

Baptised part of an important Journey

If you are intending to be baptized it is most important that you read the highlighted passages. If you do have time read the entire script you will find it useful.

Our journey of faith requires that we be baptised. This act of obedience is another step to becoming a real member Christ's church. This great and exciting journey is not without reward, the further we venture in faith and faithfulness. Acts 2:22-47; tells about how The Apostle Peter drew attention to the importance of being baptized.

'Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. David said about him: "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence".

Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendents on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'"

Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

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 so that your sins may be forgiven. 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.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.' (Acts 2:22-47)

Being a Christian and living a Christian life starts with a single step and a solitary moment, which is then followed by many other moments and steps. Most if not all journeys have the capacity to surprise us, which can end in difficulty. The Christian walk, in many respects, is no different. What follows is intended to help you get to the next point of your journey without leaving you stranded; this journey is intended to last a lifetime. **Once you have repented and believed baptism is the next requirement we come to.** With boldness we can declare our commitment to Jesus Christ.

Take a moment to consider what brought you to the place of saying you want to be baptized. This will help to make sure that you are ready to be baptized.

Confronted with the truth

Peter confronted the people with the truth about themselves.

The truth about Jesus Christ

Jesus was more than just a man; Son of God, Messiah. *"Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know."* (v. 22)

Jesus Death It was part of God's plan for our salvation. *"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."* (v. 23)

Jesus Resurrection Crucified by men *'but God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.'* (v. 24) The Prince of Life conquered the prince of death. Jesus Christ is alive today.

Jesus Exaltation Jesus was *'exalted to the right hand of God'* (v. 33) and waits the time when God's promise will be fulfilled, *"Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."* (vs. 34& 35) The time is coming when He will rule the world in peace and righteousness, and everyone will know that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Further reading about who Jesus is: Philippians 2:5-11 and Colossians 1:15-23.

The Truth About Themselves

They were **`sinners**, we are also guilty of sin, as is the entire human race for whom Jesus Christ died. God's verdict; *"There is no-one righteous, not even one; there is no-one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no-one who does good, not even one."* (Romans 3:10-12)

Our hearts tell us **'all** have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' (Romans 3:23)

They had to **Repent** to be forgiven and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, so must we! See (v. 38) Jesus taught *'unless you repent, you too will all perish.'* (Luke 13:3&5) Also see (Acts 17: 30&31)

They **Called** on the name of the Lord for salvation, See (v. 21)

And **Baptism** See (v. 38) we too must be baptised to show our past has been buried and that we have new life in Christ.

Convinced By the Truth

In the story the Spirit of God drove the word of God into their hearts in a supernatural way. It caused them to face up to their responsibilities before God.

It is so easy to allow our hearts to become hardened against the truth of the word of God. Should we reject, neglect or **accept** it?

When convicted, alarm bells go off inside. But when God speaks the best thing to do is respond in obedience.

Concerned About the Truth

"Brothers, what shall we do?" (v. 37) minds enlightened, consciences awakened, hearts challenged. Peter pointed them to Jesus Christ. Those who know they are sick consult a doctor, and those who know they have sinned against God must turn to Jesus Christ, the Great Physician. See (Luke 5: 31&32)

Converted To Jesus Christ

In answer to their question *"What shall we do?"* Peter said *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

Repenting

Repentance means having a change of mind; leading to a change of direction, or turn from ourselves and our sin and turn to God.

Repentance is a basic, essential part of the message of the New Testament. John the Baptist preached it; see (Matthew 3: 1&2) Jesus began His ministry by saying, "*repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.*" (Matthew 4:17) Peter also said, "*Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.*" (Acts 3:19)

Wandering away from God we've taken the pathway that attracted us. We need to turn around and leave what Jesus called the '*broad road that leads to destruction*' and take the '*narrow road that leads to life.*' (Matthew 7: 13&14) The military command 'Halt, about turn, quick march.' illustrates well the point of repentance. Stop, think about what you are doing, turn round and get back on track with Christ.

Repentance is more than just saying sorry. It is showing you are, by living a changed life. We cannot follow Jesus Christ without forsaking sin. Repentance means "to leave the sin I loved before, show that I'm serious by steering away from it."

Calling

'And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' (v. 21) Fact...

A man with leprosy came to Jesus (Mark 1:40-42)...

A blind Man(Mark 10:46-52)...

The promise of Jesus still holds good today. If we call on Him we will be saved, which means to be delivered from the power and consequence of sin.

Receiving

Verse 41 the crowd '*accepted his message*' or '*received his word.*' (RSV)

Also see (John 1:12)

Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' (v. 38)

God gives us the Holy Spirit so that we have an assurance that we are His children and He is our Father. *'The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.'* (Romans 8:16) *'By him we cry "Abba Father."*' (Romans 8:15)

God gives us the Holy Spirit so that we can understand the Bible. The Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of Scripture also interprets it. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would *see* (John 14:26). He later added *“When he, the Spirit of Truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.”*

God gives us the Holy Spirit to be bold in our witness as Christians. Acts 4:31 says *‘they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.’*

Can you honestly say that you have repented before God, trusted Jesus Christ by faith, and received the Holy Spirit into your life? If the answer is “Yes”, then you are ready to obey His command to be baptised. Conversion is the beginning. Having begun we must continue. Having responded to the call to believe it’s time to obey the command, be baptised.

Questions To Answer

- 1 List the important truths Peter taught the people about Jesus in the reading.
- 2 Write down the two commands and two promises given to the people in Acts 2:38.
- 3 Explain what repentance means in your own words.
- 4 Outline some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit helps us in our Christian lives.
- 5 Give a brief account of how you became a Christian.

6 In what ways have you been helped to grow as a Christian?

Confessing Jesus Christ

*'Those who accepted his message **were baptised.**'* (v. 41) Having become Christians, they were willing to show others that they belonged to Jesus Christ. Don't be a secret disciple, afraid of what others might think, There is nothing to be ashamed of. Be bold about your faith in Jesus Christ. He said *see* (Mark 8:38) Three ways to confess Jesus Christ...

By Our Lips

'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. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.' (Romans 10:9&10)

Let us use our lips to tell our friends of Jesus Christ and of all He has done for us. It will take a little courage at first, but we can go on to do this confidently.

By Our Lives

If you tell others that you are a Christian, live like a Christians, otherwise you may be called a hypocrite. *See* (Phillipians 1:27) and (Ephesians 4:1)

A changed life is a powerful witness. People may misunderstand or misinterpret your words, but they will always notice actions. What you do is as important as what you say.

The witness of your life resembles a bright light in a dark world. Jesus Christ said *see* (Matthew 5:16) and (Philippians 2: 14&15)

By Being Baptized

Baptism is another courageous way of confessing our faith in Jesus Christ. **Baptism is a way of showing people that we belong to Jesus Christ. That is one of the reasons why we are baptised 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'** (Matthew 28:19)

Baptism Follows Belief in Jesus Christ

"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16: 15&16) '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. Simon himself believed and was baptized.' (Acts 8: 12&13) '... and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.' (Acts 18:8)

To baptize a person who has never become a true Christian is like dressing a man in uniform and declaring him to be a soldier when he has never enlisted in the army.

Baptism Cannot Produce Salvation

Although baptism is often linked with salvation, the Bible never suggests that we can experience a spiritual change of heart by being baptized. **A person is not baptized to make him a Christian, but rather to show he is a Christian.** There are no magical powers in the water.

Peter links baptism with salvation and uses Noah's ark and the flood as an illustration. He states that baptism is *'not the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a good conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand.'* (1 Peter 3: 20-22) Noah and his family were saved through being in the ark. We are saved through being 'in Christ'.

In Scripture salvation is by grace through faith and not by any work performed. *'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast.'* (Ephesians 2:8&9)

Baptism and Its Meaning

Why is it necessary to be baptised? What does it denote? In baptism we actively and openly make declaration of certain facts.

1 Our Obedience To Jesus Christ

Baptism was part of the great commission that Jesus Christ gave to His disciples before He ascended to heaven. *See* (Matthew 28:19&20) They were under divine orders. As we read through the book of Acts, we see how implicitly those orders were obeyed. **Every new Christian was baptized.**

If it is the will of Jesus Christ that every person who becomes a Christian should be baptized, then we must bow in submission to His will. We must **obey Him, not grudgingly but willingly.** Before we became Christians, we thought only of pleasing ourselves, now we must make it our goal to please Him. (2 Corinthians 5:9)

The One to whom we have given our lives is Jesus Christ the Lord. Each name is significant. Jesus is the Savior, because He died for me. Christ is the Living One, who has come to live in me. He is the Lord, which means that He is owner, master and king. If He is my owner, I am His personal property. If He is my king I should be His loyal subject. The One who died for me, and lives in me, should rule over me.

The whole question of our obedience to Jesus Christ is really a test of our love for Him. How willing are we to do what He wants? He said *"If you love me, you will obey me, you will obey what I command."* (John 14: 15) Obedience that does not spring from love is a cold and clinical response.

Jesus also said *"You are my friends if you do what I command."* (John 15:14) Nothing will foster our friendship with Jesus Christ more than willing obedience. When we discover and obey His will, this will bring an added joy to our Christian experience. He said, *"Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."* (John 13:17) *'... What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized...'* (Acts 22:16)

2 Our Confession Of Jesus Christ

Baptism has been described as *'an outward sign of inward faith.'* This is a simple but helpful definition. Faith is an invisible, intangible thing and needs to be expressed in action. We can declare what they may not have already guessed, that our faith is in Jesus Christ.

Some persons become Christians after going to the front of a church in response to an appeal. Many others make a personal and private commitment to Jesus Christ when they are quite alone.

Paul said *"I am not ashamed of the gospel!"* (Romans 1:16) Jesus Christ said *"whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."* (Matthew 10:32&33)

When a girl is engaged, her fiancé gives her a ring, so that she can indicate to others that her life is linked with his. What does she do with this outward sign of her inward attachment? Does she keep it secretly in its little box? Of course not! The ring is proudly worn on the hand for all to see. Let us be equally glad to confess that our lives belong to Jesus Christ. *'... What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized...'* (Acts 22:16)

3 Our Dedication To Jesus Christ

The two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's supper, which Jesus gave His disciples whereby they could show their allegiance to Him, were soon known as 'sacraments'.

We promised to follow Jesus Christ when we became Christians and we ought to look upon baptism as a step of dedication. It will mean leaving behind the things that grieve Jesus Christ and giving ourselves devotedly to Him. Separation from all we know to be wrong and dedication to Jesus Christ go hand in hand. *'Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.'* (Romans 6:13) It is an act of total dedication to our Lord and Master, an offering of our life to Him for all time. *'Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God- which is your spiritual worship.'* (Romans 12:1)

It is a tragedy when a Christian goes back to his old ways. Let us determine, God helping us, never to turn back. Jesus Christ said *"No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."* (Luke 9:62) Satan will contest our dedication to Jesus Christ all the way by fierce temptation, bitter disappointments, and even persecution.

In some countries today, Christians have to face imprisonment following baptism: it is really costly for them to take this step. We are never alone in these experiences. The Lord Jesus will stand by us and strengthen us. *'... what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized...'* (Acts 22:16)

Identification With Jesus Christ

This is the main meaning of baptism, which is brought out in the teaching of the apostles. The origin of Christian baptism is found in the gospels, the practice of it in the book of Acts and the explanation of it in the Epistles. The main passage which deals with this is Romans 6:3-14.

In baptism we are identified with Jesus Christ in His three great acts that secured our salvation- His death, burial and resurrection. Paul sums up the Christian message by linking these together *'Christ died for our sins... He was buried... He was raised on the third day...'* (1 Corinthians 15:3&4)

His Identification With Us

The Lord Jesus first came and identified Himself with sinners before He called sinners to identify themselves with Him. He did this in two ways: (1) By His Baptism in Jordan (2) By His Baptism on the Cross Jesus Christ said, *"I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!"* (Luke 12:50). He bore God's judgment on man's sin. In His life and in His death, Jesus, who was sinless, took the place of those who were sinful.

Our Identification With Him

When we became Christians, two things happened, Our old way of life finished A completely new way of life began. (Romans 6:11) and *'therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!'* (2 Corinthians 5:17) The moment our lives were linked with Christ, the two things that happened to Him, happened also to us.

Into the Water- DEATH

As we go down into the water, we are saying in effect, that just as Jesus Christ died for our sin on the cross, so we have died to sin in our lives. There has been a complete break with the past- a death-

'count yourselves dead to sin.' (Romans 6:11). We need to be so absorbed in our rich friendship with Jesus Christ, that the temptations of the Enemy pass us by.

Under the Water- BURIAL

A dead person must be buried. Just as Jesus Christ was buried in the tomb, so when we are lowered beneath the water our lives as sinners are regarded as put out of sight. The Bible teaches *'we were therefore buried with him through baptism into death.'* (Romans 6:4) Our baptism then becomes a kind of funeral, and the water a grave, by which a declaration is made to all that the sinner has been committed to death. Death followed by burial now prevents our returning to our former way of life. This is why Paul asks the question *"We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"* (Romans 6:2)

Out of the Water- RESURRECTION

'We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with Him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.' (Romans 6:4&5)

Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God. We are lifted from the water to live a new and distinctive life, the life of Christ Himself. As Paul explained it; He said, *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* (Galatians 2:20)

The life we live as Christians must express these two great truths, that we are dead to sin and alive to God. In the Bible, darkness is often linked with evil and light with purity. Jesus Christ said *"men loved darkness instead of light, because their deeds were evil"* (John 3:19) and *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* (John 8:12).

To walk in newness of life is a continual challenge. Every day we sense the downward pull of our sinful natures, but every day we may also experience the inward power of Jesus Christ lifting us up. We must depend upon a day by day experience of Jesus Christ living His life through us. Without this we shall fail, because the Enemy is too strong for us. **Baptism is not the end of the road in reality it is only part of the beginning.** Those who became Christians in the New Testament were nearly always baptised immediately, so their knowledge and experience of Jesus Christ was just commencing. **In Acts 2 the new converts did not stand still after being baptised, they moved on to the things that would build up their faith.**

Questions to Answer

- 1 List three ways in which you can show others that you are Christians.

2 Write out two of the verses that indicate baptism should follow belief in Christ.

3 Write a note on the place of obedience in relation to baptism.

4 Why should the step of baptism be taken seriously?

5 What are we declaring in the following three actions in our baptism?

a Into the Water

b Under the water

c Out of the water

To think over:

Is there any good reason why I should not obey the command of Christ to be baptized?

Continuing With Jesus Christ

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.' (Acts 2:41 & 42) The apostles taught the new Christians the next steps in the Christian life, and the converts immediately became involved in the worship and witness of the Christian church. This is the secret of progress.

Jesus Christ sent the disciples into the world to preach the gospel and to baptize those who would believe. He then added, “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:20) Preaching the Gospel, baptizing the converts and teaching the commandments of Jesus Christ sums up the work of the Christian church.

Four vital things necessary for a devoted life:

The Apostles’ Teaching

Jesus Christ spent three years teaching His disciples before sending them into the world to teach others. The things they taught the people by word of mouth are written down for us in the New Testament. If therefore we are to devote ourselves to the apostles’ teaching it will be necessary for us to do three things. With a Bible open before us let us:

a Read It Regularly

B Interpret It Prayerfully

C Obey It Continually

Jesus Christ said “if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.” (John 8:31)

Fellowship

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A Fellowship With Christ

In 1 Corinthians 1:9 we read *‘God who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord is faithful.’* His joy and peace and strength in our lives.

‘I want to know Christ.’ (Philippians 3:10)

“But I, when I am lifted up from the face of the earth, will draw all men to myself.” (John 12:32) As we enjoy the privilege of fellowship with Christ, let us remember with grateful hearts the price He paid.

B Fellowship With Others

John speaks not only of ‘fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ’ (1 John 1:3) but refers also to having ‘fellowship with one another’ (1 John 1:7) Uniting us as Christians to each other. We are members of a large and wonderful family with Christ as the Head. We belong not only to Christ but also to one another. Just as the spokes of a bicycle wheel are joined to the hub at the center and to the rim at the circumference; so each Christian is joined to Christ, who is the center of our fellowship, and joined also to every other believer in the wider circle of Christian fellowship. As individual Christians then, as spokes in the wheel, we must make sure that we retain continual contact with Christ and close contact with Christians in order to maintain spiritual vitality and the unity of Christian fellowship. Trouble begins when the spoke comes adrift at either end.

'Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.' (Hebrews 10:25) If we stay away from Christian fellowship our love for the Lord Jesus will soon cool off, just as a piece of coal taken from a fire.

It is a great privilege to belong to a group of Christians, but it carries with it the responsibility of doing all we can to contribute to the fellowship. It will demand time, effort and money if it is going to be maintained and increased.

Breaking Of Bread

To eat together has always been a sign of fellowship, especially in the East, but the term used here 'breaking of bread' means more than simply sharing an ordinary meal. It refers to the Lord's Supper or the communion service. Jesus Christ took bread and wine, the two most common elements of an Eastern meal, and used them as a picture of His body and His blood. By breaking bread together, the disciples were doing what Jesus Christ had asked. He instituted and requested this before He died, in order that they might keep Him continually in their minds. Every Christian should now do the same.

a Instituted by Jesus Christ

(Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22: 19-20 & 1 Corinthians 11:23-32) *"This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."* He also took a cup of wine, and after giving thanks passed it to His disciples saying "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:20)

b Requested By Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ requested His disciples to continue regularly the simple service He had begun, in remembrance of Himself. When He instituted the service, He said *"do this in remembrance of me."* The words 'do this' are in the present continuous tense, which means keep on doing this until I come again. If we have obeyed the command of Jesus Christ in being baptized, we must also respond to His request to break bread in memory of Him. These are the only two ordinances Christ gave us.

Prayers

Those that believed and were baptized *'devoted themselves to prayer.'* (Acts 2:42) The fourth activity in which new converts continued steadfastly is described as 'the prayers.' (RSV) This indicates that they had set times when they met together for united prayer. Private prayer is vital to the spiritual life of the individual while public and corporate prayer is essential for the spiritual well-being of any fellowship. Prayer has been likened to breathing. Without it there cannot be life or growth.

a Private Prayer

This was taught by Jesus Christ. *"When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."* (Matthew

6:6) This was also practiced by Jesus Christ it is reported of Him *that 'very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.'* (Mark 1:35) If Jesus Christ found it necessary to pray, how much more should we. It has been said 'The secret of prayer is prayer in secret' and those who have put this principle to work have found it to be true.

"Speak, for your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:10) Our attitude is often the reverse. 'Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking.' Satan will steal the time we should give in prayer if we are not careful and disciplined. (Colossians 4:2) This isolates us from God and imperils our spiritual life and witness.

b Public Prayer

While it is important to have set times of prayer alone, it is also a great source of strength and blessing to pray with others.

Prayer is the switch that turns the fire on; it allows the warmth of God's love and the power of His Spirit to flow into the church.

Peter knew the power of prayer. Because *'many people had gathered and were praying'* (Acts 12:12) he was delivered from prison. Paul sought the prayers of the churches and often sent them prayer requests, e.g. *"Brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men."* (2 Thessalonians 3:1&2) When the people of God pray, the preaching of His Word will prevail. Samuel said *"As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you."* (1 Samuel 12:23)

If we continue steadfastly in these four vital activities we shall go on to see in our lives and fellowships the results that are mentioned in Acts 2:47. Our hearts will be full of praise to God. We shall experience good will amongst the people and see others converted through our witness.

While in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas spoke to the converts and *'urged them to continue in the grace of God.'* (Acts 13:43) They returned later *'strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.'* (Acts 14:22)

Questions To Answer

- 1 How can you make sure you will progress as a Christian and not go back to your old way of life?

- 2 What place should the Bible have in our lives?

3 Why is the Christian fellowship so necessary?

4 Why should Christians 'break bread' together?

5 Why is prayer so important for the Christian?

Why Immersion?

1 The meaning of the word

The Greek verb 'baptizo' means to dip, to submerge. The Greeks used it to describe the dyeing of a garment, and the drawing of water by dipping a cup into a bowl. It would be necessary to immerse the entire garment if it was to be completely dyed and to put the cup beneath the water to fill it. In the Greek version of the Old Testament 'baptizo' is used of Naaman dipping himself in Jordan (2 Kings 5:14). Jesus Christ used the same word to indicate that He would be immersed in suffering and overwhelmed with judgment on the Cross (Luke 12:50).

2 The practice of the Jews

The Jews practiced baptism by immersion. When a Gentile left behind his pagan beliefs and placed his faith in the living God, he could only become a worshipping member of the Jewish community by being baptized. The baptism had to take place in the presence of three witnesses; the individual had to declare his faith in the God of Israel; after which immersion took place. His past was considered to be forgotten while his present and future life were to be marked by a new relationship with God and His people.

3 The baptism of John

John the Baptist seems to have had a unique commission to baptize, *'He who sent me to baptize with water'* (John 1:33), and he obviously adapted Jewish baptism for his own particular mission. John preached the necessity of repentance for the remission of sins and then baptized those who turned to God, as a sign that the old life was finished and a new life begun. He baptized in Jordan, and is recorded as baptizing *'at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized'* (John 3:23), which suggests immersion.

4 The Baptism of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ was baptized by John in the river Jordan, and undoubtedly was immersed in the same way as the Gentile converts and repentant Jews. Both Matthew and Mark record that Jesus *'went up out of the water'* after He was baptized. The baptism of Jesus forms the link between John's baptism and Christian baptism.

When Jesus Christ stood in the river Jordan it was not as a repentant sinner, as John obviously sensed, but to *'fulfill all righteousness'*, that is, to do all that God required of Him. He was there taking the guilty sinner's place, identifying Himself with them in their relation to God as sinners. His baptism in water pointed clearly first to His death on the cross when He would again stand in the place of the sinner and then to His burial. His coming up from the water was a picture of His resurrection and ascension.

If we are baptized by immersion, we are surely following in the footsteps of the Master, which is a great privilege.

5 The practice of the Early Church

The most detailed account we have of a baptismal service in the book of Acts is that of the Ethiopian. (Acts 8:36-39) The relevant phrases are *'Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water.'* The early Christians would continue baptizing by immersion as it was the only form they knew.

6 The teaching of the Apostles

The classic passage is of course Romans 6: 1-11 where Paul uses the terms death, burial and resurrection. He speaks of being *'baptized into His death'*, *'buried with Him through baptism'* and *'raised from the dead.'* When a person becomes a Christian, the sinner he once was is considered to be dead and buried, whereas the person he now is, is very much alive spiritually. The baptistery then becomes, in picture, an open grave for sinners, who are raised to live a new life in Christ. This has been more fully explained in the main section on baptism. Baptism by immersion is the clearest and most appropriate way of expressing these wonderful truths.

Practical Details

1. Invite your family, relatives and friends to attend the service. It is an opportunity to show other people how much Jesus Christ means to you. Someone else may become a Christian or be baptized as a result of attending.
2. Wear suitable clothing. The person conducting the service will advise you on this and explain how everything takes place. If you have not previously witnessed a baptismal service, it would be wise to take the opportunity of attending one if possible.
3. Ask a close friend to sit with you to support you and to hand you a towel as you leave the water.
4. A baptismal service may bring to church people who do not normally attend.