

RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL



Attendee Workbook

Responding to the Gospel

Belief and Confession

*Hosts start DVD for initial Exercise.

Engage:

Introduction

(Pause DVD for exercise)

Describe the "Good News" in about a paragraph below:

(Resume DVD when everyone in the group has had the opportunity to write their description and had the opportunity to share it with the group)

After week one, please take a look back at your description and see how you feel about it.

Develop:

These Wednesday teachings are about *responding* to the Gospel message, not so much the details of the Gospel message itself (for a fuller version of that, please see the Grace series). In other words, once someone has heard the message, what are the steps we commonly see taken in scripture?

We looked at how people commonly responded to the Gospel message in scripture and came up with the following outline, which will be the outline of our series:

1. Belief & Confession
2. Repentance
3. Baptism

Responding to the Gospel

Belief and Confession

Week 1. Belief and Confession.

Core Scripture for memorization

Romans 10:8-10

*But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, [even] in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; 9. That if thou shalt **confess** with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt **believe** in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. 10. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

2 Key words: "**Confess**", "**Believe**"

This was the "word of faith that was preached".

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

*Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, **and wherein ye stand**; 2. By which also **ye are saved**, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. 3. **For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4. And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:***

That is the core of our faith. It's what Paul first received and first delivered. It's not complicated. The first step in responding to the gospel involves believing what we just read. What the rest of this study is going to do is reveal the power and importance behind believing and confessing the Gospel message.

There are three main things the Bible says we need to believe. These will be our first three points. Our fourth point expounds on the importance of confession.

1. Belief that Jesus is the Son of God.
2. Believe Jesus rose from the dead.
3. Believing that Jesus came in the flesh & the Spirit of Anti-Christ
4. The importance of Confessing

Responding to the Gospel

Belief and Confession

1. Belief that Jesus is the Son of God.

John 8:23-24

*And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. 24. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not **that I am he**, ye shall die in your sins.*

Believe He was who? The Son of God. The rest of chapter 8 is Jesus expounding to the Jews who the Father really is. The Jews assume they already know the Father. Jesus says if they really knew the Father they would love Jesus.

We cannot truly know the _____ without knowing the _____.

John 6:44

*No man can come to me, **except the Father which hath sent me draw him**: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

Throughout scripture, Jesus would often refer to his divine nature and Godhead in an indirect way when speaking to the scribes and Pharisees (e.g. "Before Abraham was, I Am.") There is a point however, when Jesus' "time had come" for him to be offered up, and He openly gave them the answer they had been looking for to officially declare him as a blasphemer against God.

Mark 14:61-62

But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? 62. And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses?

If we don't believe Jesus was the _____, the Son of _____, we make Him a _____.

Responding to the Gospel

Belief and Confession

It's one thing to believe in God. It's one thing to believe in Jesus of Nazerath. But believing that Jesus is the Son of God is another thing entirely. It means everything he said and stood for is true, righteous and holy. It affirms that Jesus is not only man, but God. It's ruling out the possibility of Jesus just being a powerful prophet or a good teacher. When one confesses that Jesus Christ is the Son of God they are instantly drawing a line in the sand. It's confessing faith in the operation God has planned. It's confessing that there is only one way to the Father. It's confessing that all other ways are wrong.

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg--or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

C.S. Lewis

Discussion:

Discuss instances in the Gospels where Jesus' actions or words force one to either accept Him as Lord, or dismiss him as a fool or a devil.

When you love God you love the things that He loves. And the Father loves His son. Just saying you love or believe in God is not what He has asked.

Responding to the Gospel

Belief and Confession

1 John 2:22-24

*Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.23. Whosoever **denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father:** (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.24. Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.*

God has specifically asked us to confess and teach others that Jesus is the Christ, the *Son* of God.

2. Belief that Jesus rose from the dead.

Mark 16:9-16

*Now when [Jesus] was risen early the first [day] of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. 10. [And] she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. 11. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, **believed** not. 12. After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. 13. And they went and told [it] unto the residue: neither **believed** they them.14. Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their **unbelief** and hardness of heart, because they **believed** not them which had seen him after he was risen.15. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.16. He that **believeth** and is baptized shall be saved; but he that **believeth not** shall be damned.*

Believe what? That Jesus rose from the dead!

Remember, the Gospel message not only says that Jesus paid for our sins by His death on the cross, but that He rose again for our justification. We have the right to be reborn as new creatures and enter a new kingdom because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ! It is imperative that Christ rose from the dead:

1 Corinthians 15:17-19

And if Christ be not raised, your faith [is] vain; ye are yet in your sins.18. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. 19. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

We must believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

Responding to the Gospel

Belief and Confession

"Risen" is not implying that he "re-manifested himself", or was "reborn" or "re-incarnated". Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary, rose bodily from the dead, laying his burial clothes down and walked out of the tomb. Perhaps it was similar to Lazarus. Perhaps the angel that met Mary also met Jesus and helped move the stone or remove the burial clothes, we don't know. But we do know and believe the Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead. Jesus would enter a glorified state, but it was still Jesus, not another man or only a spiritual resurrection.

Here is some scriptural support for Jesus' bodily resurrection.

-At least three times we read of Jesus showing people the holes in His hands and sides and once even his feet, inviting them to touch Him.

-Jesus was able to eat (Luke 24:42-43)

-People grabbed his feet to worship him (Matt 28:9)

-And here is what Jesus predicted about himself. Note the words He uses:

John 2:19-22

*Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. 20. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? 21. **But he spake of the temple of his body.**22. When therefore he **was risen from the dead**, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.*

-There were many witnesses who saw the Jesus they knew over a period of 40 days. Paul even lists some of these witnesses in his letter (1 Cor 15:5-8)

This is very important and foundational to our faith. We'll read why in the next section.

Discussion:

Think back to the grace series. It was important for Jesus to die for our sins. Why was it so important that He also rise?

3. Belief that Jesus came in the flesh & the spirit of AntiChrist

1 John 4:1-3

*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. 2. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: **Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:** 3. And every spirit that **confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that [spirit] of antichrist,** whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.*

If a doctrine will not allow for you to say that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, then that doctrine is incorrect. Any doctrine that will not acknowledge that *Jesus Christ* came in the flesh is the spirit of antiChrist.

The spirit of antichrist in John's time.

John was writing to warn the church of false teachers.

Gnostic heresy taught that matter is inherently evil, so a divine being could not take on human flesh. This resulted in a distinction between the man that was born and the spiritual Christ that came upon Jesus at his baptism, but departed before His Crucifixion.

Docetism (from dokeo = to seem) says that Christ only seemed to have a human body.

Further reading materials on Gnosticism can be found at the end of this lesson.

Both these doctrines deny the incarnation. That may seem like small distinction on the surface, but John calls this the spirit of Antichrist. Anyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh is the spirit of Antichrist.

Gnostics also believed that their understanding of the hidden knowledge (gnosis) made them spiritually elite.

Responding to the Gospel

Belief and Confession

"Trying The Spirits", the acid test:

We need to always be evaluating and occasionally even challenging what we may think we know. The Bible encourages it. To "try" the spirits means to "prove" or "test" them. And the standard is this, will that spirit confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh?

2 John spells it out with such specific detail:

2 John 7-11

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. 8. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. 9. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. 10. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: 11. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

We must fully acknowledge that Jesus came in the flesh even if we might not fully understand it. The specific occurrence is referenced several times in the Bible as a mystery. The just (can also be translated as righteous) shall live by faith.

One must be cautious when referring to the Son as simply a "temporary manifestation" of God as one would refer to the burning bush or the pillar of fire by night.

Jesus proceeded forth from the Father. The bible says that Jesus is in heaven right now in the presence of the Father interceding on our behalf.

Hebrews 9:24

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, [which are] the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

We serve a _____ savior who will _____ in the same manner in which he left.

Responding to the Gospel

Belief and Confession

Jesus is reigning now. And it's through His intercession that we have access to the Father. This same savior is coming back the way He left. Death was defeated, but it will not be fully conquered and destroyed until the Son of Man returns to make all things new.

Discussion:

Both the Greeks and Jews could accept believing in a god, but scripture says that Christ was a “stumbling block” to the Jews, and “foolishness” to the Greeks (1 Cor. 1:23). Why do you think that was?

Part 4: Confession

There is power in confession. Confession is evidence of the Holy Spirit speaking to a person (no man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Spirit).

Matt 10:32

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

Romans 10:9-10

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

1 John 4:15

Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

1 John 4:2

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

2 John 1:7

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

Responding to the Gospel

Belief and Confession

Discussion:

How does it make you feel to say “Jesus is Lord” out loud? Why do devils flee and cower at the authority of Jesus as Lord?

Conclusion. The power of the resurrection.

While we went over a lot of scripture, I hope it only re-enforces the necessity to not overlook the power of belief. The initial message is simple but life changing. For God to reveal his Son Jesus to a person, and for that person to believe and confess that Jesus died and rose again is the greatest revelation that person will ever receive. It is a supernatural experience. This simple belief is what “pricks” a person’s heart to confess, repent, and follow Jesus in baptism. It’s God’s love and the power of the resurrection that move a person. Let’s never forget the importance of simple belief and confession in the greatest story ever told.

Discussion:

Why is Jesus so awesome?

Discussion:

Revisit your Gospel paragraph from the beginning of the study. Are there changes you would make after this study? Is there anything you would emphasize more, etc.

Responding to the Gospel

Belief and Confession

For more information on **Gnosticism**:

Songer, H. S., & Clendenen, E. R. (2003). Gnosticism. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond & T. C. Butler, Ed.) (657). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. (1996). *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed.) (415). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Responding to the Gospel
Belief and Confession

Do:

This week read the Gospel of Mark and tell someone about the good news this week.

Responding to the Gospel

Repentance

Engage:

What is your favorite song and why? Is there a lyric that strikes you a certain way an element of the music that resonates with you? (I know it may be hard for some to narrow it down to just one, if that is the case, have them talk about one of their favorite songs.)

What was your favorite T.V. show when you were growing up?

Responding to the Gospel

Repentance

Develop:

We started this series by looking at belief on Jesus and confessing Him as Lord. That is the first step in responding to the gospel message. This week we will look at repentance and its importance in our response to that belief. As we begin the study we need to begin by understanding that repentance isn't a response to the acknowledgement of sin so much as it is acknowledging Jesus and believing in Him as we discussed in week one. It is not something that is self-generated either, it happens because we are drawn by God to him. In John chapter 6 Jesus said "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him". The fact that we would even come to understand we are lacking and that Jesus is the answer we seek is an act of Grace. It is God who draws us and puts the will in us for change.

Prepare the way:

John the Baptist preached repentance to prepare the way for Jesus. It is a good place to start talking about repentance because we have to repent to prepare our heart for Him.

Luke 3:3-14

And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; 4 As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways [shall be] made smooth; 6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. 7 ¶ Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to [our] father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. 9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? 11 He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. 12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? 13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

Responding to the Gospel

Repentance

14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse [any] falsely; and be content with your wages.

People listened to John the Baptist and realized they needed a change in their life. His preaching caused them to evaluate themselves and they were convinced a change was necessary. That is what repentance is about, knowing that there has to be a change from our ways to God's.

John told different people different things on what to do for repentance, but it was all based on the need to change their ways. He told the tax collectors to not take more taxes from people than what the job required. He told others to meet the needs of those without and he told soldiers to not abuse their power and to be happy with what they got paid. When we repent we change our mind. We see our ways for what they are and surrender to the grace of God. When the light of Jesus is shined on us, all the secret things we try to hide from even ourselves are seen and we then have to make a decision.

It is the love of Jesus, not the _____ of sin, that will bring the _____ to repent.

The prophet Isaiah spoke these words.

Isaiah 55:6-7

Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Without God we are unrighteous, by ourselves we are wicked. We need to abandon our ways and thoughts, but the key here is turning to the LORD. We have to rely on God to pardon and change us. The apostle Paul wrote that "to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Romans 7:8). Repentance is giving into the grace of God, but it requires us knowing that something needs to change.

We don't have the power to get rid of or _____ sin, but we can stop _____ on to it.

We can give our sin over to a loving God and allow His grace to give us the strength and power to overcome.

Responding to the Gospel

Repentance

Discussion:

Why do you think repentance is such a big deal? Why must repentance happen to prepare the way for Jesus?

Calling sinners to repentance:

In Luke chapter five after Jesus called Matthew to follow him, Matthew threw a big party and invited his friends. The religious people of the day, the scribes and Pharisees, couldn't understand why Jesus would spend time with the people others considered sinners. This was Jesus' response.

Luke 5:31-32

And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. 32. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

God sent His son Jesus for the express purpose of changing the lives of those who recognized they needed help. Jesus said He came to call sinners to repentance. That means that we have to recognize that we are at best incomplete without Jesus.

When we hear what Jesus did on the cross for us and know that he rose for our justification it will cause a stirring in our hearts for change. It's not enough to hear about Jesus and believe He existed or even believe everything He did. The grace that is offered through the knowledge of Him will and has to make us different. That starts with repentance. It was the whole reason for him coming. Just before he ascended into to heaven he talked to his disciples.

Responding to the Gospel

Repentance

Luke 24:46-49

And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: 47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And ye are witnesses of these things. 49 And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

Repentance and remission of sins go hand in hand. When we believe on Jesus and repent of the life we are living, we will become obedient to His word. We are going to look at some examples of this in scripture, but before we do I want to clarify a key point about repentance. Repentance isn't feeling sorry for something we did or feeling bad about the life we live. We may feel sorry or bad, but unless it leads to surrender to God's will it isn't repentance. Sometimes people think that repentance is doing something to make up for the sin they committed. We think, I got drunk last night so today I am going to give money to the homeless or we decide punish ourselves in some way as retribution.

Paying penance for what we did wrong is not repentance and it is futile, but more than that it isn't necessary. Our prideful nature sometimes feels the need to "help God out" by attempting to correct what is wrong. God through His son Jesus already paid the price for our sin so that we wouldn't have to. To try and correct ourselves is to deny the power of the cross, to say that what Jesus did was not good enough. It doesn't make us humble to think we need to do something to earn God's forgiveness; it is actually a form of pride.

_____ is when the Spirit of God takes over and we _____ him to make the change for us.

Without accepting this idea, it is impossible to lay everything down at the cross. We must let Jesus be the cure for what ails us. He is what is missing. We don't need more will power or more knowledge to be different. We need complete surrender to the grace of Jesus.

Responding to the Gospel

Repentance

Discussion:

Imagine you were there when Jesus told the scribes and the Pharisees “the whole need not a physician”. What would that make you think? What does it mean to you today? (Maybe think about how you would hear it if you were a scribe. What about if you were just an observer, or what about if you were the sinner that Jesus was standing up for.)

Finding repentance:

Let's look at some examples of this repentance process happening.

Acts 2:36-38

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. 37 Now when they heard [this], they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men [and] brethren, what shall we do? 38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Leading up to this passage in scripture, Peter had preached a message that talked about who Jesus was and the event they were witnessing was God pouring out His spirit on them. When they heard what Peter said they were “pricked” in their hearts. This shows the belief they had; there would be no twinge in their heart if there was not belief. They then ask “what shall we do?” This shows their heart for repentance. They knew something had to change and asked what to do. When we get to the place that we are willing to accept whatever Christ wants us to do, we have truly repented.

Before we are baptized, belief and _____ are necessary for a _____ with God.

Responding to the Gospel

Repentance

Another example comes from later in the book of Acts in chapter 16 with the jailer that was keeping watch over Paul and Silas.

Acts 16:26-34

And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. 27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. 29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. 32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed [their] stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. 34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

What must I do to be saved? What a powerful question and one that shows a heart of repentance. He knew something must change in his life and he believed that Paul and Silas would know what he needed to do. They told him he had to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. He took them back to his house and Paul preached Jesus to him and his whole family. There was a dramatic change in this man and it didn't come from attending a class or by any other means but trusting in Jesus.

Are you waiting for something to repent? In your heart and mind are you thinking about something you are holding on to? If you trust in Jesus, if you believe in him, then today is the day of surrender. You can be like this soldier guarding Paul and Silas and go from capture to protector, from abuser to healer or from whatever it is that you know needs changed in you to the person God wants you to be.

When we _____ and call on Jesus in repentance, we will be _____.

Responding to the Gospel

Repentance

In each of the examples we have in the book of Acts of someone coming to the knowledge of Jesus and what he did, there was belief, repentance and baptism. Sometimes we see the repentance in their actions. Like in the example in Acts 16, the jailer was washing the wounds of Paul and Silas and harboring them as fugitives, but it is always there.

Next week as we look at baptism we will see how belief, confession and repentance lead us to the obedience of what Jesus commanded us. They all work in harmony and are all necessary if we are to properly respond to the gospel of Jesus.

Discussion:

Can you think of any examples in scripture of people who repented? How do you know they repented, what about the story indicated to you they made a change? (Possible example: the Prodigal son)

Discussion:

What is the difference, in your own words, between repentance and penance (attempting to atone for your sin)?

Responding to the Gospel

Repentance

Do:

Think about someone you know who needs to hear the gospel message, it may be a coworker, a neighbor, a family member, the checkout girl at Walmart that you see regularly, etc. This week begin praying for that person. Ask God to soften their heart, to open it to belief in Jesus and what He has done. As you pray, pray for God to open the door to share with this person. It may be as simple as inviting them to a study, or church but look for the opportunity to share the goodness of God. Share your experience with your group next week.

Responding to the Gospel

Baptism

Engage:

Have you ever believed something to be true but later found out it was wrong or not completely true? How did that make you feel? What did you do about it?

If someone rented a billboard for you, what would you put on it?

Responding to the Gospel

Baptism

Develop:

Introduction

As we have seen in week two, the second chapter of Acts has been a defining source of information on how those who are seeking God will respond to the Gospel. We can see the final step in accepting Christ is through baptism according to chapter 2, verse 38, where we read:

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

While baptism has its share of controversy and dispute in the religious community, for this study we will answer three simple questions:

- 1) What is baptism?
- 2) Who should be baptized?
- 3) Why be baptized?

Following these answers, we will focus on the example of Jesus, his name being used in the performance of baptism, and the accounts of his apostles baptizing as they spread the gospel throughout the world.

What is baptism?

The word baptism itself is from the Greek, **baptizo**.

In Strong's Greek dictionary reference 907, it is: to make whelmed (i.e. fully wet); this is derived from the Greek, **bapto**, ref. 911, meaning: to cover wholly with a fluid; to dip.

Every account of baptism in the bible comes from these definitions, and gives confirmation to the accounts to follow, that it is fully immersing the convert in water.

Responding to the Gospel

Baptism

Who should be baptized?

The instructions of Jesus to his disciples in Mark answers this question.

Mark 16:15-16

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. 16. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Baptism is an act of _____ to the commandment of Jesus, not just a _____ cleansing.

By “every creature” Jesus meant all mankind; you, me, and everyone. Everyone who confesses belief that Jesus Christ is the son of God must be baptized to prove their belief. It is also important to note that no infants were ever baptized, only believers able to confess Christ as their Lord.

Discussion Question:

When the Spirit of God touches your heart to follow His commandments, how do you respond?

Are you always happy or in agreement with what He is asking you to do?

Why be baptized?

A key to understanding the importance of baptism is found in Galatians.

Galatians 3:27-28

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Responding to the Gospel

Baptism

The message in this scripture passage is that through obeying the gospel of Jesus we are dressed in his righteousness. Without baptism, we are incomplete, and have not put on, or in other words, assumed the likeness Christ by following his example.

It is also important to note in verse 28 that there is no exclusion from baptism. Also Christ sets no conditions on those who have believed and repented that would excuse, or prevent them from being baptized. For instance, in Acts chapter eight you can read the account of the disciple Phillip being called to preach the gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch of high office. It is possible that this man had not heard the teachings of Jesus. Yet when Phillip revealed the plan of salvation beginning with the Old Testament scriptures, the eunuch knew that he needed to be baptized. When they came upon some water he did not hesitate to asked if he could be baptized, as it reads:

Acts 8:26-39

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37. And Phillip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Phillip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

It is evident then; from the scriptures that Phillip spoke of baptism and understood it was an inseparable part of salvation through the gospel of Christ.

Since salvation is a spiritual renewal, it may seem pointless to be baptized, even foolish considering it is a physical act. Some say it is a “work” and we aren’t saved by works. The truth is baptism is something done for us, not a work we perform for another in the service of God. It is the way we show our love and obedience to Christ. The words of Paul to the church in Rome show it to be of vital importance.

Responding to the Gospel

Baptism

Romans 6:3-5

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 4. Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

Baptism is how we _____ God we are _____ to follow Him.

So then in putting on Christ, our baptism also represents death, burial, and resurrection. It is a symbolic act of obedience in the example of Jesus' baptism by John.

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|---------------------|---|
| Death | in that believing on Christ and repenting of our sins, we have crucified the "old man" and his ways |
| Burial | being put under the water, separated from life in the world |
| Resurrection | being raised up out of the water to walk in new life like as Christ rose from the grave alive again |

Up to the time of Christ's ministry, salvation was a matter of adhering to all the Levitical law.

Jesus was always at odds with the Scribes and Pharisees who for salvation taught the law, and circumcision as essential.

The gospel of Christ however revealed that God's desire was a change from within. The physical sign now, is no longer removal of flesh, but baptism by faith in obedience to Jesus, removing sin inwardly by accepting his sacrifice. This is shown through the account of Jesus and the Pharisee Nicodemus.

Responding to the Gospel

Baptism

John 3:1-12

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: 2. The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. 3. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5. Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 8. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. 9. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? 10. Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? 11. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. 12. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

To the Jews the “Circumcised” were God’s chosen people. Circumcision was the beginning of a life consecrated to God, and was absolutely essential to obey. It was so important that God would have killed Moses on his way to Egypt, except that he had his son circumcised before he could continue. It was expected of God even before the law was delivered to Moses. (Exodus 4:24-25)

With the coming of Christ, baptism was given in the new covenant, and the essentiality of it is no less important than circumcision was in the old covenant. We can read this expression by Paul in Colossians.

Responding to the Gospel

Baptism

Colossians 2:9-13

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. 10. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: 11. In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: 12. 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. 13. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

Therefore, we may understand that the law is not nullified, but moved inwardly from the fleshly, to the spiritual man.

Discussion Question

Why is it important for a person to believe on Christ and repent before getting baptized?

Christ's example

To give us an understanding of why baptism is an element of New Testament salvation, we must look into the example Jesus left for us to follow. We have already learned that belief and repentance are the result of God's spirit moving us to seek a new life in Christ. Now the question comes from within us, like those who heard the gospel in Acts chap. 2, we respond by asking "what shall we do?" In the same way Israel was separated from the rest of the world by Circumcision, Jesus taught us baptism fulfills the same righteousness God requires by a physical act of obedience.

John "Prepared the way" before the ministry of Christ by baptizing those who wished to repent.

Responding to the Gospel

Baptism

Mark 1:1-5

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; 2. As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. 3. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 4. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. 5. And there went out unto him all the land of Judæa, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

This form of baptism continued until Jesus came to him.

Matthew 3:13-16.

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. 14. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? 15. And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. 16. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

The first thing we see is how John recognizes Jesus had no need to be baptized. However, Jesus' answer to him shows that baptism is a righteous act, and as were many actions in his ministry, performed as examples to be followed. Second, the Holy Spirit ascended upon Jesus afterward, echoing the exhortation of Peter on the day of Pentecost to those who asked "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter knew the Holy Spirit could be received after baptism.

The name of Jesus in baptism

Simply put, when we are baptized in Jesus' name, we are identified with him.

In Matthew Jesus commanded his disciples saying:

Responding to the Gospel

Baptism

Matthew 28:19-20

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

To fully understand the correlation between the name of Jesus, and the titles Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, it would be necessary to refer to a study on the Godhead.

For the purpose of this study, we will see through the scriptures that the apostles and disciples understood that the commandment of Jesus was to baptize in his name. This can be evidenced from the passage in Acts 4, where Peter and John were called to give account for healing a lame man in Jesus' name.

Acts 4:7-12

And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? 8. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, 9. If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; 10. Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. 11. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. 12. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

We can understand from this account, Peter, who first preached the salvation plan on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, had fully understood that the name of Jesus should be used when the three thousand were baptized that day.

In Colossians 3:17, Paul teaches the importance of glorifying Jesus' name. *And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*

Responding to the Gospel

Baptism

Discussion Question:

Give some examples of how people in the New Testament were baptized after the Day of Pentecost?

Responding to the Gospel

Baptism

Do:

Consider fasting a meal or more this week for the express purpose of seeing people respond to the gospel message. Use the fasting time to draw closer to God so that His spirit can work in you to draw others to Him. During your meal time read examples in the book of Acts of people coming to know Jesus. Your Host has some examples in their book if you would like suggestions on what chapters and verses to read.

