more do you and I need to obey God in baptism? How do we dare excuse ourselves?

Baptism Is How We Get Into Jesus

Baptism is our entrance into Christ. Prior to baptism a person is not yet in Christ. I know that this goes against what many preachers say, but the message of the Bible is...

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” (Romans 6:3).

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27).

A preacher might claim that a person who rejects baptism is still walking in the way of God, but the Bible says otherwise (Luke 7:30). Before you follow such a man, first verify whether or not he will be your judge in the day of judgment. See if he has the power to override God’s Word and get you into heaven even though you rejected part of God’s

Word? If you are not absolutely positive that he can achieve this on your behalf, then I suggest that you humbly obey God in baptism.

But What About the Thief on the Cross

Many people point to the thief on the cross as an excuse for not being baptized. Let's consider the thief for a moment.

1. **Was the thief baptized?**

We don't know for certain if the thief had ever been baptized. Many people overlook the possibility that the thief could have been baptized sometime before his arrest and crucifixion. We know for a fact that some disciples fell away (John 6:66). Could the thief have been such a disciple? Yes, but we can't say for certain either way. We know for a fact that great numbers of people were baptized before the crucifixion (Matt. 3:5,6; Mark 1:5; John 4:1). Could the thief have been a part of the multitudes that were being baptized? Yes, but we can't say for certain.

Our lack of certainty about the thief's past makes him a dangerous basis for rejecting baptism. To say that the thief was never baptized is just a guess. Most of us will agree that a guess is not a good foundation to build our eternal hope upon.

2. **How did the thief know so much about Jesus?**

We know for a fact that the thief was familiar with Jesus and His teachings. While suffering the torture of crucifixion, the thief had enough conviction to defend Jesus saying, "*This man has done nothing wrong*" (Luke 23:41). How did the thief know Jesus well enough to come to His defense?

How did the thief know Jesus' teachings well enough and have enough faith in Jesus to request just prior to death, "*Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom*" (Luke 23:42).

3. Jesus had the power to forgive sins.

This fact is overlooked when considering the thief. Jesus said to a paralyzed man, “*Your sins are forgiven you,*” and then to prove that He had the power to directly forgive sins He healed the paralyzed man (Luke 5:17-24).

Today Jesus does not physically walk the earth and directly forgive sins as He could do in the first century. Today He has set a plan of salvation in place by which anyone can come to His saving blood and be cleansed, but to reach the saving blood we must follow His plan. Pointing to the thief as a pattern of salvation is a dangerous practice to say the least.

4. Old Testament or New Testament.

The thief lived and died under the Old Testament. We live under the New Testament which went into effect after Jesus’ death. The New Testament tells us what God expects of us in our time. Refusing baptism based on the example of the thief reveals a misunderstanding of the Old and New Testaments. (For further study see Jer. 31:31,32; Gal. 3:19-24; Col. 2:14-17; Heb. 1:1,2; 8:7; 9:15-17; 10:9,10).

5. Today we are baptized into Jesus’ death (Rom. 6:1-11).

It was not possible for the thief to be baptized in the likeness of Jesus death, burial, and resurrection before Jesus’ death. The baptism that we practice today was not delivered to the apostles until after the resurrection (Matthew 28:18-20). The thief might have been baptized under John the Baptist’s teaching, but he could not have obeyed the baptism that God expects of us today.

6. Making an exception into a common practice.

If it could be proven that the thief had never followed Jesus or had never been baptized and that he was truly an exception to the common practice, this still does not prove that baptism is optional today. We do not take an exception and make it the common rule of practice for everyone. If it was an exception, then that necessarily infers that the

common
practice was to require baptism.

7. Who are you going to follow?

You have two choices, a thief that may or may not have been baptized, or Jesus who was baptized (Matthew 3:13-15). Which one do you choose to follow into eternity?

God's Plan of Salvation

While we can talk about saving faith, repentance, confession, and baptism separately on paper, these cannot be separated in practice. The person who refuses baptism has not obediently surrendered to God (Luke 7:30). When these four elements are brought together as God designed, then the blood of Christ washes away our sins (Rom. 5:9, Col 1:20, I John 1:7).

Just as God's grace devised a plan of escape for Noah and a plan of victory for Joshua, God has devised a plan of salvation for us. If God Himself had not devised this plan, then faith, repentance, confession, and baptism would be worthless. It is God's grace that gives these value. These are gifts of God's grace. In these God has granted us a way to reach the saving blood of Jesus. When we follow these Bible steps, we are becoming Christians the same way the people of the first

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ Matthew 7:21-23

The Bible and Obedience

The following references show you what the Bible says about obedience. It is important that you read the Bible for yourself and get your feet firmly grounded on a solid book, chapter, and verses foundation. This list is not exhaustive, but it provides plenty of verses.

Matthew 7:21-27	Romans 16:17,19, 26
Matthew 12:50	I Cor. 7:19
Mark 3:35	I Cor. 9:27
Luke 6:46	Eph. 2:10
Luke 8:21	II Thes. 1:7-9
Luke 11:27,28	II Thes. 3:14
John 10:27	I Tim. 6:14
John 13:17	Hebrews 5:9
John 14:15, 21, 23, 24	Hebrews 11:8
John 15: 10, 14	James 1:22
Acts 5:29, 32	James 2:10
Romans 1:5	I Peter 1:2, 14
Romans 2:6-10	I Peter 3:1
Romans 6:16,17	I Peter 1:14
Romans 8:1,13	I John 2:3, 17
Romans 10:3,9,13,16	I John 3:22, 24
Romans 11:22	I John 5:2,3
Romans 12:1,2	II John 6
Romans 13:2	II John 9—11
Romans 14:12	Rev. 22:7, 14
Romans 15:18	

He became the author of eternal salvation
to all who obey Him. Hebrews 5:9

Chart of Conversions in Acts

	Hear	Faith	Repent	Confess	Baptized
Day of Pentecost Acts 2:36-42	X	X	X		X
Samaritans Acts 8:4-12	X	X			X
The Eunuch Acts 8:26-39	X	X		X	X
Saul Acts 22:1-16; 9:17-20	X				X
Cornelius Acts 10:25-48	X				X
Lydia Acts 16:13-15	X				X
Philippian Jailor Acts 16:23-34	X	X			X
Corinthians Acts 18:4-11	X	X			X
Summary	X	X	X	X	X

Request your free copy of this series today!

You can receive each chapter in this series starting with chapter one.

Send your name and address to:

CHURCH OF CHRIST; 7115 West 65th Street,
Little Rock Arkansas 72219-0062

Or E-Mail—donmclain@sbcglobal.net and we will do the rest.

COMING NEXT CHAPTER

That They all
May
Be
One
John 17:21



Chapter three

New Testament Worship

CHURCH OF CHRIST
7115 West 65th Street
Little Rock Arkansas 72219-0062