

How do I become a Christian?

One of the most elementary parts of God’s plan for man described in the Bible is found in conversion (the way someone becomes a Christian). As demonstrated by the following chart, God’s pattern for conversion requires *faith* (belief), *repentance* (a turning from sin), *confession*, and *baptism* (immersion in water) for the forgiveness of sins.

Bible verse	God’s command	God’s command	The blessing
Mk. 16:16:	Believe	<i>and</i> be baptized	Saved
Acts 2:38:	Repent	<i>and</i> be baptized	Remission of sins
Acts 22:16:	Arise	<i>and</i> be baptized	Wash away sins

The information in Mk. 16:16 has been compared to a train; just as boxcars are joined together with a coupling pin, so the word “*and*” joins together the commands of “belief” and “baptism” (Jesus said a person must *believe* and be *baptized* before he can be “saved”). Since those in Acts 2 had heard and believed the facts of the gospel (Acts 2:37), they were told to “repent and be baptized” so they could receive the “forgiveness of sins” (Acts 2:38). The information in Acts 2 also offers an excellent illustration of *repentance*, a word that meant “to change for the better.” People who had formerly hated Jesus (Acts 2:36) *repented* (they began to love and follow Jesus). After people believe and repent, they are to be *baptized*, an act that “washes away sins” (Acts 22:16).

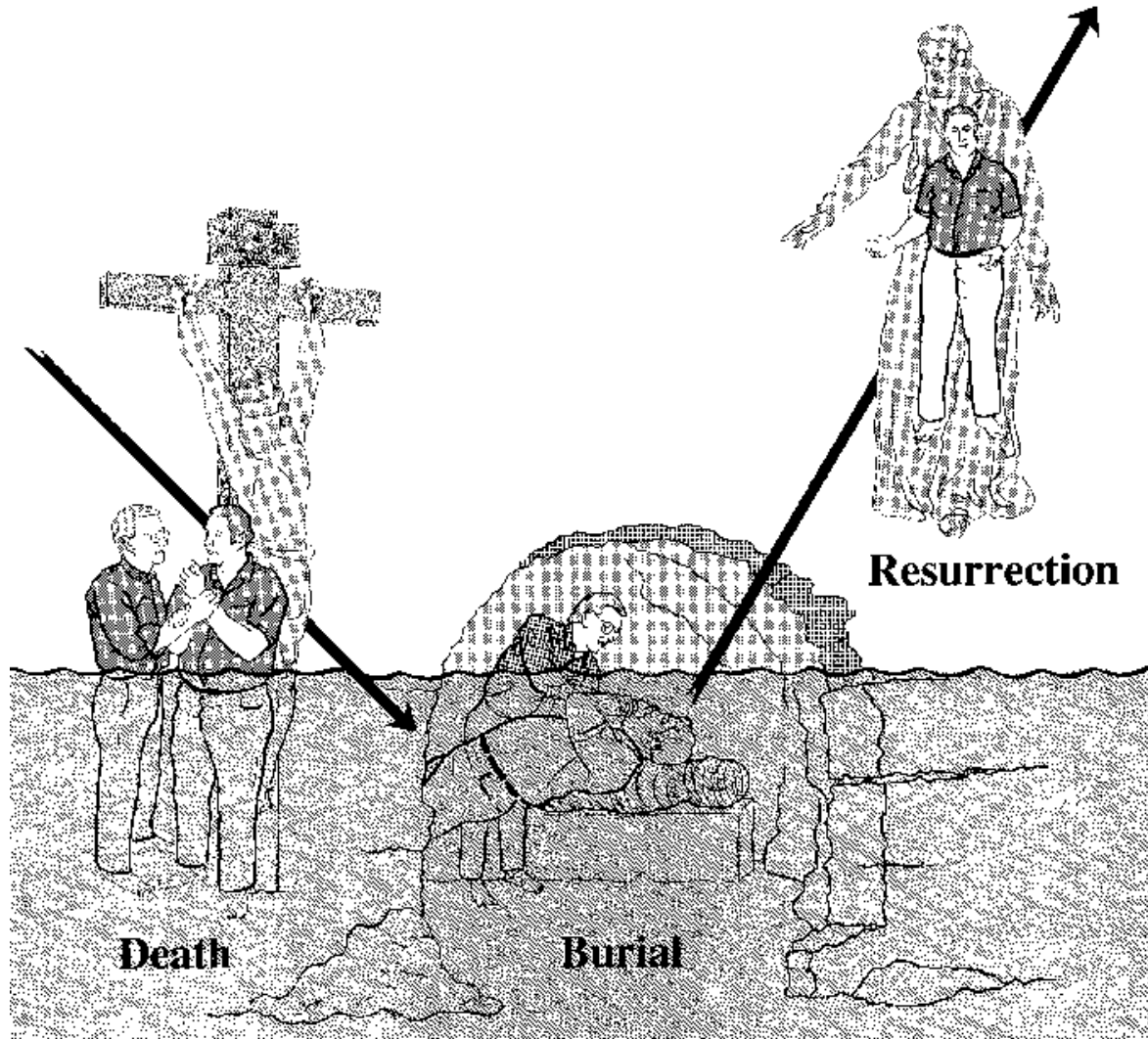
In addition to the passages in the preceding chart, the Bible also explains the purpose of baptism in Gal. 3:27 (Paul said baptism puts people “into Christ”). If a person is old enough to be accountable for his actions, he is either “in Christ” or “out of Christ.” If a person is old enough to be responsible for his actions and he is “out of Christ,” he has no spiritual blessings, one of which is salvation (2 Tim. 2:10). Those who are “in Christ” have all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3), one of which is salvation. According to Gal. 3:27, a person does not enter “into Christ” until he has been properly baptized.

In addition to Jesus and Paul saying that baptism is part of the salvation process, there is the information in 1 Pet. 3:20-21. Peter described how water served as a dividing line for Noah and his family (God used a flood to separate the saved from the lost, Gen. 6-7). Water lifted the ark and those in it to safety and water caused the unsaved to drown. In fact, Peter said Noah and his family were “*saved through water*” (1 Pet. 3:20). Peter also said there is a “true likeness” for people today and this “true likeness” is “*baptism*” (1 Pet. 3:21). In other words, just as water separated the saved from the lost in the ancient world, so water (baptism) now divides the saved from the lost under the Christian era (see again the preceding chart). Peter further noted how baptism is not for the “*filth of the flesh*” (it is not a process to remove physical dirt), 1 Pet. 3:21. Baptism is for spiritual filth—sin—as explained in Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16.

There was no special power in the flood waters that separated Noah from the unsaved and there is no special power in the water that is now used to baptize people. Our justification from sin comes through Jesus’ blood (Paul made this point in Rom. 5:9 and he explained how this process works in Rom. 6:1-4).

As demonstrated by the following graphic, which is provided through the courtesy of

We Care Ministries, sinners access the benefits of Jesus' blood by reenacting the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection. After a person believes, he is *not* saved. The believer must experience a "death." This *death* is another description for repentance (people must turn from sin. Compare Col. 3:7; Acts 2:38; Lk. 13:3; Acts 17:30). People must "die to sin" (repent) so they do not "die in sin" (perish eternally in hell).



After a person has believed and repented (died to sin), he is ready to acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 8:37; 1 Tim. 6:12) and then be "*buried with Christ through baptism*" (Rom. 6:4). After a person has been properly baptized, he has "*newness of life*" (Rom. 6:4).

Many believe that "new life" (salvation, forgiveness of sins and all spiritual blessings) comes *before* baptism, but the Bible repeatedly says this is incorrect. Jesus said a person is "saved" *after* being baptized (Mk. 16:16). Peter said a person has the "forgiveness of his sins" *after* being baptized (Acts 2:38). Ananias said sins are "washed away" *by being baptized* (Acts 22:16). Paul said "baptism" *puts people into Christ* (Gal. 3:27). A person receives "new life" *after* baptism (Rom. 6:4). Jesus said a person must be "born anew" (Jn. 3:3) and this new birth *requires water* (Jn. 3:5). God

has a specific pattern for salvation and this pattern requires people to have faith, repent of their sins, confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and be “buried with Christ” for the “forgiveness of their sins.”

The description of baptism as a “burial” (Rom. 6:4 and Col. 2:12) tells us that Bible baptism requires *immersion* (we do not *bury* something by sprinkling or pouring dirt on it). A *burial* means someone or something is covered and this is what New Testament baptism requires (a person is submerged in and thus covered by water). When John was baptizing people, his baptism required “much water” (Jn. 3:23). In fact, this verse says John baptized in this place “because” there was *much water there*.

Baptism for the forgiveness of sins is an essential part of God’s pattern for conversion, but this is just one characteristic of New Testament Christianity.