

THE FOUNDATION OF TRUE CONVERSION

“Laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed.” (1 Timothy 6:19)

God has laid down a pattern for the beginning of the Christian life. It is THE ONLY FOUNDATION upon which a life of faith in Christ *must* be built.

On the Day of Pentecost, a multitude of confused Israelites listened to Peter’s message and were convicted of their desperate need, and cried, “What shall we do?” Peter gave these, who had previously rejected Jesus, this foundation for beginning the Christian life:

“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit... For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to *Him*” (Acts 2:38, 39).

“What shall we do?”

(1) “Repent”

(2) “Be baptized”

(3) “Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

God’s plan. Heaven’s pattern. THE ONLY FOUNDATION. And if the Bible teaches that these three experiences are commanded as THE ONLY FOUNDATION upon which we should start to build our Christian life, then we may expect to find this same foundation right through the New Testament. This is exactly what we *do* find.

Some teach that if one experiences the first two steps of the foundation, repentance and water baptism, one will automatically have the third, the gift of the Holy Spirit. The only problem with this theory is that we don’t find it in the Bible. Also, vital Christian experience points the other way!

Let us look at THE ONLY FOUNDATION as it is evidenced in the Lord Jesus and His followers in New Testament times.

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

1. **“Repent”** – When sinful man repents of his sins, and puts his trust in the power of the blood of Jesus to wash the stain of sin away, the Holy Spirit does a miracle in his heart, and he is born into the family of God. *This* is called being “born again” (or “born from above”) and “born of the Spirit.”

Jesus Christ the Son of God never needed to repent. He was sinless. He was born of the Spirit from His mother’s womb, for He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18).

2. **“Be baptized”** – Then, before starting His active work, He took the next step in laying THE ONLY FOUNDATION He was baptized in water. The Bible record reads: “Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan (River) to be baptized by him (John). John would have prevented him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he consented. *And ... Jesus was baptized*” (Matthew 3:13-16). May all who trust Jesus today see their need to fulfill all righteousness, and follow their Lord through the waters of baptism.

3. **“Receive the Holy Spirit”** -After baptizing Him in water, John saw the Lord Jesus Christ receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is written: “And when Jesus was baptized, He went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on Him” (Matthew 3:16). In that river “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10:38), so that He might demonstrate to the world the love and power of God.

THE TWELVE DISCIPLES

1. **“Repent”** – The twelve disciples of Jesus lived in a unique age. While they still lived in the Old Testament age, He Who was about to shed His blood of the New Testament, the Lord Jesus, had called them to Himself.

Nevertheless, from the beginning these twelve men were confronted with the call to repentance. John the Baptist’s first recorded word is “Repent” (Matthew 3:2). The first sermon of the Lord Jesus began with “Repent” (Matthew 4:17). So they could never have followed their Master without facing up to the command to repent.

2. **“Be baptized”** -The twelve disciples of Jesus were from the beginning baptizing in water those who became His followers (John 4:1, 2), and at least Andrew and Peter among the twelve had been disciples of John the Baptist (John 1:35). We can be well assured that these first messengers of Christ were themselves obedient to His command to be baptized.

3. **“Receive the Holy Spirit”**- On the Day of Pentecost – the birthday of the Christian Church – the waiting disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). Those who were to teach others THE ONLY FOUNDATION experienced *it*, even as their Lord had done. So must all who would be His disciples today.

How then, did the disciples do miracles and cast out devils *before* they received the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? Jesus gives the answer in John 14:17: “The Spirit...dwelleth *with* you, and shall be *in you*.”

As the Spirit of the Lord “came upon” the mighty men and women in the Old Testament days, so He was with the disciples before the Day of Pentecost. It may be pointed out here, the early disciples had more *before* the Day of Pentecost, than most have today *after* the Day of Pentecost! Yet they were instructed *not* to commence proclaiming the Gospel “*until* you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). *Only* after they received the gift of the Holy Spirit did they take the message of salvation through Christ to a lost and dying world.

THE BELIEVERS AT SAMARIA

1. **“Repent”** – In Acts 8:5-25 we see God’s perfect pattern fulfilled again, as THE ONLY FOUNDATION is built in the lives of the new Christians at Samaria. As Philip preached Christ in His saving and healing power in that city, the people “gave heed” to the Word of God, “when they heard him, and saw the signs which he did.” The Bible says that “much joy” was in the city. The people repented of their sins, and “believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.”

2. **“Be baptized”** – Showing simple obedience to the command of the Lord to “be baptized,” the new believers “were baptized, both men and women” (verse 12).

3. “Receive the Holy Spirit” – It comes as a shock. It challenges our experience. It upsets our doctrine. The disturbing fact is’ this: the believers at Samaria had placed their faith in Christ, they had been baptized in water, and the joy of salvation filled their whole city – but “as yet He (the Holy Spirit) was fallen upon NONE of them” (Acts 8:16- King James Version).

In other words, the foundation of the Samaritan believers’ experience was not complete. And this greatly concerned the apostles at Jerusalem. So despite danger to their lives in traveling from Jerusalem to Samaria, “they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.... Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:14,15,17).

Again we see THE ONLY FOUNDATION properly laid in the lives of new believers, to enable them to become holy temples of God, filled with His Spirit.

THE APOSTLE PAUL

1. “Repent” – Saul of Tarsus, later known as the apostle Paul, repented from sin and was converted to Christ while traveling to Damascus to imprison and persecute the Christians there (Acts 9). On the way he saw a blinding light, brighter than the midday sun. He fell to the ground. He heard the voice of the Lord Jesus. And he who had been filled with murderous hate against Christians called Jesus “Lord.” He had surely repented, the Spirit of God changing his heart, for he later wrote, “No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor.12:3).

2. “Be baptized” – On a later occasion, while telling how he first met Christ, Paul was careful to mention that the Lord, through Ananias (Acts 9:10-19) exhorted him: “And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His Name” (Acts 22:16). “Then he arose and was baptized” (Acts 9:18).

3. “Receive the Holy Spirit”- Three days *after* his Damascus Road experience, Paul also received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Lord had instructed Ananias, in a vision, to go to him. Accordingly: “Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him (Paul), he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 9:17).

As a result of this experience, Paul was able in later years to speak of “what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15: 18, 19).

CORNELIUS AND HIS COMPANY

1. **“Repent”** – Cornelius, a God-fearing soldier, was directed by a vision to call the Apostle Peter to his home to preach the Word of God. The story of how he and his household received three definite experiences to commence their Christian lives is told in Acts 10.

A devout and sincere *man*, Cornelius worshipped and prayed continually to God. Yet, just like so many devout and sincere people today’ he was not saved (see Acts 11:14). Only when Cornelius and his company heard the Apostle Peter teaching the Gospel did they repent of their sins, and trust the Lord Jesus Christ to save them. Then the Lord “cleansed their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:7, 9).

2. **“Be baptized”** – These people repented of their sins, and while Peter was still preaching, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, even before they were baptized in water. However, Peter immediately “commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:48). On this occasion, the three experiences of THE ONLY FOUNDATION did not change – only the order in which they were received.

It is possible to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit before you follow the Lord through the waters of baptism. Indeed, it is possible to repent from sin and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit almost simultaneously. However, note carefully that the Bible teaches repentance from sin together with the miracle of being born into the family of God and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, are two separate operations of the Spirit of God. While it is possible to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit before water baptism, the Bible clearly teaches it is *not* possible to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit *before* you have repented.

3. **“Receive the Holy Spirit”** – The Bible says that while Peter was still preaching: “the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God “(Acts 10:44-46).

When Peter told the Jewish Christians at Jerusalem about the outpouring of the Spirit in the house of Cornelius, he gave this testimony:

“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’ “(Acts 11:15,16).

THE ONLY FOUNDATION does not change... “The firm foundation laid by God stands, sure and unshaken” (2 Timothy 2:19 – Amplified Bible).

THE DISCIPLES AT EPHEBUS

1. **“Repent”** – In Acts 19:1 we read that the Apostle Paul “found some disciples.” In the New Testament, when the word “disciple” is used for any except those who are true followers of Jesus Christ, it is specifically stated (for example, the disciples of John). It is safe to conclude then, that these disciples at Ephesus were followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as such had repented of their sins, and been cleansed by the power of His blood.

Further proof of this is found in Acts 18:24-28. Here we read on Apollos, who went to Ephesus. The Bible says Apollos “had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John” (verse 25). Apollos instructed them about Jesus, and Paul took them on to the second and third steps in THE ONLY FOUNDATION.

2. **“Be baptized”** – Taking the second step, “they were baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5).

3. **“Receive the Holy Spirit”** – At the same time, Paul challenged these disciples with the very question that pricks many of our hearts today: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (verse 2) “And when Paul had laid hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19:6).

If all Christians automatically receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, then why should the apostle Paul have asked believers this question? We clearly see from this that one may be a disciple of Jesus’ without having entered into possession of the Holy Spirit as God’s gift

to believers. Now- see how Paul led the Ephesian believers to take the essential third step:

When later writing to these Christians at Ephesus, Paul again pointed out the distinction between their repentance and believing in Christ as their Savior, and their receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit: “Christ, in Whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation; in Whom also *after* that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13 – King James Version).

These examples prove conclusively God’s plan for THE ONLY FOUNDATION is the same for Jews, Samaritans, Romans, and Greeks who had had their lives built on this foundation. Insofar as He was permitted by His sinlessness, so did the Lord Jesus Christ. The first and only foundation upon which a complete Christian life can be built stands sure.

HAS THE ONLY FOUNDATION CHANGED?

“Repent”, “Be baptized”, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” We have seen that in the Bible God’s plan for THE ONLY FOUNDATION for a Christian life never changes.

Neither has God Himself changed. He says, “I the Lord do not change” (Malachi 3:6). He Who commanded all men everywhere to “Repent,” “Be baptized,” and “Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” in Bible days has never altered His pattern, and He still commands all men everywhere to build their lives on this same firm foundation. The three experiences of THE ONLY FOUNDATION are definitely for all of us today, no matter who we are. For the very next verse after the commandment to “Repent,” “Be baptized,” and “Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” says: “The promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to Him” (Acts 2:39)

Though far off in time from the day the command and promise were given, if you are called to God at all, you are also called to build your life on THE ONLY FOUNDATION.

TRADITION OR THE ONLY FOUNDATION

Tragedy has overtaken certain sections of the Church. Some of the foundation has been removed! In some places, all of the foundation has been destroyed! For THE ONLY FOUNDATION, which God has commanded, the traditions of men have been substituted.

The religious leaders of Jesus' time had also substituted the traditions of men for the commandments of God. Jesus asked them this pointed question "Why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" (Matthew 15:3).

Please note that Jesus clearly stated it to be transgression (*sin*) to follow the traditions of men instead of obeying the commandment of God. Jesus went on to warn us:

"So for the sake of your tradition (the rules handed down by your forefathers), you have set aside the Word of God – depriving it of force and authority and making it of no effect. You pretenders – hypocrites! Admirably and truly did Isaiah prophesy of you when he said: 'This people draw near Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their heart holds off and is far away from Me; uselessly do they worship Me, for they teach as doctrines the commands of men' "(Matthew 15:6-9 – Amplified Bible).

Could anything be clearer? If any man – be he bishop, priest, or pastor – teaches the traditions of men instead of the commandments of God, he must be putting the Word of God to one side. Historically the results of doing this have been serious indeed! Countless numbers of sincere people have been deceived, and robbed of precious blessings purchased for them by Jesus Christ on the Cross.

Again the Lord Jesus said to the religious people of His day: "You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men" (Mark 7:8).

Many are doing the same today. Dear friend, what about you? What will you do? Leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men? Or will you leave the tradition of men, and hold fast the commandment of God? Today you must make your choice.

"Repent," "Be baptized," "Receive the Holy Spirit." This is the commandment of God. This is God's plan for THE ONLY FOUNDATION upon which a proper Christian life can be built.