



EST FONDS VITAE

DATE

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SERIES

Church Basics

TITLE & PASSAGE

*The Gospel & the
Response*

Acts 20:22-41

OCCASION

A message presented by Pastor Marc Minter on the Lord's Day morning to the congregation of First Baptist Church of Diana, TX.

MAIN POINT

The gospel is the message about Jesus Christ – who He is and what He has done – and the gospel unites all those who repent and believe.

EMAIL QUESTIONS TO PASTOR@FBCDIANA.ORG

INTRODUCTION

Joe Biden has been in the news last week, since he is currently the front-runner for the Democratic party nomination to the upcoming presidential election. He is a self-professed Roman Catholic, and yet he has recently changed one of his political positions in such a way so as to contradict official Roman Catholic teaching.

Now, I am not interested in talking politics this morning, but Biden's own comments on what kind of Roman Catholic he is are pertinent to our topic today.

In his autobiography, Biden wrote,

“My idea of self, of family, of community, of the wider world comes straight from my religion. It's not so much the Bible, the beatitudes, the Ten Commandments, the sacraments, or the prayers I learned. It's the culture.”¹

Joe Biden talks about his religion... his religious affiliation... his idea of self, family, and the wider world as *a culture*... not so much something that comes from the Bible or from the teachings of a religious institution. Does *cultural religion* seem a strange idea to you? He understands himself to be a Roman Catholic because it is a *familiar culture*, not because he sees any significance in the Bible or the sacraments.

Now, if you know anything about Roman Catholicism, then you know that the sacraments are the essence of what it means to be a Catholic. What is the centerpiece of every Catholic service? The sacrament of the eucharist.

What is the first experience of every identifying Catholic? The sacrament of baptism.

What is the last experience of every dying Catholic? The administration of “last rites,” which is actually the combination of three sacraments – confession, anointing of the sick, and a final eucharist.

Simply put, you can't be a Roman Catholic without sharing in the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church. And yet, here is a man who says he is religious while at the same time denying the basic essence of the religion he claims.

¹ <https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/joe-bidens-catholicism>

This morning, I'm not concerned about Biden's *cultural* Catholicism. This kind of nonsense is quite common in our day. One's religion is often perceived as nothing more than one's own cultural background. But I am concerned about a similar sort of religious attachment in our own neck of the East Texas woods.

You and I probably know people who are "Baptists" or "Methodists" or "Non-denominational" but they can hardly tell you anything about what it means to be a "Baptist" or a "Methodist" or what it means to be "Non-denominational."

More heart-breaking is the fact that many people claim to be *Christian*, but they don't base their brand of Christianity on anything from the Bible... they don't know the commands of Christ... and they have no intention of following Jesus as their Master. They are merely "cultural Christians." Christianity, for them, is just a sentimental feeling... a memorable experience... a familiar culture.

As a matter of fact, I wonder how many in this room are more attached to a kind of Christian *culture* than they are to biblical Christianity. Do you know that it's possible for someone to think they are a Christian just because they are at home among a particular culture that feels like Christianity to them?

Friend, how would you know if your Christianity is merely cultural and not real?

Church family, how would you know if your friend or your sibling or your child or your grandchild really is a Christian?

How would you be able to get beyond your own unreliable emotions in order to expose the true heart of the matter?

Well, my prayer is that today's message will help us to answer such questions.

We will be considering the essence of biblical Christianity – the gospel – and the biblical response we should have to it.

The normal diet for FBC Diana is expositional preaching, where the preacher draws the main point of his sermon from the main point of a Bible passage. Today, I'll be preaching a topical message, since I chose my text with a particular topic already in mind. I chose Acts 2:22-41 because this passage highlights the stuff (or the content) I want us to consider this morning.

In Acts 2, we are diving into a momentous portion of Scripture. This is the record of the time in human history when God reversed the curse of Genesis 11. At the tower of Babel, God confused the languages of humanity, causing people to disperse themselves among the earth.

Incidentally, this dispersing of humanity was a large portion of what we learned through our VBS teaching a couple of weeks ago.

In Acts 2, however, God sent His Spirit among all those people who believed and followed Jesus. When God's Spirit came upon them, they all began to praise God in the various languages of the foreigners gathered in Jerusalem that day. This was a supernatural demonstration of power, and the Apostle Peter stepped up to give an explanation to those who saw and heard it.

Peter's message was not recorded in its entirety – verse 40 tells us that he used “many other words” – but Luke gave us the core of it... the part God wants us to have. Peter explained the gospel and he also called his hearers to respond.

This gets us to my main point today: *The gospel is the message about Jesus Christ – who He is and what He has done – and the gospel unites all those who repent and believe.*

Let's turn now to our passage and read it together.

(6:00)

SCRIPTURE READING

Acts 2:22–41 (ESV)

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him (quoted from Ps. 16:8-11), ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says (quoted from Ps. 110:1), ‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized 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.

For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

(3:30 – 9:30)

MAIN POINT

The gospel is the message about Jesus Christ – who He is and what He has done – and the gospel unites all those who repent and believe.

MESSAGE OUTLINE

(1) WHAT IS THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL?

(2) HOW DO WE SHARE IN THE PROMISES OF THE GOSPEL?

(3) WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL?

(1:00 – 10:30)

MESSAGE

(1) WHAT IS THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL?

The message of the gospel is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Look with me again at Peter's stinging message to those who were gathered in Jerusalem for the celebration feast of Pentecost... just fifty days after the Passover, which was the day when they had witnessed Jesus' crucifixion.

Peter spoke of Jesus as a real historical man. In verse 22 we see: Jesus was "a man" who was from "Nazareth," and He did "mighty works and wonders and signs" that were seen by many of those gathered in front of Peter that day. In verse 23 we see: Jesus was "crucified" at the hands of "lawless men" (a phrase that means non-Jews, and in this case refers specifically to the Roman civil authorities). And in verse 24 we also see the claim that Jesus was raised from the dead by God Himself.

Now these are important facts, and the timing is significant as well. Peter was claiming that Jesus had been murdered, and he was blaming the people right in front of him for doing it. Further, Peter was claiming that Jesus had been raised back to life, and he was saying that God was in charge of the whole thing.

If ever there was someone with the motive and the means to disprove the claim that Jesus was raised from the dead, it was people like those to whom Peter was speaking right then. Many of these were the same people who demanded that Jesus be crucified several weeks earlier. They had witnessed His death, and they had heard the rumors of His resurrection. The Jewish leaders wanted Jesus gone, but now they had an empty tomb and no way to stop the publication of Jesus' resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact of history that simply cannot be dismissed by honest skeptics.

More could be said on this apologetic point, but you get the idea.

Looking back to our passage, we see that Peter begins in verse 25 to bring up Old Testament citations in order to demonstrate that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were all according to God's plan. God revealed these things from long ago, and this was not some kind of "plan B" on His part.

In verse 32 Peter brings the message around to his own personal witness of the facts he's been talking about. Peter had known Jesus before He died. Peter walked and talked with Jesus... he ate and drank with Jesus... and he watched Jesus die. Peter also saw and talked with and ate with the resurrected Jesus! What a thought!

But Peter turned immediately to the “**promise of the Holy Spirit**” as was demonstrated in the “**seeing and hearing**” of the people gathered that day. This was the fulfillment of the promise God had made to be with His people again (Joel 2:27), another reversal of God's curse!

In Genesis 3, man sinned against God, and this resulted in a loss of God's blessed presence. Because of their sin, God banished Adam and Eve (along with all their descendants – including you and me) from His blessings... from His favor... from His presence. Humanity was set at enmity with God and with one another, and the way back was cut off by God Himself. A flaming sword would stop any sinner's approach to the holy God who will not be disobeyed (Gen. 3:24).

Ah, but how, then, can Peter and these other sinners... how can sinners like us enjoy the presence of God? How can we become welcome before God and not banished?

Is it not because the flaming sword was plunged into Christ on behalf of all those who would turn from their sin and trust in Him? Didn't Peter say that the crucifixion of Jesus was “**according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God**” (v23)?

So, it wasn't just lawless men at work that day... God Himself was at work, offering Christ as the perfect sacrifice for sinners. God condemned Christ in order to redeem sinners. God poured out His wrath upon Christ so that He could pour out His Spirit upon His people. What a glorious gospel this is?!

But Peter didn't just speak of Jesus death and resurrection... there was more.

Peter went on to say that the coming of the Holy Spirit was evidence that Jesus had ascended to the “**right hand of God**” (v33). And Peter helps us to understand what this means in verse 36. He said, “**Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him [Jesus] both Lord and Christ...**”

Peter's claim is that Jesus is both “**Lord**” – ruler, king, master – and “**Christ**” – promised savior, prophesied redeemer, God's anointed one.

The title “**Lord**” signifies Jesus’ divine authority over all... He is, as Isaiah foretold, “**Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God...**” And Isaiah went on to say, “**Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end... [He will] establish [His kingdom] and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore**” (Is. 9:6-7).

The title “**Christ**” signifies Jesus’ identity as God’s anointed Messiah. The “**Christ**” or “**Messiah**” is someone prophesied and prefigured throughout the Old Testament. He is the one whose “**coming forth is from of old, from ancient days**” (Micah 5:2). He is the one who will “**shepherd his flock in the strength of Yahweh... and he shall be their peace**” (Micah 5:4).

So, let’s recap where we’ve been so far.

I asked the question, “What is the message gospel?” Then I said, the message of the gospel is the person and work of Jesus Christ. And then we looked at how Peter described the person and work of Christ in this impromptu evangelistic presentation.

- Peter described Jesus as an actual man who truly lived and truly died.
- He explained that Jesus’ death upon the cross was ultimately the work of God, offering the perfect sacrifice for sinners.
- He spoke of the guilt of his hearers and the grace of God.
- He declared that Jesus is both Savior and Lord, Redeemer and Master.
- And he pointed to God’s delivery on His promise to be with His people by way of His indwelling Spirit.

Friend, do you believe these things? Do you believe there really was a man named Jesus, who lived and died for sinners?

Do you really believe that you are guilty before God, completely unwelcome (based on your own merit) in His presence?

Do you trust in Christ as Savior and follow Him as Lord?

Have you taken Christ as your Redeemer and as your Master?

Do you enjoy the benefits of God’s presence? Are you filled with His Holy Spirit?

Church family, there is another application on this point for us this morning. Remember that Peter was an “uneducated” and “common” man (Acts 4:13), nevertheless we read about his ability to deliver this message on the spur of the moment. Of course, he was empowered by God’s Spirit to speak the way he did, but he also demonstrated a healthy familiarity with the Scripture and with the message of the gospel. He showed a willingness to stick himself out there for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of others.

Church family, do you know the gospel message well enough to explain it in 60 seconds or less?

When is the last time you shared the gospel with someone? When is the last time you helped someone understand the gospel better?

Who is responsible to explain the gospel to your friends... to your kids... to your family... to your neighbor... to your co-worker?

The gospel is the message about Jesus Christ – who He is and what He has done...

We are to receive it and then to tell it.

(7:30 – 18:00)

(2) HOW DO WE SHARE IN THE PROMISES OF THE GOSPEL?

Peter spoke of marvelous promises in the gospel! Look with me at verses 38 and 39. Peter said there is “**forgiveness of sins**” and the gift of “**the Holy Spirit.**” And, these promises are not just for those people on that day, these promises are for “**all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself**” (v39). These promises are as far reaching as the gospel message.... Where the gospel goes – where God’s Spirit causes sinners to be born again – there the promises are realized.

We’ve already spent a little time talking about the promises or benefits of the gospel in point one, so I’d like to move now to a different emphasis. In this point (#2), I’m interested in considering what we (or anyone else) must do in order to share in these gospel promises.

Are all sins forgiven... everyone in the whole world? Do all people everywhere have the promised Holy Spirit?

How about those who have at least heard the gospel? Does the mere hearing of the message give someone a share in these promises?

Thankfully, some of the folks in Peter's crowd asked the right question... and, thankfully, Peter answered them plainly.

Look with me at verses 37 and 38. "Now when they heard **this** [Peter's message] they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, '**Brothers, what shall we do?**' And Peter said to them, '**Repent** and be baptized... in the name of Jesus Christ...' And now down to verse 40, "So those who **received his word** [i.e. believed Peter's message] **were baptized.**"

Here we see at least two necessary conditions. A person must do at least two things in order to have a share in the promises of the gospel. These two are **repentance** and **belief**. Repentance is likely more obvious to you in this passage than belief, but both are present. Belief is implicit in the phrase, "**received his word**" in verse 40.

In other words, those who "**received**" Peter's word or message... "believed" it or "had faith" in it (I'm going to use "faith" & "belief" interchangeably because the Bible uses them that way).

Baptism is also emphatically mentioned here, but I will get to the topic of baptism in just a bit.

Repentance and belief are commonly joined together in Scripture. And they are always used as necessary conditions for a share in the gospel promises.

The first statement recorded from Jesus in Mark's Gospel is, "**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel**" (Mk. 1:15).

The Apostle Paul summarized his ministry among the Christians in Ephesus as him preaching "**of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ**" (Acts 20:21). Elsewhere Paul defended his ministry in front of a Roman king, describing what Christ had called him to preach – that people "**should repent and turn to God** [i.e. turn to God in belief]" (Acts 26:20).

Since repentance and belief are joined so frequently, and because of what each of these words means, some have noted that they are really two sides of the same coin. You simply cannot have one without the other.

In order for us to share in the gospel promises, we must repent and believe.

OK, but what does “repent” mean? And what does it mean to believe?

Let’s start with the one that’s going to be more familiar to most of us.

“Believe” is a verb... the one believing is doing something. But it’s not like changing a tire or building a house. Belief is also more than wishful thinking; like wanting the laundry to magically fold itself or wishing that cheesecake was actually health-food.

Belief is like trust or confidence. Every time you sit in a chair, you are believing the chair is capable of holding you. When you put money in a savings account, you are believing that it will be better spent in the future.

It is important to recognize that belief is not a thing; it has no power in itself. You might believe the chair is strong, for example, but it may not actually be up to the task. Your belief, no matter how sincere or heart-felt, has no effect whatever on the chair... or anything else.

So, what is it that God wants us to believe in or have faith in? The gospel! Or more specifically, the person and work of Christ. God is calling us... commanding us to believe Jesus.

We are to believe the things Peter preached about in our passage today. We are to believe that we are guilty before God and that Jesus Christ was God’s appointed guilt offering. We are to believe that Jesus Christ is truly man and truly God, the second person of the holy Trinity. We are to believe that Christ alone can rescue us from our sin and God’s wrath, and we are to cling to Christ in the belief that He will deliver on His promises to save and preserve us.

If what I have just described is what it means to believe, then is there really anything else a person must do in order to share in the promises of the gospel?

This is probably where some of us might become a bit confused, so let me ask that question again.

If someone believes the kind of things I’ve listed here, then is there anything else a person must do in order to share in the promises of the gospel?

The ABC's of salvation tell us that we must Admit we are sinners, Believe in Jesus, and Confess our faith in Christ... but this leaves out an essential feature of what it means to be a Christian. We cannot share in the promises of the gospel... we cannot be a Christian... we cannot have our sins forgiven... we cannot be saved without repentance.

Repentance is translated from a word that literally means to *change your mind*.

So, repentance includes turning away from sinful thinking. In fact, one of the responsibilities of elders or pastors is to correct wrong thinking with patience and gentleness, in the hope that God might grant “repentance” to those in error (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

But repentance also includes a change of one's behavior. In Peter's second message, recorded for us in the book of Acts, he calls his hearers to “repent” and “turn back, [so] that [their] sins may be blotted out...” (Acts 3:19). Elsewhere, Peter commanded a man to “repent” of his “wickedness” (Acts 8:22). But the most comprehensive call to repentance I know of in the Bible is in Romans, chapter 2.

The Apostle Paul lists many expressions of sin in chapter 1: such as greed, malice, envy, murder, dishonesty, fighting, gossip, slander, disrespect, pride, bragging, disobedience toward parents, harshness, foolishness, and faithlessness (Rom. 1:29-31). Then, after the list of sins, he wrote, “We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things... Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:2, 4).

The idea here is clear. If you are doing any of this stuff (sinning), and you know that God will judge everyone who does it, you ought to thank God for not destroying you yet and turn away from doing this stuff anymore.

Repentance, then, includes turning away from sinful thoughts, words, and deeds.

Repentance is not just feeling guilty... it is not merely admitting that something you've done is wrong. Repentance is an act of the will, turning away from sin, even though sin still looks appealing to you.

Repentance is a biblical command that flies in the face of our culture today. We are told all day long that our personal desires reign supreme. “[Listen to your heart](#)” is the constant message we hear. In fact, only bigots and extremists say that a person’s deep desires should be limited by some outside rule or standard.

And yet, a fundamental truth of Christianity is that God has made us, and He must tell us who we are, why we were made, and what we are to do with ourselves.

We naturally think and act like sinners, but God comes in and tells us how we are to think and act. Repentance is submitting ourselves to this new information... it is a humble human response to God’s authoritative revelation.

Again, repentance and belief are two sides to the same coin. You can’t have one without the other. You might have legalistic folks who seem to have their lives straightened up, but without belief this is not true repentance. Or you might have others who say they believe in Jesus, but without a pattern of turning away from sin this is not true belief.

True repentance and true belief are demonstrated over time... And both repentance and belief are the necessary conditions for anyone to share in the gospel promises.

Friend, when is the last time you resisted your sinful desires? I’m not asking about when you might have felt guilty for doing something bad. I’m asking you to think about the last time you actually wanted to think or say or do something sinful, and you turned away from it because of your love for Christ.

Friend, if repentance is not something you are regularly doing, then I wonder how this message sounds to you today.

Is repentance a biblical command? And is repentance one of the things the Bible says a person must do in order to enjoy the benefits of the gospel?

Why would you think Jesus is your Savior if you do not intend to repent or turn from sin and follow Him as Lord?

Church family, this is something we’ve been considering for quite some time now. What are we to think of our friends... our family members... our children who claim to be Christians but who don’t seem interested in doing the stuff that Christians ought to do?

Are we really going to try to convince them that church is cool by inviting them to events, games, camps, concerts and other programs? What if they aren't interested in church because they aren't really interested in Christ? What if they don't come on Sundays because they don't actually love Jesus and want to follow Him?

We certainly cannot know anyone's heart, so I am not suggesting that we go around telling people that they aren't Christians.

But at some point, we have to stop affirming those people around us who merely give lip service to Christ.

It is one thing to say, "You say you are a Christian... why don't you act like one?"

And it is quite another thing to say, "I love you, but the kinds of things you are doing just don't line up with your claim to follow Christ... have you ever considered that you might not be a Christian?"

May God help us to be a repenting and a believing people... and may He grant repentance and belief to many others around us as we share the gospel and call them to respond.

The gospel is the message about Jesus Christ – who He is and what He has done... **and we must repent and believe.**

(11:00 – 29:00)

(3) WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL?

In one sense, this is merely a different way of asking the same question I just tried to answer in point 2. The way we share in the promises of the gospel is by responding rightly to it. And the biblical response to the gospel is repentance and belief.

But there is another major concept Peter brings up here, about the way sinners ought to respond to the gospel, and we will benefit from considering it here.

Look again with me at verses 37 and 38. "**Now when they** [the crowd] **heard this** [Peter's message] **they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'** And Peter said to them, '**Repent and be baptized... in the name of Jesus Christ...**' And now again to verse 40, "**So those**

who received his word [believed Peter's message] were **baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.**"

Peter speaks of baptism right along with repentance and belief because baptism is a person's inductive public act of such things.

Who was baptized that day? ...Those who repented and received Peter's word or believed the gospel.

On what basis or authority were these repenting and believing people baptized? They were baptized *in Jesus' name* – not as a sort of verbal formula – but based on Christ's authority.

Into what were these new believers baptized? Or to ask it another way: To what were these three thousand souls added? These three thousand souls were added to the number of believers already identified with Christ in Jerusalem.

In Acts 1:15, we see a phrase that is used throughout the New Testament to refer to groups of Christians – “the brothers.” And we also learn that there were about 120 of them (the brothers) gathered in Jerusalem, waiting on the promised arrival of the Holy Spirit. So, the three thousand who repented and believed in response to Peter's gospel message were united to the existing believers by way of the public, New Covenant sign of baptism.

Much could be said about baptism. As a matter of fact, being that we are a Baptist church, we do indeed believe the Bible teaches quite a bit about baptism. But today, I'd like us to consider the significance of baptism as the biblical response to the gospel.

What do you think about Peter's answer to the question “**What shall we do?**” (v37)?

What if you are with your co-worker on Monday morning, and you each are talking about what you did this last weekend. You mention that you went to church, and you say that the message was about the gospel and the right response. Then your co-worker says, “You know, I've been thinking about the gospel for a while, and I'd like to know how to be saved. What should I do?”

How would you answer?

How would you bring up the subject of repentance? Would you say anything about baptism? What about joining a local church?

Does it strike you as odd that the teaching and pattern of the New Testament is that sinners are to repent and believe the gospel, making their public profession of faith by being baptized into fellowship with Christ and with a local church?

Why would repentance, baptism, and church membership be detached from our concept of responding to the gospel if such things are common in the New Testament?

Many of us are probably familiar with the phrase “public profession of faith,” but what does it actually mean?

Is walking to the front of the room during a Christian service a public profession of faith? Maybe, but is this kind of response ever taught in Scripture?

How does the Bible tell us we are to respond to the gospel? Simply put, we are to respond in repentance and belief in Christ, publicly identifying ourselves with Christ and His people through baptism.

How does the Bible tell us to call others to respond to the gospel? We are to call others to repent and believe in Christ, and to publicly identify themselves with Christ and His people through baptism.

Baptism carries with it the authority of Christ... Jesus commanded it and the New Testament saints followed Jesus’ command. They gave us the pattern which we are to follow today.

Many of us are familiar with evangelistic meetings where people are called to walk an aisle or take a stand or to pray a prayer. I have personally lead hundreds of meetings just like this, when I was a full-time evangelist. And we both probably know people who have trusted in Christ at such meetings and remain followers of Jesus to this day.

One of my fellow interns at Capitol Hill Baptist Church was saved at an evangelistic meeting like the ones I used to lead. It was heart-warming to hear about his conversion, and I was glad to learn that he is going to plant a church in Nacogdoches, TX. I look forward to introducing Wesley and his family to you soon.

So, I don’t intend to diminish the work of God in people’s lives through various evangelistic efforts. What I do intend to press upon us is the biblical command and pattern.

The question is not, “What is our experience with evangelistic methods?” Or “How have we seen God save people?”

The question is, “Why in the world would we try to change or neglect the teaching and pattern of Christ?”

Is the biblical response to the gospel repentance and belief, publicly demonstrated by baptism? If “yes,” then we do not have the authority or freedom to change it.

I got a note this week from a pastor of a church in Iraq. His name is Mack Stiles, and he authored the book I’ve given away here, called “Evangelism.” He asked for prayer this week because he was going to baptize a handful of people this Sunday. They are eight hours ahead of us, so their Sunday is winding down now.

Each of the new converts he mentioned were either from a Muslim or Hindu background, and most of them are facing real threats from their respective families and friends. Mack wrote, “They are all aware of the commitment they are making to be baptized; all are taking the covenant very seriously and see the church as their new family. I’m so honored and privileged and humbled.”

You see, baptism publicly unites repenting and believing sinners with Christ and with one another in a way that even non-Christians recognize as significant.

A person may claim the name of Christ... a person may say a prayer or shake a preacher’s hand... but when a person is baptized, we are all saying something about the gospel, about that person, about Christ, and about our unity with one another.

Christianity is more than mere culture. It is a way of life that is based upon our mutual love for Christ and for one another. Christians are those who have heard the message of the gospel, they believe in Jesus as Savior, and they follow Him as Lord. Christians are those who unite with Christ and with Christ’s people, not just because they are culturally similar, but because they are depending upon one another.

May God make us a gospel-believing people. May God make us a repenting people.

And may God make us a united people, joined by our mutual repentance and belief... and by our mutual commitment to help one another follow Christ together.

(7:00 – 36:00)