

Preparation For Baptism

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AIM

Our aim is to understand and receive the key truths of the Christian faith.

Baptism is into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and into the fellowship of the church, so Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the God's holy Church will be the outline of what we will consider.

Everyone can participate—so questions about the Bible and about life can be raised and brought into the light of God's truth.

Our aim is also to be assured that the word of Christ is God's true word and that it is for us.

Our aim is also to encourage one another 'to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion' (Acts 11:23)—by trusting ourselves to the grace of God, loving the way of God for our lives in the world, and growing in knowledge and wisdom and in favour with God and man (Luke 2:52).

Lesson One

GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE AND COMFORT IN LIFE?

Our chief purpose in life, and our greatest comfort, is to know God as Father (John 14:8), and Son (John 17:3; Phil. 3:8) and Spirit (John 14:17).

He has made us, and made us for himself, so that, by him, we would be equipped for everything else in life (Heb. 13:20–21).

IS THERE ANY DIFFICULTY IN KNOWING GOD?

We have not wanted to know the Father, because we would then have to give him the glory for everything (Rom. 1:19–32).

But God is always speaking to everyone. He is known by his actions: providing, judging and renewing his creation (Psa. 19:1–4; Acts 14:15–17).

God has especially spoken to us by telling us he will heal us: forgiving us; renewing us in love. To this end, he sent his prophets and his Son (Tit. 3:4–7).

HOW HAS GOD REVEALED HIMSELF?

All of God's revelations have been made known as covenants—made at various times.

With Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3).

With Moses (Exod. 24:3–8).

With David (II Sam. 7:10–16).

With God's chosen people—in the name of Jesus Christ (Jer. 31:31–34; Luke 1:68–75; Luke 22:19–20).

Everything the Father does is through his Son, Jesus Christ (I Corin. 8:6). By his coming into the world, God has taught us to trust him again (Heb. 12:2). No one could come to the Father except through Christ (John 14:6). We had lost our way, but he found us and led us back to the Father.

Through his grace, we know that God is the Creator—our Father—who has made us in his own image, who has given us all things, who delights in us, who chastens us, and, to whom we can entrust ourselves (Eph. 1:1–6).

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LET US TURN FROM IDOLS TO SERVE THE LIVING AND TRUE GOD!

Many other idols have come to be in the world. God frees us from the worship of false idols through the grace of Christ so that we can serve the living and true God (Luke 1:74–75; I Thes. 1:9).

Through Jesus Christ, we may honour and reverence and trust God in our whole life. This is the purpose of God for us. Everything else is idolatry and belongs to the world which is hostile to God (I John 2:15–17).

HOW MAY WE LIVE A TRULY FULL LIFE?

God is over us, our Creator, but he is not far from anyone. He wants to be in us and us in him (Eph. 4:6; I Corin. 8:6). In this way we come to be fully human (Eph. 4:25–5:2).

Because God is Father and has given us family relationships, being at one with God equips us for oneness in all other relationships. He provides the grace and the unity which is the true environment for our living.

Lesson Two

JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD

WHY SHOULD EVERYONE CONFESS THAT JESUS CHRIST IS LORD?

God has made everything in this life and the life to come to depend on Jesus Christ. There is no other name given whereby we may be saved (Acts 4:12). Everything we need to know and to be comes from him.

WHO SHOULD WE SAY THAT JESUS CHRIST IS?

He is the world's Messiah or Promised Deliverer

God promised a Ruler and Saviour to his people, one who would be for all the peoples of the world—saving them from their sins (Matt. 1:20–21). This is what Jesus showed himself to be when he came to Israel. Many people cried out to him: 'Have mercy on us Son of David'.

He is God's Son

Jesus did things that it was only proper for God to do—like forgive sins (Mark 2:5–12), judge the world (John 5:22–23) and save his people (I Tim. 4:10; II Tim. 1:10). He called God his Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:18). We worship the Son, together with the Father—as God (John 1:1; II Pet. 1:1). Only the Son who was 'in the bosom of the Father' could fully reveal God (John 1:18).

Many other names and titles are given to him, such as Son of Man, Leader and Saviour, Lamb of God, all of which help us to know him.

WHAT HAS JESUS CHRIST DONE?

He lived truly as a human being

Jesus came from his Father but came as a man—poor, weak, sharing our nature, made in the likeness of sinful flesh (Heb. 2:14). He did not cease being God but relied wholly on his Father for everything he needed in life and in death.

No one could accuse Jesus of sin. He lived fully what every person is called to be. He did not fall short of the glory of God (compare Rom. 3:21). He did not live for himself but for those he found around him.

Everything that we had become as sinners, Jesus took upon himself (Rom. 8:3)—so there was nothing left of our sinfulness for us to deal with. He did not come to condemn but to save (John 3:17).

He has died for our sins

Because God had promised to bring sinners to destruction, he judged his own Son on whom our sins had been laid (Rom. 8:3). Jesus did this freely, firstly because he

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loved his Father, and secondly, so that we could be included with him as children of God.

He has risen again and ascended to his Father

It was not possible for Jesus to remain in the grave: because God had promised he would rise (Acts 2:24–28); because he had obediently given himself up to death on the cross (Phil. 3:8–9); because God would give life to us in him; because God had chosen him to administer all of history for the benefit of his people (Rev. 5:9–10).

HOW MUST WE RESPOND TO JESUS CHRIST?

We are to believe in him as we believe in God (John 14:1), especially that he is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31). All who turn from their own way and believe in him receive the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and are called children of God (Acts 2:38; John 1:12).

In Jesus Christ, the fullness of deity dwells bodily and to receive him is to receive all of God and so to have fullness of life (Col. 2:9–10).

To be baptized into the name of Jesus is to be baptized into the whole name of God (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38). Baptism is God's sign that we are his and not the world's. We are immersed in Christ, washed clean from every false way, so as to sin no more and to live to please God. God's purpose is that we never sin again, but, if we do, he has provided an Advocate who is the sacrifice for our sins (I John 2:1).

Jesus Christ is with his Church, and each believer, as Advocate—the one who has come to take our part (John 14:18; I John 2:1). He is the good shepherd who leads his sheep (John 10:11).

WHAT REMAINS FOR CHRIST TO DO?

Jesus Christ, still as a man, is now at the right hand of God. He has gone to the Father, and, in him, we are before the Father (Eph. 2:4–6). From this place of power, he can administer everything for the glory of his Father and for the benefit of his people (Eph. 1:20–22).

To bring everything to its conclusion, and to demonstrate the truth of everything he has promised, Jesus Christ will return at the time the Father has set for him. At that time, those who have believed in him, and died, will be raised up from their graves; those who are still on the earth will be changed to be with them and with Christ forever (I Thes. 4:13–18).

Jesus Christ will judge all people and all nations. No-one will be able to escape this judgement (II Corin. 5:9–10). Those who have not believed will be condemned (John 5:24–29). Then, Christ will hand the kingdom to the Father so that his Father can be everything to everyone (I Corin. 15:24–28).

Lesson Three

LIFE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

WHY DID JESUS CALL US THIRSTY AND OFFER TO US THE WATER OF LIFE?

Jesus saw that we were thirsty because we did not have a real relationship with the living God (Jer. 2:11–13).

The Holy Spirit would be given to all who came to him (John 7:37–39).

God had promised to send his Spirit and renew his people (Ezek. 36:25–27). Jesus would fulfil this promise after his death and resurrection (Luke 24:45–49) and this is what happened on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:).

Our human powers are not able to do what God wants done. Our life needs to be empowered by the Holy Spirit (Zech. 4:6).

WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Jesus said we would know the Spirit and that he would be another Advocate—like Jesus (John 14:15–17).

Jesus said it would be worse for us to sin against the Holy Spirit than to sin against himself (Mark 3:29). To sin against the Holy Spirit is to sin against God (Acts 5:3–4; Heb. 10:29–31). He takes the things of Christ (John 16:13–14) and the things of God (I Corin. 2:10–11) and shows them to us—which only God could do (see Matt. 11:27).

The Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son (Matt. 28:19). From him, together with the Father and the Son, come every blessing we have (II Corin. 13:14). He is God.

WHAT SHOULD I DO TO RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). God gives his Holy Spirit freely to all who believe in his Son. There is nothing we can do to be worthy of this. In fact, the Holy Spirit was busy before we believed (I Pet. 1:2).

HOW WILL I RECOGNISE THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Jesus said being born of the Spirit was like wind blowing—we could not see the Spirit's coming or going but could recognise his life giving power (John 3:8). The Spirit that is from God confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (I John 4:2) and that he is Lord (I Corin. 12:3). In fact, he unites us with Christ (I Corin. 12:12–13).

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WHAT IS THE SPECIAL WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The Spirit enables us to call out to God as Father (Rom. 8:15–16). We actually say ‘Father’ in the same way that Jesus said ‘Father’ because Jesus has sent his Spirit to purify our hearts and enable us to participate in his Sonship.

In addition to bringing us to life, as we have already seen, he is the Spirit of participation (communion or fellowship) in God (II Corin. 13:14). Because of this, no one is left out of the fellowship of God’s people (Eph. 2:17–19).

Love is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). In this way, we are kept from discouragement and can live for others as Christ lives for us. If we are unwilling to let this love of God flow on to others, we grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:30–31).

The Spirit sanctifies us. This happened before we believed (I Pet. 1:2) and because we were joined to Christ (I Corin. 6:11), but sanctification continues because the Spirit is God and he is the *Holy* Spirit (I Thes. 5:23). God is transforming us to be like his Son.

Lesson Four

THE BODY OF CHRIST (THE CHURCH)

WHAT IS THE SPECIAL CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHURCH?

We are a people *chosen by God* and the one reason for this is God's purpose and grace (John 17:6; Rom. 1:6). He has provided for us *to be holy* before him in love (Eph. 1:3–6).

All who have believed in Christ are *one with him and with one another* in the family of God. We, together with Jesus Christ, are *beloved by God* (II Thes. 2:13).

As the beloved children, we are *to live in love*, giving ourselves up for one another (Eph. 5:1–2).

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE 'IN JESUS CHRIST'?

There is a big difference between people being what they are in themselves and what they are in Christ. Our old humanity has come to judgement in Christ's death. Jesus has brought a new humanity to life in his resurrection.

This new life is not limited by what we have been or directed by what we would like to be. It is what God calls us to be—what we really are created for—with all of the wonder and pain and joy that that may involve.

HOW CAN WE LEARN TO LIVE IN CHRIST?

We know who we are through faith (I Pet. 1:18–21). The alternative to faith in God is faith in ourselves—and this is not a hopeful prospect! Jesus alone is without defect or blemish, and God has given him up for us—so we have our trust set on God.

Through baptism, God himself puts his sign upon us that we are joined to Jesus Christ—in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3–4), and so, in his righteousness. It is the outward sign that our sins are washed away (Acts 22:16), our consciences are purified (Heb. 10:22; I Pet. 3:21) and that we are free to live before God (Rom. 6:10–11).

We live through hearing the word of God (I Peter 1:23–25; 2:1–3). Everything exists because God speaks, and we have heard that word. Therefore, we should long to hear God speak to us—in the Bible, in the proclamation and teaching of the church, and in the encouragement that comes from other believers.

We are fruitful through prayer (John 15:12–16; 16:23–24). No one can do anything lasting of themselves, but God has chosen us to be fruitful, and, to ask for the things that we need. Jesus taught us how to pray for everything (Matt. 6:5–15). This means that our life should be lived in joyfulness rather than in anxiety (Phil. 4:4–7).

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Who we are is expressed in our manner of life (I Pet. 1:13–17, 22). We formerly lived by our feelings and wants, but the love of God has taught us to fix our minds and our hopes on his grace and holiness and love—which we now share. We are to ‘love one another deeply from the heart’.

All these things are ours together, not privately. God has joined us to each other through being joined to him and we are necessary to one another.

HELPING OTHERS TO BE WHO CHRIST HAS MADE THEM

No one can be properly seen from a human point of view. Christ has died for all, and that changes everything (II Corin. 5:14–21).

People will usually want us to help them be what they want to be. There may be nothing wrong with this, or, there may be something very wrong with this. We are to please one another ‘for the good purpose of building up the neighbour’ (Rom. 15:2). ‘See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all’ (1Thess. 5:15).

God has given us ways of serving each other which are special to each person (Rom. 12:3–13). Trying to be like someone else is fighting against what God has made us, and may be trying to take away what God has made someone else. Love is happy to serve with the opportunities and gifts that each has been given.

God’s purpose is that our good works will draw attention to the Father who has loved us, so that they come to believe in him and in his Son (Matt. 5:16).