

Saved: God's Plan of Salvation, Teacher's Guide

Week 7: Baptism for the Forgiveness of Sins

Acts 2:36–41

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson sits on holy and contested ground: the first gospel sermon and the first response to it. Doctrinally, Acts 2:36–41 is foundational because it gives us, on the very first day of the church, the divinely authorized answer to the question “what shall we do?” Peter’s reply, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins,” presents baptism as the God-appointed response of faith through which a penitent believer receives the forgiveness Christ purchased. Your task is to let the text say what it plainly says, while guarding it from two errors: the idea that baptism is a meritorious work earning salvation, and the idea that it is merely a symbol added after a person is already forgiven. The phrase “for the forgiveness of your sins” will not support the symbol-only reading; baptism here looks forward to forgiveness, not back to it.

Two further doctrinal points deserve attention. First, this passage displays the whole pattern of response that the study has been building: the crowd heard the word, believed it (they were cut to the heart and asked what to do), were called to repent, and were baptized; confession of Jesus as Lord and Christ is the very substance of the sermon they received. Hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized; the apostolic answer is all here. Second, Pentecost is the birthday of the Lord’s church and the establishing of the kingdom. The saved were “added” (vv. 41, 47), and to be saved is to be added to the one body. This is consistent with our conviction that the kingdom came with power at Pentecost (Mark 9:1; Acts 2), not in some future earthly reign; Christ is reigning now as “both Lord and Christ.”

Aim the lesson at the heart as well as the head. The crowd was “cut to the heart,” and that piercing is the goal: that students would feel afresh the weight of who Jesus is and the wonder of forgiveness, and respond. For any who have never obeyed the gospel, this is among the clearest and warmest invitations in all of Scripture; be prepared to help. For the forgiven, lead them to live as people genuinely washed and added to the family of God.

Question 1

Student Question:

Peter’s sermon climaxes with the declaration that “God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (v. 36). Why is this the high point of the whole sermon, and what does it mean to declare that the crucified Jesus is now both “Lord” and “Christ”?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Show why verse 36 is the climax. Peter's whole sermon has built from prophecy and the resurrection toward this verdict: the Jesus they crucified has been exalted by God as "both Lord and Christ." It is the conclusion the evidence demands and the hinge on which the hearers' response turns.

Define the two titles. "Lord" (kyrios) declares His deity and sovereign authority; "Christ" (Messiah) declares Him the long-promised Anointed King. Together they announce that the crucified one now reigns. This is the content of the good confession from Week 5, now proclaimed publicly by an apostle.

Highlight the sharp personal edge: "whom you crucified." Peter does not let the crowd hold the gospel at a safe distance. The exalted Lord is the very one they rejected. This collision of Christ's glory and their guilt is what cuts them to the heart.

Connect to the present reign of Christ. Because God has already made Him Lord and Christ, Jesus reigns now from the right hand of God (Acts 2:33–35). His kingship is a present reality to be confessed, not merely a future hope to be awaited.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Verse 36 as the verdict the whole sermon drives toward
- "Lord" (deity, authority) and "Christ" (the promised King) together
- The personal edge: the exalted Lord is the one "you crucified"
- The present reign of Christ from God's right hand (Acts 2:33–35)
- The collision of Christ's glory and human guilt as the heart's piercing

Discussion Prompts

- Why is "Lord and Christ" the climax of Peter's sermon?
- What do the titles Lord and Christ each declare about Jesus?
- What does it mean that Jesus reigns as Lord and Christ right now?

Question 2

Student Question:

The crowd was "cut to the heart" when they realized the truth about Jesus and their own guilt. When the gospel cuts that deeply, it always demands a response. Where in your life has God's truth recently pierced you, and how have you responded, with action, or with excuses and delay?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses the phrase "cut to the heart." The gospel, rightly heard, wounds before it heals; it pierces our defenses and exposes our need. Ask students whether they still let it cut, or have grown calloused.

Name the danger of familiarity. Long-time church members can become inoculated, able to hear the most staggering truths without a flicker. Pray and aim for fresh piercing, not mere information.

Drive toward response over reflection. The crowd's being cut led immediately to "what shall we do?" Help students notice their own pattern: when truth pierces them, do they act, or do they admire the feeling and then make excuses and delay?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel as a word that pierces before it heals
- The peril of gospel-hardened familiarity
- Conviction meant to produce response, not mere reflection
- Discerning our pattern of action versus excuse and delay

Discussion Prompts

- When did the gospel last truly cut you to the heart?
- How can long familiarity dull us to truths that should astonish us?
- When you are pierced by truth, do you tend to act or to delay?

Question 3

Student Question:

To the question "what shall we do?" Peter answered, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (v. 38). Walk through Peter's answer step by step. Why is it significant that this clear, specific response was given on the very first day the gospel was ever preached?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Walk through Peter's answer phrase by phrase. "Repent" (turn from sin, Week 4), "be baptized every one of you" (personal and universal), "in the name of Jesus Christ" (by His authority and into Him), "for the forgiveness of your sins" (the purpose), "and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (the accompanying blessing). Nothing here is vague.

Stress the significance of the timing. This is the inaugural gospel sermon, delivered by an inspired apostle holding the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:19), answering the first sincere question ever asked of the church. If ever an answer carried divine authority and clarity, it is this one. Whatever Peter said here is the pattern.

Note what Peter did not say. He did not tell them to pray a prayer to receive forgiveness, nor did he tell them they were already saved by believing and should be baptized only as a sign. He told

penitent believers to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Let the absence of the “sinner’s prayer” be felt; the apostolic answer is different.

Tie it to the whole plan. This single verse contains the response the entire study describes, presupposing the hearing and believing already evident in the crowd. It is the plan of salvation in miniature, spoken on day one.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Peter’s answer phrase by phrase: repent, be baptized, in His name, for forgiveness, receive the Spirit
- The authority and clarity of the inaugural gospel sermon (Matthew 16:19)
- What Peter did not say: no “sinner’s prayer,” no baptism as mere later symbol
- Acts 2:38 as the plan of salvation in miniature
- The first sincere question answered with God-given clarity

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that this clear answer came on the church’s very first day?
- What does each part of Peter’s answer mean?
- What did Peter not tell the crowd to do, and why is that significant?

Question 4

Student Question:

Three thousand people that day did not merely agree with Peter; they “received his word” and were baptized (v. 41). Is there a step of obedient response to the gospel that you know you should take but have been putting off? What is keeping you from doing it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question turns on verse 41: they “received his word” and “were baptized.” Receiving the word meant acting on it that very day. Ask students whether there is a known step of obedience they have been postponing.

Address the universal human tendency to delay. The crowd did not say, “we will think it over.” Three thousand obeyed immediately. We, by contrast, are skilled at intending to obey later. Name the cost of delay: hearts harden, convictions fade.

Press for the specific step and its obstacle. Whether it is baptism itself, a reconciliation, a confession, or a surrendered habit, name it and name what is in the way. Then encourage one concrete movement this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Receiving the word as immediate action (v. 41)
- The danger of intending to obey “later”
- Naming the postponed step and its specific obstacle
- The hardening effect of delay

Discussion Prompts

- What step of obedient response have you been putting off?
- What is actually keeping you from taking it?
- What would it look like to respond today, as the three thousand did?

Question 5

Student Question:

Peter says to be baptized “for the forgiveness of your sins” (v. 38). What does this teach us about the purpose and meaning of baptism, and how does it fit with everything Scripture says about forgiveness coming through the blood of Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open the key phrase: baptized “for the forgiveness of your sins.” The little word “for” points forward to a purpose, in order to obtain. The same construction appears where forgiveness is the goal. Baptism here is the appointed occasion at which the penitent believer receives forgiveness, not a celebration of forgiveness already possessed.

Harmonize with the blood of Christ. Forgiveness is purchased by the blood of Jesus and by nothing else (Ephesians 1:7; Matthew 26:28, His blood poured out “for the forgiveness of sins,” the very same phrase). Baptism does not rival the blood; it is the divinely appointed point at which the cleansing power of that blood is applied to us. Acts 22:16 makes the connection explicit: “be baptized and wash away your sins.”

Address the common objection. Some argue “for” means “because of” (baptized because already forgiven). But the identical phrase in Matthew 26:28 describes Christ’s blood shed “for the forgiveness of sins,” and no one supposes His blood was shed because forgiveness already existed. Consistency requires the forward-looking sense in both.

Keep the wonder central. The point is not a technical argument but a glorious reality: in this act, the believer’s sins are genuinely washed away by the blood of Christ. Forgiveness is not a vague hope but a definite gift received at a definite place.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “For the forgiveness of sins”: a forward-looking purpose, not a backward-looking sign
- Forgiveness purchased by Christ’s blood alone (Ephesians 1:7; Matthew 26:28)

- Baptism as the appointed point where the blood is applied (Acts 22:16)
- The parallel of Matthew 26:28 answering the “because of” objection
- Forgiveness as a definite gift received at a definite place

Discussion Prompts

- What does the phrase “for the forgiveness of your sins” tell us about baptism’s purpose?
- How does baptism for forgiveness fit with forgiveness being through Christ’s blood alone?
- How does Matthew 26:28 help us understand the word “for” in Acts 2:38?

Question 6

Student Question:

Forgiveness is one of the deepest needs of the human heart. What would change in the way you carry yourself day to day if you were fully assured that in Christ your sins have truly been washed away and forgiven? Where do you still live as though your guilt has the last word?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the gift of forgiveness into daily life. Many believers intellectually affirm forgiveness yet live under a quiet, ongoing sense of guilt and unworthiness. Speak to that gently.

Help students name where guilt still rules. It may show up as perfectionism, an inability to receive love, harshness toward self or others, or a haunting by past sins God has already washed away. Forgiveness received changes the posture of a life.

Anchor assurance in the right place. Confidence rests not on our feelings or performance but on the promise of God and the blood of Christ applied in our union with Him. Invite students to preach the fact of their forgiveness to themselves where guilt still speaks.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gap between affirmed and experienced forgiveness
- How unresolved guilt shows up (perfectionism, harshness, haunting)
- Assurance grounded in God’s promise and Christ’s blood, not feelings
- Living from forgiveness rather than under guilt

Discussion Prompts

- What would change if you were fully assured your sins are washed away?
- Where do you still live as though your guilt has the last word?
- How can you preach your forgiveness to yourself where guilt still speaks?

Question 7

Student Question:

Luke records that those who received the word “were added that day, about three thousand souls” (v. 41), and the Lord kept adding to their number (v. 47). What does it mean that the saved were “added,” and how does this show that responding to the gospel brings a person not only forgiveness but membership in the one body, the church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open the word “added” (vv. 41, 47). The saved were not left as scattered individuals; they were added to a community, and Acts 2:47 says the Lord Himself did the adding. To be saved is to be brought into the one body.

Teach the birth of the church. Pentecost is the day the Lord’s church began. The kingdom Jesus said would come “with power” (Mark 9:1) arrived; Christ now reigns and gathers His people. Salvation is therefore never merely private; it is entrance into the people of God.

Connect baptism and the body. “By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). The same act that unites us with Christ (Week 6) unites us with His people. There is no being joined to the Head while remaining apart from the body.

Apply the high view of the church. Because to be saved is to be added, faithful participation in the local congregation is not optional decoration but the ordinary shape of the saved life (Acts 2:42). Guard against the modern individualism that wants Jesus without His church.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “Added” by the Lord to the one body (vv. 41, 47)
- Pentecost as the birth of the church and the coming of the kingdom with power (Mark 9:1)
- Baptism into Christ as baptism into the one body (1 Corinthians 12:13)
- Salvation as entrance into the people of God, never merely private
- A high view of the local congregation against modern individualism

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the saved were “added,” and who did the adding?
- How does being saved connect a person to the church, the one body?
- Why is “Jesus but not His church” foreign to the New Testament?

Question 8**Student Question:**

Peter said the promise was “for you and for your children and for all who are far off” (v. 39). Who in your life is “far off” and needs to hear that this same promise is for them? What is one

step you could take this week to carry Peter's answer to someone who is asking, even quietly, "what shall I do?"

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question turns the promise outward. "For all who are far off" means the gospel was never meant to stop with the first crowd. Ask students to picture specific "far off" people in their own lives.

Reconnect with Week 2. Faith comes by hearing, and people hear because someone tells them. Peter's clear answer is the message we get to carry; we are not asked to invent it, only to deliver it.

Aim at one concrete step toward one person: an invitation, an honest conversation, an offer to study. Many around us are quietly asking "what shall I do?" and have never heard a clear answer.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The promise "for all who are far off": the gospel's outward reach
- Carrying the apostolic answer, not inventing a message (connection to Week 2)
- Picturing specific "far off" people in our lives
- One concrete step toward one person this week

Discussion Prompts

- Who in your life is "far off" and needs to hear this promise?
- What keeps you from sharing the clear answer Peter gave?
- What is one step you could take this week toward that person?

Question 9

Student Question:

Peter commanded baptism "for the forgiveness of... sins," yet Scripture is equally clear that forgiveness is by the grace of God through the blood of Christ, never earned by anything we do. How does Acts 2:38 present baptism as the God-appointed response of faith, the moment a believing, repentant heart receives the forgiveness Christ purchased, rather than as a meritorious work that earns salvation or as a mere symbol added after a person is already saved? And what does it mean that this same day, with these same words, the Lord's church began and people were added to it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, and it brings the study's central tension to its sharpest point. Hold two truths together without flinching. First, Acts 2:38 commands baptism "for the

forgiveness of... sins,” presenting it as the God-appointed moment at which a penitent believer receives forgiveness. This is not optional, and it is not a sign of forgiveness already received; the text points forward to forgiveness, not back.

Second, forgiveness is by grace through the blood of Christ, never earned. Establish this firmly so no one hears works-righteousness. The crowd contributed nothing to their redemption; the blood was shed, the price was paid, the gift was ready. Baptism is the empty hand by which the penitent believer receives what Christ alone accomplished. It is response, not merit; receiving, not earning.

Now resolve the apparent tension explicitly, because students will feel it. How can baptism be “for forgiveness” and yet not a meritorious work? Because being baptized is not an achievement that places God in our debt; it is submission to the way of grace He appointed. A condemned prisoner who accepts a pardon by walking out the opened door has not earned his freedom; he has received it in the appointed way. So with the believer at the water: he earns nothing, he receives everything. The same Peter who said “be baptized... for the forgiveness of your sins” never imagined he was teaching salvation by human merit, and neither should we.

Show that this is the climax of the whole pattern. Hearing (Week 2), faith (Week 3), repentance (Week 4), confession (Week 5), and baptism (Weeks 6–7) are not five separate works stacked up to earn heaven; they are the single, indivisible response of a heart laying hold of Christ. Baptism is where that believing, repenting, confessing faith receives the forgiveness Christ purchased. To make baptism a meritorious work misreads the whole; to make it an optional symbol guts Peter’s plain words.

Finally, draw out the ecclesial and kingdom point. On this same day, with these same words, the Lord’s church began and the saved were added to it (vv. 41, 47). To obey the gospel is to be forgiven and to be added to the one body over which Christ reigns as Lord and Christ now. Salvation and the church are not separable. End with assurance and joy: the same answer Peter gave still stands, and the same Lord still adds the saved to His people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Baptism “for the forgiveness of sins” as the God-appointed point of receiving forgiveness
- Forgiveness by grace through Christ’s blood alone, never earned
- The resolution: receiving a pardon in the appointed way is not earning it
- Hearing, faith, repentance, confession, baptism as one response, not five merit-works
- Rejecting both works-righteousness and the optional-symbol view
- Pentecost as the birth of the church: the saved added to the one body (vv. 41, 47)
- Christ reigning now as Lord and Christ; the kingdom present, not merely future

Discussion Prompts

- How can baptism be “for forgiveness” and still not be a work that earns salvation?

- Why is accepting a pardon in the appointed way different from earning it?
- How does this day show that being saved means being added to the Lord's church?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over this scene, the piercing word, the desperate question, the clear answer, the three thousand saved and added to the church. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you to respond this week. If you have never repented and been baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, what is keeping you? If you have, how is He calling you to live as one forgiven and added to His people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone places the student in the Pentecost crowd and asks for their answer to "what shall I do?" Press for one specific response this week.

Discern where people are. For the not-yet-obedient, the truest response is to repent and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and this lesson is one of the clearest moments in the study to extend that invitation warmly; be ready to help today. For the forgiven, the response is to live as one truly washed and faithfully added to the body.

End with the promise and the Person. The promise is "for you," and the Lord who was "made both Lord and Christ" still adds the saved to His people. Let students leave moved by the wonder of forgiveness and belonging, not merely informed about a sermon.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Answering "what shall I do?" with one specific response this week
- The clear invitation to repent and be baptized for the not-yet-obedient
- Living as forgiven and faithfully added, for the believer
- Response anchored in the promise "for you" and in Christ the Lord

Discussion Prompts

- What is the one specific way you will respond to this gospel this week?
- If you have never repented and been baptized for the forgiveness of your sins, what is keeping you?
- If you have, how is Christ calling you to live as one forgiven and added to His people?