

Becoming a Christian

*And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
(Matthew 28:18-20)*

Before ascending to heaven the resurrected Lord instructed His disciples to go everywhere making disciples. This great commission remains a prime directive for Christ's followers.

How are disciples made? If you research the question you'll find as many methods for making disciples as there are churches. And if you check your phonebook (does anyone still use a phonebook?) or "google it" you'll find there are a lot of churches. It would take pages and pages to summarize and compare all the different methods for making Christians.

Is how one becomes a Christian important? Absolutely! In one of the scariest passages in scripture Jesus said that on judgment day many that expected to spend eternity in heaven would instead find they were headed to hell (Matthew 7:22-23). It is possible, even probable, that people who consider themselves Christians are not. My aim in writing this article is to keep as many as possible from making this tragic mistake.

Instead of trying to summarize all the different ways to become a Christian let's see how Jesus' disciples made Christians. Doesn't it make sense that the ones who first made Christians, those who had learned how directly from Jesus, knew best? Doesn't it make sense that those who were brought to a relationship with the Lord by his apostles were true disciples?

In the next few pages I will show you that as the apostles went forth making disciples they followed a pattern. Certain things were done in a certain order. The pattern is simple yet profound. If you become a Christian this way, the way the apostles made Christians, you can have confidence that you are a Christian indeed.



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If you are not a Christian you can skip to the next paragraph. If you are a Christian, before you read this article take a moment to write down exactly how you became a Christian. Were you taught? What were you taught? Were you baptized? How were you baptized? At what age? Write down right now all the steps you can remember. At the end of the study I'll invite you to make personal application. That is, I'll ask you to compare how you became a Christian with the way the apostles made Christians.

Church History Recorded in the Book of Acts

The Book of Acts records the birth and growth of the New Testament church. And the church grew by conversions to Christ. If you take away conversions and attempted conversions from Acts you don't have much left. Our method will be to survey the Book of Acts for conversions. We'll note what was done, by whom, for whom, and the order in which each step was done.

Here are the conversions we'll consider:

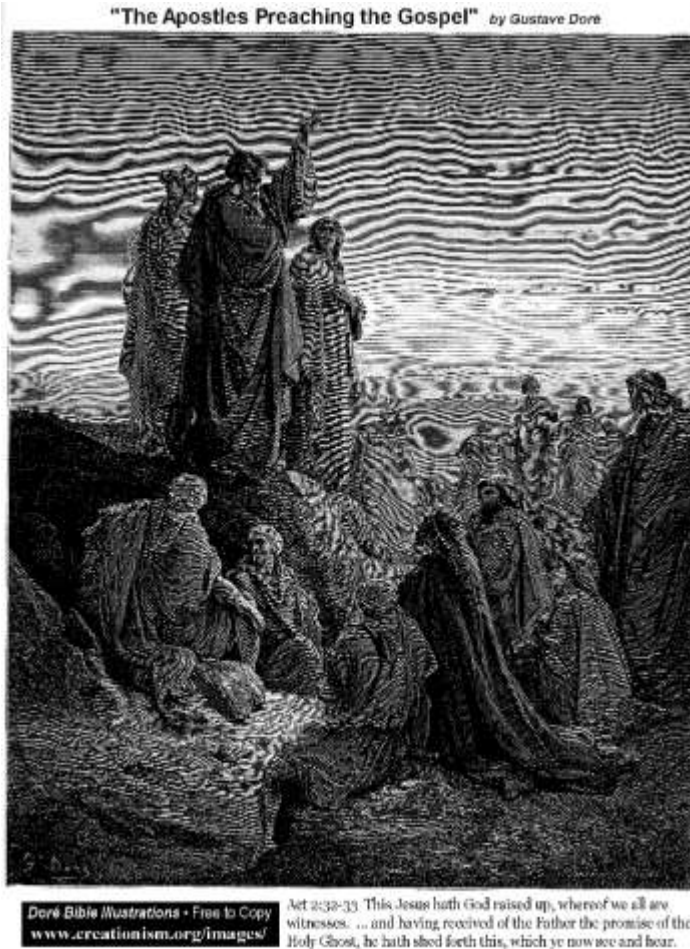
Chapter in Acts	Subjects	Preacher	Occasion
2	Jews in Jerusalem	Peter	Pentecost, AD 30
8	Samaritans	Philip	Preaching in Samaria
8	Ethiopian Treasurer	Philip	On Road to Gaza
9	Saul of Tarsus	Ananias	In Damascus
10	Cornelius and His Household	Peter	In Ceasarea
16	Lydia and Her Household	Paul	2 nd Preaching Trip
16	Philippian Jailer	Paul	2 nd Preaching Trip

Although other conversions are listed, especially in chapters 3 and 4, we won't explore them in detail because details of the conversions are not given. Likewise we won't consider the attempted conversions in chapters 24 and 26.

Peter Preaching to Jews in Jerusalem on Pentecost, AD 30

The twelve apostles had been instructed to wait in Jerusalem until they received power from on high (Acts 1:4, 8). The Holy Spirit descended upon them in fulfillment of God's promise and the apostles went forth to preach to the assembled multitude (Acts 2:1-12). The crowd didn't know what to think of the way the apostles were speaking and supposed the men were drunk (Acts 2:13). But Peter arose and assured them that the apostles were not drunk but had received the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of prophecy (Acts 2:15-21). Peter went on to explain that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had just recently crucified, had arisen from the dead (Acts 2:22-24). Peter explained the deep significance of the resurrection. How it boldly demonstrated that Jesus was unique among the prophets, and was, in fact, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2: 25-36). The assembly believed Peter's teaching and were convicted that they had been complicit in the death of God's messiah. They asked what they should do, and Peter told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:37-38). With many other words he exhorted them to save themselves from their

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perverse generation (Acts 2:39-40). Those who heard and believed were baptized; about 3000 people that day (Acts 2:41). The new converts enjoyed their relationship with God and one another. They learned, ate, and worshipped together (Acts 2:42-46). And, daily, God added to the church those who were saved (Acts 2:27).

So in Acts chapter two people heard a sermon, believed what they heard, then they were baptized for the remission of their sins. At the right is a table that we'll use to keep track of what we find in each instance.

Columns on the right indicate the chapter of the Book of Acts where the conversion is recorded. The column on the left lists the different actions which formed the

Action\Chapter	2
Preaching	✓
Believing	✓
Repentance	✓
Baptism	✓

conversion. Checks indicate the actions listed in the conversion.

Philip in Samaria

As he was dispersed from Jerusalem along with all other believers except the apostles, Philip went down into Samaria and proclaimed Christ to the people there (Acts 8:4-5). The people listened to what Philip said and watched the signs he performed (Acts 8:6-7). When they believed the word Philip preached both men and women were baptized (Acts 8:12).

Action\Chapter	2	8
Preaching	✓	✓
Believing	✓	✓
Repentance	✓	
Baptism	✓	✓

Ethiopian Treasurer

An angel told Philip to leave Samaria and travel down to the road that ran from Jerusalem to Gaza (Acts 8:26). As Philip arrived at that place he saw a man, an Ethiopian court official, traveling along the road (Acts 8:27). Philip heard him reading from the scriptures and asked him if he understood what he read (Acts 8:30-31). The

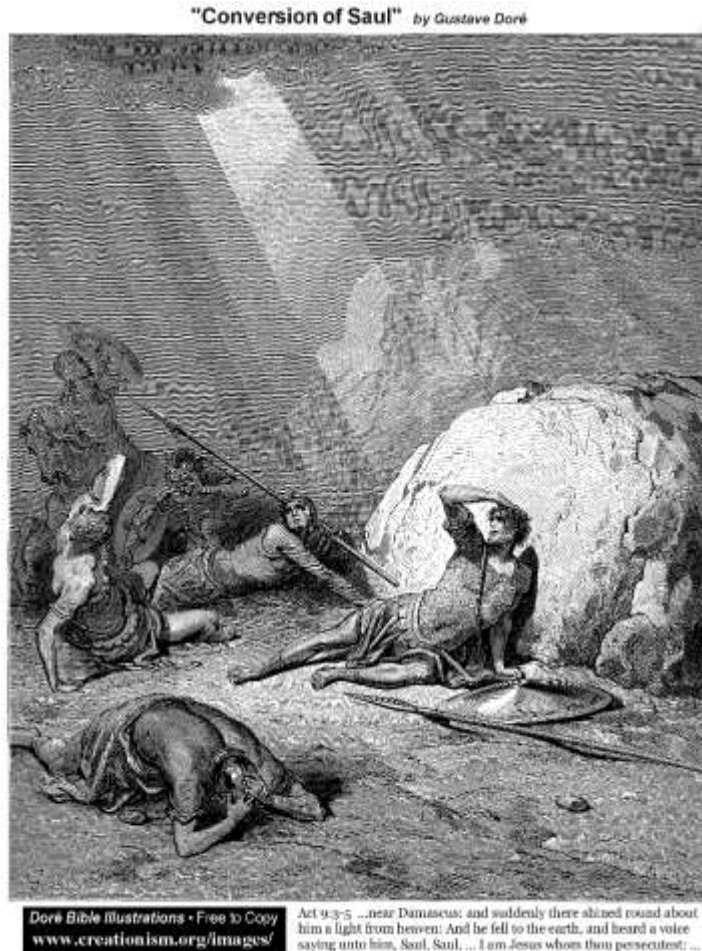
Action\Chapter	2	8	8
Preaching	✓	✓	✓
Believing	✓	✓	✓
Repentance	✓		
Baptism	✓	✓	✓

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treasurer said that he didn't understand and he invited Philip into his chariot to explain the passage to him (Acts 8:31). Philip began at the passage the treasurer was reading (which was Isaiah 53:7-8) and preached Jesus to him (Acts 8:32-35). Now, we don't have record of all Philip preached that day; just the simplest outline. But we can infer some of what Philip taught. He must have taught that baptism is the next step for a believer. Because as they continued along and found water the treasurer asked to be baptized (Acts 8:36). So both Philip and the treasurer went into the water and Philip baptized the treasurer (Acts 8:38-39).

Saul of Tarsus on the Road to Damascus

Saul of Tarsus, a very devout Jew, thought that Christianity was heresy so he persecuted Christians (Acts 9:1-2). As he travelled to Damascus for that purpose the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Saul in a bright light (Acts 9:3) and asked him why Saul persecuted Jesus (Acts 9:4). Saul asked who was speaking and Jesus revealed that it was He (Acts 9:5). Jesus went on to tell Saul that he should go into Damascus where he would be told what to do next (Acts 9:6). Saul, blinded, continued into Damascus and spent three days fasting (Acts 9:8-9). Then Ananias came to Saul, healed him of his blindness, preached to him, after which Saul was baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 9:17-18; Acts 22:16).



Action\Chapter	2	8	8	9
Preaching	✓	✓	✓	✓
Believing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Repentance	✓			✓
Baptism	✓	✓	✓	✓

Peter Preaches to Cornelius in Caesarea

Cornelius was instructed to get the Apostle Peter and listen to what he had to tell him, which he accomplished without delay (Acts 10:1-8). When Cornelius' messengers found

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Peter he immediately went back to Caesarea with them (Acts 10:17-23). When Peter arrived he found Cornelius and his household assembled to hear what Peter had to say (Acts 10:24-27). Peter then preached to those assembled Acts 10:34-44). And when they heard, they were baptized (Acts 10:48).

Action\Chapter	2	8	8	9	10
Preaching	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Believing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Repentance	✓			✓	
Baptism	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Paul Preaches to Lydia in Philippi

The Apostle Paul was sent to preach in Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10). When he arrived in Philippi he learned that Jews in that area met by a river to worship (Acts 16:11-13). As Paul preached to the women there they heard what he said and were baptized (Acts 16:14-15).

Action\Chapter	2	8	8	9	10	16
Preaching	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Believing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Repentance	✓			✓		
Baptism	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Paul Preaches to Lydia in Philippi

After being beaten and imprisoned in Philippi the Apostle Paul was singing in his cell late at night when an earthquake occurred (Acts 16:22-26). The jailer awoke to find the prison doors open (Acts 16:27). The punishment for a Roman soldier or jailer losing a prison placed in their charge was death (Acts 12:19). So to avoid public execution the jailer drew his sword to kill himself (Acts 16:27). In fact the prisoners had not been lost, and Paul called out to keep the jailer from committing suicide (Acts 16:28). The jailer brought Paul out of the cell and asked Paul what he needed to do to be saved (Acts 16:29-30). Paul told him that he needed to believe and went on to preach Christ to the jailer and his household (Acts 16:31-32). The jailer first tended to Paul's wounds then was baptized (Acts 16:33).

Action\Chapter	2	8	8	9	10	16	16
Preaching	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Believing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Repentance	✓			✓			✓
Baptism	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Summary

Note the pattern for New Testament conversions to Christ. People heard the word of God preached to them. We know these people were not immature, either infants or the very young, because it said they were men or women (as opposed to boys and girls) and they heard, that is, they understood, the good news that was preached to them. Infants and the very young can't understand the gospel. When they believed they were sorry for the wrong that they had done and were baptized without delay. And baptism in the New Testament was an immersion or burial in water. We know that from the meaning of the word *baptism* and from the conversion of the Ethiopian. Remember? They went down into the water for the baptism. You don't have to go into the water to sprinkle someone. That is the pattern for becoming a Christian as the apostles made Christians.

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Application

How does your conversion to Christ compare with those in the Book of Acts? If you heard a preacher teach the gospel, then believed it, were sorry for what you had done wrong, then were immersed, you became a Christian in harmony with this pattern and are a Christian, indeed.

However, if your conversion differs in key points you might want to take corrective action. For instance, if you were sprinkled instead of immersed you should be immersed. We have no example in scripture of a person being sprinkled for baptism. If you were baptized as a youth and later taught why you were baptized, that is a concern. We don't see any examples in the New Testament of people being baptized before they were taught.

If the idea of being re-baptized seems odd to you, know that we have an example in the Book of Acts of people being re-baptized. The apostle Paul came upon some disciples who had been baptized improperly. He taught them the truth and then baptized them again (Acts 19:1-5).

An Analogy

If you long considered yourself a Christian but have just discovered that your baptism was incorrect, I know how you feel. It happened to me a few years ago. I had been active in church for years and considered myself a devoted disciple of our Lord. But a friend showed me the material I've just shown you and I knew I needed to be baptized the Biblical way.

An analogy comes from the game of baseball. Do you know what happens if a person hits a homerun then misses a base while running the base path? If a player on the opposing team tags him before the next pitch is thrown the runner is out. Even though he hit a homerun and ran the bases, if he misses just one base he is out and his run doesn't count. Missing a base seems like a small thing, a mere technicality, but it makes a big difference.

There is something he can do, however. If he realizes his mistake and goes back and tags the appropriate bag, he is safe and all is well.

When a person who is devoted to our Lord and Savior learns that they didn't become a Christian the New Testament way it is just like that player who missed a base. If you've discovered something amiss in your conversion make it right, right now. Bring your conversion into harmony with the scriptures, and know with confidence that you are a child of God.

Questions or Comments

In this brief article I have set forth the Biblical pattern for becoming a Christian. If you have a question or comment I would be glad to discuss this further. Please write to me.

Jeff Smith: haymarketcofc@live.com