

CHAPTER 13

AN OVERVIEW OF HOW TO BE SAVED - THE FOUR STEPS WE NEED TO TAKE

¹Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ²instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

Hebrews 6:1-2 (NIV)

In the verses above, the writer to the Hebrews (probably apostle Paul in my view), sets out the six basic things we need to know. He refers to them as "*the elementary teachings about Christ*". He may have viewed them as elementary, i.e. basic, but in most churches today these six things are not widely known or taught.

The first four of the elementary or basic teachings have to do with what we need to do to become Christians. The fifth and sixth are about what lies ahead, i.e. resurrection and judgment. We shall look closely at these fifth and sixth points in later books in this series. For now I propose to focus on the first four points or steps. I intend to set out an overview of these in this chapter and then look at them separately, and in closer detail, in the next four chapters.

The four steps we need to take to become a Christian are:

- 1) repent
- 2) believe (or have faith)
- 3) be baptised in water
- 4) receive the Holy Spirit

We need to emphasise all four steps, not just one in particular

I have set out all four of these steps alongside each other, as a combined "*package*" just as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews does. Indeed, I believe that that is what the whole Bible does. All four steps are needed and they all belong together. If you look at particular verses in the Bible, one or another of these steps will be emphasised, depending on the context and on what the letter or book is focusing upon. However, we must not take any one of these steps in isolation and treat that particular one as if it was the only one, or even the most important one.

All four steps are important and they all need to be taken. If not, it's possible that we may not actually become a Christian at all. Or, even if we do, we may be missing something very important, which leaves us deficient or stunted. If so, we may not grow properly as a Christian, and will probably have various problems that we could have avoided if we had taken all four steps properly.

There are groups, though rare nowadays, who focus on repentance more than on the other three steps. Repentance is crucial, but it is still wrong to over-emphasise it and downplay the other steps. Repentance by itself is not enough.

Likewise, other groups focus excessively or exclusively on believing and elevate that to the central place. Some even allow believing (or faith) to take the place of some or all of the other steps. That's

wrong too. For example, believing without repenting is not enough. In fact, it's hard to see how you can truly say you do believe if you aren't also repenting. If you really believed, you would repent.

Alternatively, a small minority put an excessive and unbalanced emphasis on being baptised in water, as if that alone could save you. That said, there are far more people who do the opposite. They deny, or object to, the need for baptism in water at all. They say it doesn't matter or isn't essential. Some object to water baptism very strongly.

In particular, many believe that baptism is something that we can and should do to babies. But that is not biblical. The Bible never speaks of infant baptism, not even once. Yet, those who believe in it say that if a person was baptised as a baby then the job has been done and they therefore do not need to be baptised again when they are old enough to believe for themselves. Many get very uptight about this and will get angry if the need for baptism as a believer is even mentioned.

Lastly, there is the step of receiving the Holy Spirit, or being "*filled with*", or "*baptised in*", the Holy Spirit. This fourth step probably causes even more confusion and controversy than baptism in water. Some people get very tense and defensive about the baptism in the Holy Spirit. They are suspicious of those who believe that this step is needed.

Alternatively, others who do realise the importance of this fourth step, can get a superior and divisive attitude. Such people can tend to look down on those who do not understand what it means to be baptised in the Holy Spirit. They can then despise those who have not experienced that, or who are not sure whether they have.

So, my point is that many people only emphasise one or more of these steps and avoid, ignore or downplay the others. However, the Bible emphasises them all. It is, therefore, not open to us to pick and choose which of these four steps we wish to emphasise. We need to understand and take *all four* steps and *hold them all together in balance*. We have no valid reason, and no authority, to do otherwise.

Now let's look briefly at each of the four basic steps and seek to define them:

1) **REPENT**

This step means to realise and admit that you are sinful, selfish and wrong, that you have ignored, disobeyed and offended God and that you have rebelled against Him and what He stands for. It then means to turn away from those sins, to stop rebelling, and to go in the opposite direction. So, when we repent, it means that we accept that it is we who are wrong, not God or other people. We therefore accept that it is we who need to change, turn around, and get right with God.

You can never get right with God, or enter into a relationship with Him, unless you realise that you aren't right with Him at the moment. Until you grasp that basic point you can't get anywhere or be in the right place to take any of the other three steps.

So, repentance is a vital first step. It makes you capable of understanding and taking the other steps. A person who hasn't repented just isn't ready or able to go any further. Repentance is the vital platform or foundation upon which all the other steps rest. So, it's crucial and must not be missed out or made too little of. That is why the writer to the Hebrews refers to the "*foundation of repentance*".

It would be fair to say that repentance is primarily directed towards God the Father. It is mainly He whom we have offended and to whom our repentance needs to be made. It is His laws that we have broken and rebelled against, and His fatherhood over us that we have rejected. He is the one before

whom we stand condemned, and whose wrath we face, unless we are rescued from it. Please note that repentance is discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 14.

2) BELIEVE (OR HAVE FAITH)

Each of the other steps is, likewise, largely directed towards one in particular of the three members of the Trinity. As we have said, repentance is mainly directed towards God the Father. When we believe, however, it is Jesus Christ, (the Son of God and the Second Person of the Trinity) that we are mainly dealing with. Our belief, or faith, must primarily be in (or on) the Lord Jesus. We are to believe in who and what He is, and in what He did on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins.

This is not something merely mental or passive. It means we are to put our faith into action by trusting in Him and accepting His Lordship over us. That means to accept Him as your Saviour and rely solely on Him, and His death on the cross, to pay the penalty for your sin and to remove your guilt.

It also means accepting Him as your Lord and King and recognising your duty to follow and obey Him from now on. Otherwise, if you do not regard Him as Saviour, Lord and King, then how can you meaningfully say that you believe in Him? The Bible says He is all of those things.

Taking the second step, believing, also means realising who Jesus Christ really is. That involves understanding His immense status and the exalted position He occupies. He is the most important person in the whole world. It also means putting your whole trust in Him to save you, not trusting in yourself or in your own merit. This step, believing or having faith, is discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 15.

So, having repented towards God the Father, we must then believe in, have faith in, and put all our trust in, the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the second step and, for many people, that is as far as they ever go. But the Bible shows clearly that there is still more to do:

3) BE BAPTISED IN WATER

This third step is frequently viewed as controversial. People have strong views and get very sensitive about this. They generally do so because their own particular denomination has taken a stance about what water baptism (or "Christian baptism") involves, how it should be done, and when, and whether it is even needed at all.

In taking such stances, which are often held very passionately, people rarely get their views from the Bible itself. They tend to get them from their own traditions, or what their own denomination does and says.

I would urge you instead to try hard to make sure that you get your views on baptism directly from the Bible, not from what you have heard from others or have been used to. This is not easy to do. You will have to make yourself do it. Otherwise, your instincts and habits will cause you to follow whatever group you happen to belong to.

Therefore, take a good look at what the Bible actually says about baptism in water. Seek to do what the people in the New Testament did, nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else.

Resolve just to believe and do what you see clearly written in the Bible, not what you have seen demonstrated by those around you. Then most of the confusion and controversy will evaporate away.

It will then become much clearer what you need to do and how. Simply ask yourself "*What did they do in the New Testament, and how and when did they do it?*"

What you will find in the Bible is that as soon as a person had repented of their sins and put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, they were then *immediately baptised in water*. They did not wait until some later time when they had matured or passed an exam or reached any particular stage or age. They went straight ahead and got baptised in water. They saw it as a priority.

As for *what* they did, it was very simple; they went to a place nearby where there was water and submerged themselves in it fully. They went completely under the water and then rose up again. It was not done by sprinkling water on their heads. More importantly, it was not done to them as babies. They made the decision to do it themselves. And it was by full immersion under the water.

So, baptism in water was only for those who were old enough to know what they were doing. They were not necessarily adults; they could be children, but they were not babies. They had all repented and believed for themselves before being baptised in water. There is no trace of any infant baptism anywhere in the Bible.

In fact, there is no example recorded anywhere in the New Testament of any practice other than that which I have described above, i.e. full immersion under the water, of believers, who are old enough to decide for themselves. (See chapter 16 for a fuller analysis of baptism in water and why it matters.)

Therefore, we can say that baptism in water is the third step after we have repented and believed, and that it means being fully submerged under water. Baptism in water has a number of effects and meanings, and they all matter:

- a) baptism in water symbolises and tells the world about the fact that we have repented towards God.
- b) it also represents our choosing to 'die' to our own selfish aims, ambitions and desires. That means to abandon them or give them up. As we go down into the water it symbolises our death. We die to ourselves and to all that is worldly, carnal and selfish. We also turn away from what we have been doing so far, which is living for ourselves, with ourselves at the centre. We then resolve instead to live for, and follow, the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we are baptised in water we are effectively saying that the person we have been all our lives until this moment, is now dead. He is in the grave under the water. We identify ourselves with Jesus Christ in His death. It is as if the person that we have been until now has therefore died and been "*buried*" under the water and is no more.

We are therefore "*cut off*" from our old self. We are no longer under the power of our selfish nature as we have been. That "*old man*" we once were has died. Therefore he can no longer rule over us unless we choose to let him.

However, there is even more to it, and in a more positive sense. We are also cut off from the negative and sinful baggage of our past life. There is much that we leave behind in the water, or "*grave*", as we rise up. All of this is symbolic, of course. But, it is much more than just symbolic. Things really happen when we are baptised in water. We really are cut off from, and set free from, many evil and harmful things. These things would otherwise continue to plague us and hinder our growth as disciples if we were not baptised in water.

That is one reason why it is so sad that so many people are taught that they do not need to be baptised in water. Or they are told that it need not be done in the way it was in the first century, as shown in

the pages of the New Testament. People who are told that they don't need baptism in water are missing out on something very important that God wants us all to have and to benefit from.

Moreover, being baptised is also an issue of obedience, whatever view we take about the benefits it provides. In other words, *we are commanded to be baptised*. The Bible also clearly tells us *how* to do it. It is not open to us to say that baptism in water isn't necessary. Neither can we substitute another way of doing it instead of the biblical way, which is always, without exception, by full immersion in water.

Christian baptism is primarily directed towards Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity. We are to be baptised in His name, or *into* his name. That is why Christian baptism in water differs from the water baptism that John the Baptist practised. John's baptism was purely a baptism of *repentance*. Christian baptism in water means much more. It means we are identifying with Jesus in His death and resurrection and that we have unmistakably linked ourselves to Him publicly. Then everybody can see we are believing in Him and trusting only in Him.

That is why the demons hate and fear Christian baptism in water. They will always seek to discourage or obstruct you from taking this crucial step. The Devil knows how significant baptism is. He is behind a great deal of the confusion, defensiveness and hostility which are so common wherever baptism in water is discussed. Baptism in water is discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 16.

4) RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT, (ALSO KNOWN AS BEING "BAPTISED IN" OR "FILLED WITH" THE HOLY SPIRIT)

This is the fourth step. Obviously, this step primarily involves the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity. However, it also involves Jesus Christ, because it is He, Jesus Christ, who *"baptises"* us in the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is the one who *causes* us to *"receive"*, or *"be baptised in"*, or *"filled with"* the Holy Spirit. So, one of Jesus Christ's many roles is to be the one who baptises people in the Holy Spirit. Men do not do it. Jesus does it.

Like baptism in water, the subject of receiving the Holy Spirit or being baptised in the Holy Spirit, is a highly controversial and widely misunderstood area. People take up all sorts of aggressive, emotional and unthought-out positions. They tend to feel sure that their own denomination's view on this subject is obviously the right one. They also assume that their own experience, or lack of experience, represents what is normal, proper and correct. Few people ever question their own stance or seriously consider any other view.

However, whatever our own personal experience may, or may not be, that is not, and never can be, the basis for our theology. Our own experience must not be what we rely upon in arriving at an understanding of what it means to 'receive' the Holy Spirit.

Our beliefs and practices need to come solely from the Bible, not from what others say, or from what our own denomination teaches, or from what our own individual experiences have been. If we rely on any of those things we could arrive at an infinite number of different conclusions, all of which could be wrong.

So, we must look solely at what the Bible says and at what the disciples did in the first century. This is set out in the New Testament, in particular in the book of Acts and some of the letters. Let those be our guide and the only basis for our understanding.

This complex subject of receiving the Holy Spirit will be more fully explained in chapter 17. However, for the moment, the key point to make is that the practice in the New Testament period was

that when a person had repented, believed, and been baptised in water, they then took the fourth and final step. That was to receive the Holy Spirit.

My suggestion to you is that you and I are no different from the people in the first century. So, it follows that we need to do exactly the same as them. We therefore need to receive the Holy Spirit, i.e. be baptised in, or filled with, the Holy Spirit. We should not neglect to take this step.

This is not some personal idea of my own. Neither do I believe that I am over-emphasising or exaggerating what the Bible says about the importance of receiving the Holy Spirit. The Bible presents this fourth step as being crucially important. Moreover, it applied to everybody. This was not seen as something solely for the apostles, or only for certain special people.

Neither is there anything in the Bible to suggest that the baptism in the Holy Spirit was only for people of that era, i.e. those who lived in the first century. There is no reason, why we should suppose that. The Bible does not say it. That idea is a purely man-made one, with no biblical basis.

If receiving the Holy Spirit was only for the people of the first century, or only for people of certain types or roles, such as apostles, then why not likewise limit repentance, or believing, or baptism in water solely to such people? It would be equally logical, or illogical.

I will seek in chapter 17 to elaborate upon all of this. I will try to explain more fully what it means to receive the Holy Spirit, why it matters and how it ought to be done. For now I would aim only to bring this important point to your attention and to emphasise its importance. It is the fourth step that every believer needs to take if he is to get fully in line with the biblical way of becoming a Christian and to receive everything that God intends for us, without missing anything out.

Some general points about being saved

I now want to make a few further points about how a person comes to be "*saved*" or "*born again*" or "*converted*". I will also make some general points about salvation, and especially about the vital need for sincerity, i.e. genuineness. If we try to become a Christian insincerely, without really meaning it, and especially if our repentance isn't real, then nothing will happen. We will remain unsaved, no matter what words we may have said.

It would all be meaningless ritual and would have no effect. Christianity is not about formulas or forms or words with some magical powers in themselves. Far from it. These steps are to be taken only by those who *really mean it* and are *genuine*.

Having made that very serious point, I also need to say, on the other hand, that forgiveness and salvation are freely available to everybody. Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, not His own, because He had no sin. Therefore salvation is available to anyone who wants it, if they will meet God's simple conditions. Jesus died once and it was on behalf of us all. No one is excluded from the offer of salvation. Let's look at some passages which emphasise that fact:

Salvation is available to everybody. Nobody is excluded or disqualified.

³*This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, ⁴who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*
1 Timothy 2:3-4 (NIV)

²¹*'And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'*
Acts 2:21 (NASB)

“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.” ***1 Peter 3:18 (NIV)***

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” ***John 3:16 (NIV)***

But not everybody will actually be saved

So, we know that Jesus’ death on the cross was capable of paying the price for the sin of every person, even though there are billions of us. There are no limitations on Jesus Christ. He has an infinite capacity to take all our punishment upon Himself. However, some people have taken this to mean that therefore everyone will actually be saved, regardless of what they do or believe. Sadly, there is no basis for that assumption in the Bible.

Although Jesus is capable of bearing the sin of everyone who comes to Him, not everyone will actually *choose* to benefit from what He did on the cross. It is reserved for those who meet His very simple (but not easy) conditions. The first two essential foundations, which many people fail to put in place, are to repent and believe:

⁹That 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. ¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” ¹²For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ***Romans 10:9-13 (NIV)***

We do not need to be clever or impressive to believe in Jesus. The simplest and most lowly person can manage it easily. Yet, the high and the mighty, the rich and the powerful, the proud and the self-sufficient, find it very difficult. It is especially hard for those who consider themselves to be intellectual. They are often put off by the very simplicity of the gospel.

The idea that by believing in Jesus we can receive forgiveness and salvation seems too easy. Many of us therefore assume there must be more to it and that we have to achieve something or reach some high standard. The answer is no - we don't!

God deliberately chose to make belief or faith the key to salvation, rather than ability or achievement. That way salvation would be possible for, and available to, everybody. The poor and simple, the uneducated and downtrodden, can easily grasp and respond to this.

Those of us whose lives are more privileged therefore need to humble ourselves and get in line with what God requires by putting our trust in Jesus alone to save us. It is a life or death matter. Listen to what Jesus Himself said:

I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.” ***John 8:24 (NIV)***

The above verse seems a harsh one. Yet, take note that it was said by Jesus personally. If we do not believe in Him and put our trust in Him then we will die in our sins! That means that when we die we will still be carrying the full burden and guilt of our sins. If so, we will need to pay the eternal penalty for them ourselves at the Day of Judgment. Yet, if we do believe in Him, then our sins are forgiven

and the burden of guilt is removed from us. If so, then we have so much to look forward to for all eternity:

⁹However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" *1 Corinthians 2:9 (NIV)*

So, that is a picture of how much God loves us. However the experience of knowing God's love is available only to those who believe in Jesus Christ. We will not all be saved. We will not all go to Heaven.

The majority of people will not be saved

God has laid down very clear conditions for us receiving His forgiveness and salvation. The benefit of what Jesus did on the cross is available to all of us, but only provided we meet His conditions. Thus we can rule out any suggestion of “*universalism*”. That is the false idea that everyone will be saved. In fact the Bible tells us that only a minority of people will be saved. And it would seem to be a small minority:

¹³Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. *Matthew 7:13-14 (NIV)*

Many people are going to fail or refuse to become real Christians. Given the terrible consequences that that will produce for them, we now need to look very closely at what God's conditions are and how we can make sure we meet them properly.

God's conditions in more detail - repent, believe, be baptised in water and receive the Holy Spirit

When we take these steps and genuinely mean it, then we are born again and we receive eternal life. The Holy Spirit Himself comes to live within us, such that He can then be our guide, helper and comforter. He will assist us and empower us from then on to live the Christian life as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit comes to live in us because there is no way that we can successfully carry on the Christian life in our own strength or virtue. That is because we do not have enough strength and we do not have any real virtue in ourselves.

But are you genuine and sincere or are you shallow and phoney?

Only we can tell whether we ourselves are genuine and sincere. Nobody else knows the true motives of our hearts. But, if we are sincere, then it is possible for us to have assurance of our own salvation. That means that you can know that Jesus has paid the penalty for your sins, that God has forgiven you, that the Holy Spirit has come to live in you and that you have eternal life. This is clearly expressed in this passage:

¹¹ And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. *1 John 5:11-13 (NIV)*

That is a strong statement and there are others like it in the Bible. However, I cannot tell you whether your repentance and belief/faith are genuine. You must decide that. But be careful, because there are many people who complacently assume they have eternal life but have, in fact, only made a false or shallow repentance. Perhaps there was no real repentance at all.

Or they may have just casually announced that they believe in Jesus Christ, but without any clear understanding or heartfelt conviction about it. Many such lukewarm, casual people are in our churches today. They struggle with the Christian life and often fizzle out and fall away, because they have never been born again to begin with.

Often the problem is that Church leaders reassure such people too easily. They hastily tell people that they are saved and can be sure of it when, in fact, they aren't yet saved. That's why I am very wary of ever telling anybody else that they are a genuine believer. I have done that in the past, only to see such people fall away badly later on and give up on their faith completely.

There are many people in churches today who are only nominally Christian. They may be church members or churchgoers but it could just be for social reasons, e.g. to make friends, or because they have an interest in the culture, music, liturgy, or trappings of church life.

I have found that such people can be the hardest to talk to about the real gospel. They assume that because they go to church they are obviously already Christians and don't need to do or believe anything extra or different. They can be highly offended by the suggestion that what they have may not be enough.

I therefore wish to emphasise as much as possible the need for earnestness and sincerity in taking each of these steps. God knows what the real attitude of your heart is. You can't deceive Him. He knows whether you mean what you are saying. If you merely *say* these things and don't *mean* them, then it will count for nothing. In fact it would only be an insult to God.

If however you sincerely mean what you say and take the steps with a genuine desire to become a real Christian, then you will be saved. You can have complete assurance of that fact, not because I say so, but because the Bible says so. (See chapter 21 for more detail on assurance of salvation.)

Above all, ensure that you are sincere and serious and that you really mean what you say. God is eager to be found by those who are genuinely seeking Him:

***¹³You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.
Jeremiah 29:13 (NASB)***