

# The New Life

The Bible teaches clearly that baptism is essential to be part of God's family and to have the hope of everlasting life in His kingdom. That was the message in the last part of this series. But what happens after baptism? What comes next? This part of our series looks at the practical and spiritual aspects of this new life.

In Acts chapter 2, a great number of people followed the apostles' advice and were baptised. They were not then left without guidance and support. Verse 42 tells us that after they were baptized:

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers.*

These four things are essential parts of true Christians' lives.

## Essential beliefs

The apostles' teaching was based on what Jesus taught, which was founded on the Old Testament. If all the New Testament verses that depend on the Old Testament were removed from our Bibles, there would be little left; and what remained would not make much sense. The only way for us to stay faithful to the apostles' teaching is for us to read from the whole Bible regularly, preferably every day.

There is a suggested Bible Reading Planner included in each December issue of *Glad Tidings*. You can request this on our web site or by post – all the details are on the back of this magazine. By following it you will read all of

the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice, each year. When you



have a question, you will often find the answer as you continue to read, because the Bible contains its own explanations. You are also very welcome to send your query to one of the addresses in this publication.

Very few of us can read the Bible in its original languages, which are Hebrew and Greek plus a little Aramaic. We depend on translations. It is best to use a translation that keeps as close as possible to the language used by the writers, not a loose translation or paraphrase. That way you are getting as close as you can to the inspired words of God rather than being presented with the opinions of a translator, who could be biased. The translations mostly used in *Glad Tidings* are the New King James and English Standard Versions, which try to stay close to the original text.

## Christian Fellowship

The converts in Acts were not left on their own after they were baptised.

They met together to support and encourage each other in their new lives. As ‘brothers and sisters’ in the Lord Jesus they rejoiced to be members of God’s family. They studied God’s word together and helped each other in many ways – including preaching to others:

*And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people (Acts 2:46–7).*

## **Breaking of Bread**

The New Testament contains four records of the last meal that Jesus shared with his followers before his death. You can easily read the accounts for yourself in Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22 and 1 Corinthians 11:24–29. At the end of the meal we read that Jesus...

*...took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:19–20).*

Jesus told us to do this as the right way to remember him and contemplate his sacrifice. It is his direct command and so we should obey it regularly. The Apostle Paul advised that at these times we should examine ourselves individually, to search our own hearts and motives, face up to our failures, and resolve to serve God better until Jesus returns as king (read 1 Corinthians 11:23–29).

## **Prayer: How We Speak to God**

It gives God pleasure when we pray to Him sincerely:

*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to Him (Proverbs 15:8).*

We can pray to Him as individuals or as a group. Our prayers show that we believe He is our Creator, that He knows our thoughts, and that He desires to help us. By prayer we thank Him for all He does for us. We show Him that we really do believe His promises and want more than anything else to be part of them, in His mercy. We confess our sins (all the times when we fail to live as Jesus did), and we ask Him to forgive us and guide our lives. We tell Him that we have forgiven all the people who have sinned against us in the past, and that above all we want Him to set up His Kingdom here on earth. Jesus himself gives us guidance in ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ found in Matthew 6:9–13.



*This is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us (1 John 5:14).*

Gradually our whole life can become like a prayer to God and we value His mercy more and more. This spiritual growth comes if we seek to live new lives now, seriously trying to follow the example Jesus left us.

## **Living a New Life**

Jesus was asked *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”*

His answer was this: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:36–40).*

Jesus knew that if we really obeyed these two simple rules, as he did, we would do all the good things and avoid all the bad things without having to think too much about details. Sadly, though, human nature means that all too often we want to go our own way.

Jesus obeyed his Father because of his love for Him, but he received a great reward, and if we follow him he will share it with us!

*Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him (Hebrews 5:7–9).*

## **Serving Others**

Even Jesus himself found it difficult to always put God first and to think of others rather than himself – although he did manage it. For instance, when he was very tired and sad because John the Baptist had been executed, he found a quiet place to rest and talk with his followers. But when the crowds followed him with all their needs and problems, Jesus put his own needs aside and served them. You can read about it in Mark 6:31–45. To his followers Jesus said:

*Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:26–8).*

## **A New Creation**

The Bible says: *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).*

One of the meanings of baptism is the death of the old life and the birth of a new life – a new creation. Baptism is the way that we start our service to God, and it is the key to the new life,



but its meaning is symbolic. In and of itself it does not change us. It is not the end but the beginning. The challenge is to really change our way of life, and accept Jesus as the loving Lord of our lives.

Many of the new converts in Corinth came from abhorrent, sinful backgrounds and they had to work hard to change their habits. Paul wrote to them:

*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).*

Only by reading God's word regularly, prayerfully and thoughtfully, will our minds be transformed, and then our lives can be changed and become nearer to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Members of God's Family**

All of this is made easier if we can do it with others who share our faith. We can learn, pray and develop together, helping each other where we can. In the same way as those believers in Acts 2, Christians should meet together to read the Bible, to Break Bread together and to preach the message to others. All of this builds towards growing into a family in Christ, which is what 'fellowship' really means. In some places this may be dif-

ficult, although modern technologies make communication possible for fellow-believers who live far apart.

The right approach is to make every different part of our lives orientated towards God, following the example of Jesus. All of our work, study, leisure or family activities can and should be influenced by being part of God's family. Writing to Christians in Philippi, Paul wrote:

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Philippians 4:8).*

If our daily activities are in harmony with 'these things', we are truly 'living new lives' now. If not, then we can start to put them right. Paul puts it beautifully in the Letter to the Colossians, speaking of figuratively dying to the old way of life, and then focusing on the things to do with God, with the prospect of eternal life:

*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:1-4).*

**John Woodall**

*Bible Quotations from the English  
Standard Version*