

# SEEING THE LIGHT

*how to prepare your heart for learning and sharing the gospel*

LESSON 7 | PAUL SAW THAT FAITH MANIFESTS TRUE PENITENCE AND BAPTISM | 1/17/2021

Seeing is believing, is what some people say, and Saul saw Jesus alive. But from Paul's own testimony, some of which we considered last week, the Bible does not indicate that Saul was saved when he saw Jesus on the road to Damascus. In fact, it will not be until three days later that Ananias called by God Himself to regain his sight and to tell him that Saul would be a chosen instrument of His (9:11-16). Also, *if it was the appearance on the road to Paul that brought him salvation* from his sin, for seventy-two hours, he was the most miserably "saved" man there ever was (Acts 9:9, 11). In his praying, he was abstaining from eating and drinking.

- Unlike others who were saved, Saul did not rejoice, as other saved sinners did (Acts 8:39; 16:34).
- He had no peace with God (Romans 5:1; Colossians 3:15).

He was penitent. He fasted. He agonized as he ... remembered the innocent people he had hurt ... thought of the sorrow and pain he had caused families by driving them from home ... remembered the spouses he had separated and the parents he had taken from their children ... thought of the faithful Christians he had compelled to blaspheme their Savior. He allowed not a morsel nor a drop to pass his lips. Normally going without sustenance for so long would be exhausting; but Saul did not sleep. He prayed . . . and prayed . . . and prayed.

Jesus had told Saul that there was something he "must do" (Acts 9:6), so he waited to learn what that was. Upon arrival at the house on Straight Street, the preacher Jesus sent did not congratulate Saul on his new-found salvation or announce to him that he had successfully prayed through. Instead, Ananias reported to him first that God had sent him to restore his sight and to be filled with the Spirit (9:17). **But what Ananias asked Saul to do** was to "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). One could say, then, that Saul's sins were removed not on the road, but in the pool (cf. Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21). After his baptism, he ate. He fellowshiped. He taught (Acts 9:19-20). His agony was over; his sins were forgiven; he was at peace; he was now a Christian.

This coincides with the teaching of Peter:

- "Repent and be baptized everyone of you for the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 2:38).
- "Baptism now saves you" (1 Peter 3:21).

And this coincides with the teaching of Jesus:

- "Unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).
- "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes, it is said that Paul taught that the baptism of the Spirit (Eph 4:4-5) was the baptism that saves. Yet, in the New Testament, Spirit baptism is never a command. How could one possibly command the Holy Spirit to baptize him? However, water baptism is a command (Acts 2:38; 10:48). The baptism in view in Romans 6 was in response to a command, to which the Roman Christians previously had been obedient, thereby being "made free from sin" (6:17-18). It was not Spirit baptism.

Further, the baptism of Romans 6:3 was identical with that which Paul himself had received (note the plural pronoun "we"). But Paul's baptism in Damascus was in water (cf. Acts 22:16). And it is clear from a consideration of the language in Romans 6:3-4 that the baptism into which one is immersed is also that from which he emerges (i.e., is raised). Thus, the apostle argues that our baptism, as to its mode of action, involves both a burial and a resurrection, just as Christ's death did (cf. vv. 4-5). The same point is made in Colossians 2:12.

Also, Paul declared to the Ephesian saints that **they had been cleansed by the washing of water with the word**. And this harmonizes perfectly with Jesus' description of the new birth, which likewise involves water (John 3:3-5), as well as Titus 3:5 which speaks of the "washing of regeneration," i.e., rebirth. First Peter 3:20-21 certainly connects the baptism that involves becoming saved with water.

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Some also contend that since Paul was not sent to baptize, baptism is unnecessary. However, the word “baptize” here denotes “to administer the rite” of baptism (Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 94). Paul had not been commissioned administer baptism – but to proclaim the good news of Christ. In fact he could have said the same about repentance – or holiness. Yet, he still preached the truth about all of this that the Lord revealed to him. The fact that he could remember only three names (cf. 1 Cor. 1:14-16) of those whom he had baptized, during an eighteen-month stay in the city (Acts 18:11), is clear evidence that he was not merely preaching baptism; His main function had been to proclaim the gospel. Yet, Paul himself was immersed in order to have his sins “washed away” (Acts 22:16) and he recounted that even – with his own words – and does not say that Ananias told him to believe and wash away...

And some often contend that baptism isn’t always mentioned. While the New Testament is chock full of references that connect baptism with salvation (e.g., Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:21), some will say that Paul taught instead that “by grace are you saved” (Ephesians 2:4) and that “He is the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:22-27) – not the one who is baptized.

- While it is true that the passages referenced (Eph. 2:8; Rom. 3:22-27) do not explicitly mention baptism, neither do they contain any allusion to repentance. Are we to assume that repentance is not required for redemption?
- It is rarely the case that a single context will totally exhaust the biblical material on any particular theme. It is the “sum” of the truth that counts (Psa. 119:160), not an isolated text, that may focus upon a limited point of emphasis.

There is not an example in the book of Acts of a “conversion” that does not either state explicitly, or at least imply, baptism in the conversion process. Even Acts 17:34, the term “believed” must embrace the rite when compared with other uses of the verb in the same document (cf. 16:34).

- It is a baptism of water (Acts 8:36; 10:47; with John 3:5).
- It is a baptism for the forgiveness of sins (or salvation, Acts 2:38, Mark 16:16).
- It is a baptism that marks the beginning of new life (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:11-12).

Once someone surrenders to believe what Saul of Tarsus did – that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah sent from Yahweh to fulfill every promise He made to Israel (defying the common expectations that Saul and other Jews had already formulated in their traditions); and One someone surrenders to repent as Saul of Tarsus did – that the sins of our own are the reason for which we must seek reconciliation with God through the good news He has supplied in Jesus Christ; then, one must surrender to the obedience of faith to “put on” the Lord or “clothed themselves with Christ” and in so doing “belong to Christ” and become “heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:27-29).