

What Happens After Death?

Lesson 4:

Be Ready



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

What Happens After Death Lesson

4: Be Ready!

Learn the need to be ready for what will happen after death and how to be ready for these things

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

Study Number: DGW78

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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What Happens After Death?

Lesson 4:

Be Ready!

What happens after death? Consider some of what we have established up to this point in our study. (1) Mankind possesses a soul that survives physical death. That is, this soul will live on after we experience physical death. (2) Physical death is a certainty. Though you don't know when your physical death will take place, you can be assured that you will die. (3) Hades is the realm of the dead. It is the place where those who have died are today and it is where you will be if you die prior to the return of Jesus Christ. This Hadean realm consists of a part of comfort and a part of torment. (4) Jesus Christ will return. His return is still in the future and we do not know when this Day will come. When He comes, everyone (both living and dead) will be involved and this world will be destroyed. (5) You will be judged by God. God will judge the world by Jesus Christ when He returns, according to the things that are written in the Bible (God's word). (6) You will spend eternity in Heaven or in Hell. Where you spend your eternity will be revealed on the Day of Judgment. Heaven will be a place of tremendous comfort and joy in the presence of God. Hell will be an unimaginable place of torment and punishment away from God's presence.

This is what the Bible teaches about death and what will happen after death. Certainly, though, these are not just facts for us to understand. Instead, these are pressing realities that require great reflection and application. You *will* experience these things (as we have discussed). You will not escape physical death, the return of Christ, the Judgment, and eternity! Therefore, you need to be ready for

these things so that you will spend eternity in Heaven.

Think about it for a moment. We want to be ready for all other major events in our lives. It is called being "prepared." Being prepared means that we exercise foresight to anticipate things that are probable or impending in order to take necessary precautions or make necessary arrangements.

Consider a few examples. (1) Retirement. We want to be prepared for retirement because we recognize that there is a time coming in our lives when we will either be unable to work or will choose not to work. Therefore, in order to be prepared for this time, we go to great lengths to store up money for the future. (2) New child. Those who are expecting a new child desire to be prepared for their child's birth because they recognize that there are certain things they want to have in place for when the child is born. Therefore, in order to be prepared for this time, parents go to great lengths to prepare the necessary clothing, diapers, the baby's room, make arrangements for traveling, etc. (3) Safety in a storm. Preparedness is stressed prior to an expected storm because taking the proper steps to be prepared for a natural disaster can save lives. Therefore, in order to be prepared for a storm, many people will gather non-perishable food items and water, find the proper shelter from the storm, prepare a piece of property (i.e. boarding up windows), etc.

I'm sure we could think of an even greater number of examples about how we think about preparedness than these! But, why is it that these sorts of preparations are often seen as being so pressing, while preparing the soul for the things that await after death are put off (even though they could happen at any moment – even today)? It is likely due to being carnally minded. That is, we *see* the sorts of things that we have just talked about. We are constantly reminded of them and understand them from a physical perspective. However, since the soul is unseen and we have never (yet) experienced physical death and the things that come after death, they often do not seem real or serious to us.

Our challenge, therefore, is to live with a focus on the life that is to come rather than focusing on the life here on this earth. Constantly put yourself

in remembrance of the things that are going to happen at death – and beyond! That’s why Solomon (one of the wisest men to ever live) said that it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting in Ecclesiastes 7:2. We might phrase it this way: It is better to go a funeral than to a party. Why is that? Solomon says it is because it will remind the living that this is what will happen to them all some day! Therefore, we need to be very diligent to observe these reminders of death and take them to heart, knowing that it will happen to each one of us some day – and we need to be ready!

The purpose of this fourth (and final) lesson in the study, “What Happens After Death?,” is to encourage you to recognize the truths we have established through this study and help you understand and determine to do what God says you need to do in order to be ready.

Few Will Be Ready

You have heard the warnings God has given throughout the pages of Scripture about death and what happens after death – as well as the wonderful blessings He has prepared for those who do His will. However, regardless of all the information God has given and the warnings He has offered, few will actually be ready.

Jesus taught that few will be saved

Look at Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:13-14: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

This passage highlights the two options folks have in life regarding how they will live. The broad way is the way of the world. It is the way of living to please your own desires rather than God’s desires. The narrow way is the way of God. It is the way of living to please God rather than your own desires.

This passage also highlights the simple fact of the matter that most will walk on the broad way.

The broad way is the easy way. It is the path we will walk on whenever we follow our own earthly desires. It is the path that does not require self-discipline or determination. However, the narrow way is difficult. It takes great effort, focus, and determination. It is the path that involves great self-denial and dedication to God. Very few people, therefore, will choose this path.

Finally, this passage highlights the end of both roads (where they lead). The broad way (the easy way) is said to lead to eternal destruction. This path leads to the place of eternal punishment we studied about in lesson 3 (Hell). This is the place of punishment that burns with fire and brimstone (as described in Revelation 21:8). However, the narrow way (the difficult way) is said to lead to eternal life. This path leads to the place of everlasting joy and comfort we also studied about in lesson 3 (Heaven). This is the place that is described in Revelation 21:1-22:5 and the same place God dwells.

This means that few will be prepared!

Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:13-14 simply helps us to understand that the number of people who will be prepared for their earthly lives to end will be quite small (in comparison to the number who have lived on earth).

Most people will choose to live life for themselves. Most will put their focus on the things of this earth and fail to live their lives completely dedicated to God. They will be focused on achieving earthly measures of “success.” They will be focused on accumulating the riches of this world. They will be focused on experiencing the pleasures this life offers them. They will be focused on the hustle-and-bustle of this life. They will be focused on the daily things that pertain to this life.

And, even many who are “religious” (even professing “Christians”) will be lost eternally in Hell because they will not completely dedicate themselves to the Lord. Shortly after Jesus taught that few will be saved (Matthew 7:13-14), He said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in

Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:21-23). Therefore, many of these individuals will die believing that they were “Christians” and (perhaps) while they were even living morally good lives (in comparison to the world). However, these individuals will have failed to be obedient to God and fully dedicate their lives to Him – practicing a *form* of (so-called) “Christianity,” but not practicing true, New Testament Christianity.

Few people will live their lives in a way that will result in being prepared for eternity. But, this is nothing new. Throughout the Bible, you should notice that there were few who listened to God and heeded His warnings! For instance, few people listened to and heeded God’s warnings in the time leading up to the flood that covered the earth (only Noah and his family listened – eight souls in total). Few people listened to God’s law among the nation of Israel and heeded His warnings about disobedience.

Nothing has changed. Few will listen to God’s law today and heed His warnings about disobedience! Most will not want to live their lives according to His standards. Most will be too occupied by the things of life to think about the things that will happen after death. Many will not even want to recognize the things we have discussed in this study as being true! However, a few will give their lives to live according to God’s standard in preparation for the things we have been studying about.

The Importance Of Being Ready

Few will be ready. But, why should you even desire to be among the few who will be ready? Hopefully you have a good understanding of these things by this point in our study. However, let’s spend some time underscoring the importance of

being ready – before we talk about how you can be ready.

Because of the things we’ve established

Why do you need to be ready? Think back over everything we have discussed in this study. It is all applicable to your need to be ready. Consider the points we’ve established again – with a focus on how they apply to your need to be prepared.

(1) You have a soul that will survive your physical death. There is a part of your existence (the spiritual part) that will continue to exist *somewhere* after your life on earth is over. (2) You will die. Your earthly life will come to an end (and it won’t last very long). (3) If you die before the return of Jesus Christ, your soul will be taken to Hades. In Hades, you will either go to a place of torment or comfort, depending on how you have lived your life on this earth. (4) You will take part in Jesus’ return. Whether you are alive on this earth or you have already died, you will be involved in Jesus’ return. (5) You will be judged by God (through Christ) according to the things written in the Bible (God’s word). Your life will be evaluated as to whether you have been obedient to God’s instructions or not. (6) You will either spend eternity in Heaven or in Hell. Where you will spend your eternity will be determined in Judgment, according to how you have lived your earthly life compared to the teachings of God’s word.

These things that we have been discussing throughout this study are very serious and have eternal implications! Therefore, every one of these points needs to be seriously considered and preparations need to be made accordingly.

Because Jesus tells you to be ready

Why do you need to be ready? Jesus Christ, who possesses perfect knowledge, tells you that you need to be ready! Particularly, in Matthew 24:36 through chapter 25, Jesus taught concerning His return, the Judgment, and eternity. And, as He teaches concerning these things, He tells us about our need to be prepared for them!

(1) Matthew 24:36-44. In verse 36, Jesus says that no one knows the “day and hour” of His return (not even the angels of heaven), only the Father

knows. Then, He compares how His return will be similar to the days of Noah. He says that most people were conducting their lives as usual when the flood came to destroy the world of those who were unprepared. Likewise, Jesus' coming will be at a time when most people are focused on their own earthly lives and have made no preparations for His return, though there will be few prepared. In verses 42-44, Jesus says, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

(2) Matthew 24:45-51. In this passage, Jesus compares His return to the return of a master. He talks of a master who set his servant as ruler of his household. Then, he compares the servant who will be prepared for the master's return and will be found doing the master's will with the servant who was unprepared for the master's return and is found neglecting his given responsibilities. Jesus says that the servant who is "faithful and wise" and found doing what the master desires will be blessed. However, the evil servant who sees that his master is delayed and is found unprepared for the master's return will be punished. This illustration is used to identify the fact that some will be caught unprepared for Jesus' return and they will be punished to the place where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (verse 51).

(3) Matthew 25:1-13. Jesus goes on in this passage to teach a parable about being prepared. The setting is given as ten virgins who are waiting for the bridegroom to come and marry his bride. Five of these virgins are said to have been wise (having taken oil for their lamps) and five of them are identified as being foolish (not having brought oil for their lamps). And, while the bridegroom delayed, "they all slumbered and slept" (verse 5). Then, at midnight, the bridegroom was announced as coming – and the five virgins who were unprepared were forced to go at that time to buy oil for their lamps. However, while they were gone, the bridegroom came and took the five wise and prepared virgins with him to the wedding – and the door to the wedding was shut.

When the five foolish virgins returned, they pleaded for entrance to the wedding, but it was not granted to them. Then, in verse 13, Jesus demonstrates how that His point in this parable is for people to be ready for His return: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

(4) Matthew 25:14-30. After the parable about the ten virgins, Jesus teaches another parable that indicates the need to be ready. In this parable, Jesus teaches concerning three individuals who were given a certain amount of their master's possessions (i.e. talents). Note that a talent was a particular weight of gold or silver. One man was entrusted with five talents, another two talents, and another one talent – each one according to his ability. Then, after a long time, the master returned and "settled accounts with them" (verse 19). He required each servant to present him with what he had done with the amount he had been given. The "five talent man" had gained five additional talents. The "two talent man" had gained two additional talents. However, the "one talent man" had hidden his talent in the ground and had failed to make any gain. The five and two talent men were rewarded for the good way they managed the master's possessions. However, the one talent man was punished because of the way he had wasted the master's possession. Likewise, Jesus' point in the parable is that we have each been entrusted with certain things (i.e. our health, time, abilities, opportunities, relationships, etc.) and we must use them during our earthly lives in His service. If we faithfully serve Him, He will reward us when He returns. However, if we waste our lives by not faithfully serving Him, He will punish us when He returns.

Think about it! Jesus knows what is going to happen when your life is over. He knows about Hades and He knows about Heaven and Hell! Therefore, if Jesus warns you to be ready (as we have seen demonstrated), shouldn't you heed His warning? He knows how bad the punishment will be for those who have failed to obey Him. He knows how great the reward will be for those who have faithfully served Him. He knows both of these so well that He willingly left Heaven to come to earth

and die so that you could be saved from the punishment of Hell and spend eternity in Heaven!

Because all earthly things will perish

Why do you need to be ready? You need to be ready because of the implications from the things we studied about what will happen to everything on this earth. Recall how that we have studied about your own earthly life coming to an end and about this world being destroyed when Jesus returns. Why does it matter that everything on earth will be destroyed? Because that's what so many people live their lives for! So, the fact that these things are only temporary ought to serve as a wakeup call!

(1) 2 Peter 3:7, 10, 12. Verse 7 says that this world is “reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” – when it will be destroyed by this fire. This is demonstrated in verse 10 when Peter says that “the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” whenever Jesus returns. Then, verse 12 continues to demonstrate that “the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat” at this time. So, when Christ returns, everything left on this earth will be burned up! Therefore, your earthly body (if there's anything left of it by that time), the money, the houses, the sources of earthly pleasure, etc. will all be burned up whenever Christ returns!

(2) Matthew 6:19-21. In this text, Jesus warns against storing up treasures on this earth. He demonstrates that earthly treasures are only temporary. He says that moths and rust can destroy them. He says that thieves can steal them away. However, treasures stored up in Heaven are not temporary. They are eternal – not subject to destruction, decay, or being stolen. Therefore, you must realize that anything you value on this earth is only temporary! You can put all of your focus on fulfilling your earthly desires (storing up earthly treasures) or you can put all of your focus on doing God's will (storing up Heavenly treasures). You have this choice – but only one will be worthwhile and will be beneficial to you spiritually!

(3) Luke 12:13-21. Here is a passage that demonstrates the previous point. First, Jesus warns that life is not about the things you possess (verse 15). Essentially, Jesus says that life on this earth is really not about life on this earth – it is about making preparations for the life that is yet to come! Then, Jesus tells a parable about an individual who made all sorts of preparations for his earthly wealth, pleasure, and comfort. But, He left God out of his planning. When his life was over, his soul was unprepared – and his earthly treasures (which he had worked so hard to accumulate and prepare) would simply be given to someone else! They would not benefit him at all now that his earthly life was over. Jesus says that this story is a warning to everyone who is living – who is laying up treasure upon the earth and is not rich toward God!

No matter how valuable some earthly treasure is to you during your earthly life, you need to realize that it is only temporary! At best it will last you the whole time you live on this earth. Instead of finding yourself bankrupt after your earthly life ends, you need to make a spiritual investment of yourself to store up treasures in Heaven so that you can be rich toward God! Please take some time to diligently reflect upon the truths we've just established and consider every physical thing that you enjoy “soon to be burned”! Allow this thinking to help you recognize your true need to store up Heavenly treasures rather than earthly ones.

Because if you miss Heaven, you miss it all!

Why do you need to be ready? We have already seen that your readiness impacts where you will spend eternity. Now, realize that if you are not ready and you miss Heaven, you have truly missed it all!

In Matthew 16:26, Jesus said, “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” All of the self-denial and sacrifice to live as a Christian will be well worth it whenever the faithful get to Heaven! However, Jesus says that the consequence of losing your soul (being unprepared and cast into Hell) is not worth it – even if you can possess and enjoy *everything* the world has to offer (i.e. all of its pleasures and treasures)!

What will you give in exchange for your soul? Is there anything you are willing to sell your soul for? Is there something on this earth that appeals to you so much that you would be willing to spend eternity in Hell for it? Some temporary earthly pleasure? Some temporary wealth? Some temporary ease of living? If so, you had better listen up! Jesus says that nothing and no one is worth losing your soul for! Remember, He is the one who should know – He is the one who gave His own life on the cross in order to save you from the consequences of dying in your sin (Romans 5:6-11; Romans 6:23)!

If you live your life in pursuit of earthly things, you will almost certainly experience some temporary pleasure and enjoyment. However, as we have seen, these things will certainly not be beneficial to you beyond your earthly life. Instead, you need to recognize the true blessing of having the opportunity to live eternally in Heaven – and recognize that nothing and no one is so valuable that you should sacrifice that opportunity for them! If you are spending your life chasing after earthly things, one day you will certainly recognize that you wasted your life and missed that the most important thing about this life is preparing yourself for the great Day of Judgment and eternity!

How To Be Ready

Few will be ready and be saved eternally. However, you must certainly act upon the knowledge you have gained from the Bible about what happens after death so that you can be among the few who will be ready. But, how can you be ready?

How can you be ready?

What do you need to do in order to be “ready”? I sincerely hope that you recognize the need to be prepared for the things that will happen after death. But, what can you do to make sure that you are prepared? Let’s now begin to discuss some very basic and essential things that the Bible requires of you.

First, please understand that the only way you can be ready and be saved from your sins is through

the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Without Him, you would be hopelessly lost in your sins. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Sin (violating the laws of God) produces spiritual death (separation from God). Dying in this condition of being separated from God results in eternal separation from God by being condemned to Hell (the “second death,” Revelation 21:8). This is what we have all earned by sinning against God.

However, although we have all earned this eternal spiritual torment in Hell by sinning, God has provided all mankind the opportunity to be saved. This He did through sending Jesus Christ as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. Notice the language of John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Therefore, God has given you this opportunity to “not perish but have everlasting life.” This is truly something that you could not earn! However, because of the love of God, He has given you this opportunity to entirely trust in Him and be saved from the consequences of your sins.

Thanks be to God for giving us all the opportunity to be saved from our sins! Again, this is an opportunity none of us deserve; but, that we should all desire to make the most of! Yet, in order to be saved, God requires that we be obedient to His commandments. Whenever you obey God in this way, you will not earn your salvation. Instead, you will simply do what God has required you to do for salvation (meeting the conditions He has placed upon such). Read the following passages to observe the fact that God does require you to be obedient to Him in order to be saved: Matthew 7:21-23; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Hebrews 5:9; James 1:22-25; James 2:14-26.

While we will not be able to discuss every aspect of living for the Lord in this lesson (as that will take life-long devotion to studying and applying the teachings of God’s word), please understand that the things we will now begin to discuss represent the plan of salvation you can read about throughout the pages of the Scriptures. Specifically, we will be considering what you must do in order to become a

Christian and then emphasize that you must continue to live a life of faithful service to God.

Hear God's word

The first "step" to becoming a Christian and having your sins forgiven (so that you can have an eternal home in Heaven) is to hear what God's word teaches. This, then, is the first step in being "ready."

Romans 10:17 says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Acts 18:8 demonstrates this truth – showing that the Corinthians first heard the teaching of God's word before they believed and obeyed it. It says, "Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized."

Certainly, you cannot know what you must do in order to be saved and take any action so as to be saved unless you first learn about what God wants from your life! Now, God does not require you to have a perfect knowledge about His word before you can be saved. However, you do need to know who He is, what He has done for you, and what He has required you to do to be saved!

Therefore, you should imitate the example of the Bereans, who searched the Scriptures every day to know whether they were being taught correctly or not. Acts 17:11 says the following about them: "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." Consider the importance of diligently searching the Scriptures in light of all the false doctrine that is being taught in the name of Jesus Christ. Read the following passages to see some of what the Bible says about false teaching: Matthew 7:15-20; Galatians 1:6-12; 2 Peter 2:1-3. Therefore, you need to hear what God's word teaches (and cannot just take someone else's word for things) so that you can be obedient to His instructions!

Believe

Once again, Romans 10:17 says that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Now, Hebrews 11:6 says that "without faith it is

impossible to please" God. Certainly, you must truly believe in God and in Jesus Christ!

In John 8:24, Jesus said, "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." You cannot please God unless you fully trust that Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be – the Son of God!

Now, please recognize at this point that many people and religious organizations will claim that belief in Christ is all that God requires for you to be saved. This is false. For instance, in Matthew 7:21-23 (quoted earlier in the lesson), Jesus said that there would be many people on the Day of Judgment who would claim that they had believed in Jesus. However, Jesus said that they would be eternally condemned to Hell because they were unwilling to be obedient to the Father's will. Furthermore, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 demonstrates that those who are not obedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ will be punished with everlasting destruction.

Then, James 2:14-26 is even further evidence that simply accepting the truth about Jesus Christ is not enough for salvation. I invite you to read the entirety of this passage. Three times in this passage, James demonstrates that "faith without works is dead" (verse 20). Then, James demonstrates that even the demons accept the truth about God and tremble, but they will not be saved because they do not obey Him (verse 19). Finally, consider the plain statement made by James in verse 24: "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." So, salvation is clearly "not by faith only." It does require works. The works that are required are works of *obedience*, not works of *merit*.

Repent of your sins

Not only does God indicate that hearing His word and believing in Jesus Christ are essential for salvation, but, God also requires that you repent of your sins.

In Luke 13:3, Jesus said, "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Again, in verse 5, He says, "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Acts 3:19 says, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing

may come from the presence of the Lord.” To individuals who desired to know what they needed to do to be saved, Peter said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Then, when Paul preached to idolaters in the city of Athens, he said that God “now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

To repent is to change your mind regarding your past sins. When you repent, you look upon your past sins with abhorrence, as you recognize that your sins have separated you from God. Repentance (according to 2 Corinthians 7:9-10) is produced by experiencing godly sorrow over the wrongs you have committed against God. Therefore, you repent whenever you determine no longer to live in those same sinful ways and determine to live your life for God in the future.

Confess Jesus Christ

Another requirement God has placed upon salvation is that you must confess Jesus Christ. Again, as we continue to see, it is not enough just to mentally accept the truth about Jesus Christ; but, you must also confess Him publicly.

In Matthew 10:32-33, Jesus said, “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.” Romans 10:9-10 says, “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

What does God require you to confess? Some say that that you must confess your sins. However, this is *not* the confession God requires. Instead, God requires that you confess “the Lord Jesus.” This is demonstrated in Acts 8:37. In this passage (read Acts 8:26-40), a man from Ethiopia learns the gospel of Jesus Christ and wants to be obedient to it. He sees some water as they are traveling and wants to comply with God’s instructions to be baptized. He asked, “What hinders me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36). Then, Philip (the one who had been teaching

the man) said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And, the man of Ethiopia answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37). Then, the man was baptized for the remission of his sins (Acts 8:38-39).

Be baptized

The final “step” (or, requirement) God has given you to obey to become a Christian and be forgiven of your sins is baptism (immersion in water). While there are many people today who will tell you that baptism is *not* essential for salvation, God says that it *is* necessary for salvation!

Consider the following passages that demonstrate the fact that baptism is necessary for salvation. Mark 16:16 says, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Acts 2:38 says, “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” Acts 22:16 says, “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Galatians 3:26-27 says, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” 1 Peter 3:20-21 says, “who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

So, the Bible clearly teaches that baptism comes *before* the point of salvation – not after! Baptism is demonstrated by these passages to be necessary for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16), to be in Christ (Galatians 3:26-27), and to be saved (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:20-21). Therefore, without being obedient to God’s command to be baptized, you will not have your sins forgiven, be in Christ, or be saved!

Now, please recognize that true Bible baptism can only be accomplished by the immersion

in water. Sprinkling or pouring water over someone's head is *not* sufficient to fulfill God's command to be baptized (though many religious organizations practice such things as acceptable substitutes for immersion). Along with the fact that the original word for "baptism" means "immersion," the Bible demonstrates the action involved in baptism in Matthew 3:16 and Acts 8:38-39 clearly is the action of immersion (notice how they went down and came up from the water). Then, the Bible also identifies baptism as a burial. Romans 6:4 says that we are "buried" with Christ through baptism. Similarly, Colossians 2:12 says, "buried with Him in baptism...." Clearly, baptism is a full immersion in water.

Then, please understand that baptism that is done in any other way or for any other purpose besides the way and purpose given in the Bible is *not* true Bible baptism! For instance, many people have been "baptized" in the past by having water sprinkled or poured on their heads. Or, many people have been baptized (perhaps even fully immersed in water), but they believed they were saved prior to being baptized. Instead, true Bible baptism is the only baptism that results in salvation – and it is at this point you become a Christian!

Be faithful

Upon your obedience to the commandments we have been considering, you become a Christian, are forgiven of your sins, and are added to Christ's church. Read how those who were obedient to the gospel's plan of salvation were added to Christ's church in Acts 2:37-47. It was only after individuals were baptized into Christ Jesus for the remission of their sins that they could go on their way rejoicing (see Acts 8:38-39; Acts 16:34).

Then, once you have become a Christian, God instructs you to be faithful unto death. To a group of Christians who were about to be severely persecuted, Jesus instructed: "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). You see, Christians are *not* "once saved always saved." Rather, the Bible teaches that those who have been saved can sin so as to be lost from God's grace (see Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 10:26-39). God expects faithfulness throughout your life (as

Revelation 2:10 and many other Bible passages demonstrate). This faithfulness to God is accomplished whenever you trust and obey God whole-heartedly!

Part of being a Christian involves walking in a newness of life (as evident from Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 3:1-17). The Christian simply must not go back to living the kind of life that he/she lived prior to becoming a Christian (read the entirety of Romans 6). Also, consider the following passages to see the kind of commitment that God expects you to make: Luke 9:23-26; Luke 14:25-33; Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 2:20. All of these passages demonstrate that there must be a complete dedication to God and fulfilling His purposes throughout your life!

Then, as a Christian, you have become a member of Christ's one true church (the church of Christ) – see Acts 2:41, 47. It is important, then, to join a local church that teaches and practices only that which you can read about in the Bible! Most churches simply fail to practice and teach only what the New Testament authorizes. To be involved with any of these churches is to fail to abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 1:9-11) and is to be in fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11)! Instead, you need to search out or start a church that only believes, practices, and teaches what you can read about in the New Testament.

Conclusion

We have still not exhausted everything that could be said about being ready. However, I hope that the things we *have* established have been beneficial to you. First, we have established that few will be ready and, therefore, few will be saved. Second, we established why it is important to be ready. Third, we established some basics concerning how you can be ready.

I hope that you will be ready for your life on this earth to end. Now, I encourage you to consider your true purpose in life. It is *not* to fulfill your own earthly desires. Rather, it is to fear God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). I encourage

you to view yourself as a stranger and a pilgrim on this earth (1 Peter 2:11-12). That is, don't view this earth as your home. Instead, view it only as your temporary dwelling place until your earthly life is over. In doing this, you will be better prepared to deny yourself of fleshly desires and focus on your spiritual needs.

Please take time at the conclusion of this lesson to reflect on all of the Bible truths we have established through this study. Make diligent application of them to your life. And, determine to do whatever you need to do in order to be ready for the end of your earthly life! Are you ready for what happens after death?

Study Questions

What was established in the first three lessons?

What are some areas you make careful preparations in?

1. Few Will Be Ready

How many, according to Jesus, will be saved (Matthew 7:13-14)?

What does this fact tell you about the spiritual preparedness of most people?

2. The Importance Of Being Ready

How do the things we've discussed in the other 3 lessons of this series impact the need to be prepared?

What does Jesus teach about the need to be ready? Why is this significant?

Why is the fact that all earthly things will perish significant? How does it impact your need to be ready?

What does Jesus teach in Matthew 16:26? What impact does this teaching have upon the need to be ready? Is there anything/anyone you will sell your soul for?

3. How To Be Ready

How has God given you the opportunity to be saved? What does He require of you?

What is the importance of hearing God's Word?

What is the importance of faith? Is faith only enough to be saved?

What is repentance? Why is it important?

What confession must be made?

Is baptism necessary for salvation? What is baptism? Have you been baptized in this way and for this purpose?

What is involved in remaining faithful to God? Why is it necessary? What should you look for in a church?

***Summarize what you have learned in this study. Do you have any questions/comments?**