

2. The Master's Instructions about the Gospel

2.3 How should we respond to it? (Acts 2:1-47)

The first sermon ever preached in the history of the Christian church concludes with an invitation for people to respond to what God has done. God has reached out his hand to mankind and said: 'If you will come to me this way I can accept you.' Take a moment to read Acts 2:36-41. The key is verse 38 in which Peter says we should respond to the good news in three ways.

Repent

This literally means to change your mind, to change your purpose and to change what you do. It involves both a turning away from sin and a turning towards God. God and sin do not go together. He is holy (Isaiah 6:3) and we are sinful (Romans 3:23). When we choose to turn from sin we show we truly know God. This repentance is an act of our free will.

When a soccer player is to move from one club to another, the managers will settle the fee and fix terms and dates. However, it is up to the player finally to decide which colour shirt he likes playing in. Likewise, it is up to us to choose to repent and turn to God.

The need to repent was preached without apology by the early church (Acts 3:19; 8:22; 17:30-31; 26:20). It is repentance that brings about forgiveness of sins. Repentance itself is obedience to a command of God. True repentance is shown by a complete change of life.

Be baptized

This word literally means 'to dip' or 'to immerse'. It used to refer to the dyeing of a garment by plunging it into a liquid dye. Jesus himself commanded his followers to show that they were his followers by observing this simple ceremony (Matthew 28:19-20).

Baptism does not save anyone from sin. It is only Jesus Christ who can do that. But it does show to others that the person being baptized has decided to follow Jesus Christ in his life, leaving the world's way behind. The early church practised believes' baptism (Acts 8:36-38, 9:18; 10:47-48, 16:31-33). Believers' baptism in water is a *public confession* of a

personal commitment. The truth of the witness of baptism is shown by a complete change of life.

Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit

Frequently people say to me: 'I can't become a real Christian because I couldn't keep it up.' God knows that's true - without his help. But he does not expect you to keep it up on your own. He gives his Holy Spirit to all believers and the Holy Spirit gives spiritual life. God wants every Christian to learn to live a Christian life in the fullness of the Holy Spirit's power. He will not *force* you to do anything - he respects your free will - but he wants you to know, by faith, his fullness in your life.

We trust God that our sins are forgiven. We trust him to make us sensitive to sin in our lives. We trust him to make us more like Jesus Christ. We trust him to give us the Holy Spirit as we ask him to fill our lives (Luke 11:13).

It is one thing to know in your head that Jesus Christ is the Saviour - it is quite another thing to know this in your heart. May I ask where you stand before God? Are you lost or are you saved? Are you spiritually dead towards God or are you alive in him? Are you ruined by sin or have you been restored in Jesus Christ?

Pray this prayer right where you are in all honesty and sincerity and you will receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

'Father God, I admit my sinfulness before you; I believe you sent Jesus Christ to be my Saviour; I choose to leave my old life of sin and learn the new Christian life. I desire the fullness of God's Holy Spirit to enable me. Accept me, break me, cleanse me and disciple me, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ my Saviour and Lord, Amen.'

Discussion guide on 'the Gospel, how should we respond to it?'

Read Acts 2:36-47.

1. Since God has provided Himself a substitute for us in facing His own judgement on sin, verse 36, how should we respond to God?
2. What does it mean "they were cut to the heart", verse 37?

3. Discuss the difference between *repentance* in the Bible and a person merely *feeling sorry* over something.
4. The importance of repentance is seen in the preaching of the early Christians. See Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30-31; 26:20. What do you understand by Paul's testimony, "*I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds*", Acts 26:20? Is this still good preaching (and witnessing) today? Why?
5. The importance of believers' baptism is also seen in the early church, see Acts 2:41; 8:36-39; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:31-34. What is a person showing and saying to those who witness his or her baptism?
6. "Baptism does not save anyone from sin". Discuss this statement. What is the purpose of baptism if this statement is true?
7. Peter preached, "*Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*", Acts 2:38. Why was the Holy Spirit important to Peter's listeners? Is the same true for new believers today? Why?
8. In Acts 1:8 Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will give "power for witnessing". Discuss what this means for you today.