

A Biblical Study of WATER BAPTISM

This is a study of water baptism and its significance in the life of a believer. There are different traditions about baptism, but our purpose is to go to the scripture to see what the Bible says concerning baptism. The scripture reveals what baptism is and how it was done.

Water Baptism

What are three things that are important in becoming a Christian? We see from Acts 2:38 *"And Peter said to them, 'Repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Three important things in becoming a Christian are:*

1. repent
2. be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins
3. receive the gift of the Holy Spirit

What did Jesus say about baptism?

Mark 16:15,16 *"And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.'" "*

Matthew 28:19 *"Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy*

Spirit."

Jesus gave the commandment to be baptized. He also gave the commandment to his disciples to baptize those who would become disciples. It is important to be baptized according to the words of Jesus.

Baptism Defined

To understand the meaning of baptism, and what takes place when one is baptized, it is significant to look at the words "baptism" and "to baptize" from a Greek dictionary. The word baptism comes from the Greek word, BAPTISMA. It means the process of emersion, submersion and emergence. It comes from the Greek word, BAPTO, which means, to dip. The phrase, to baptize, comes from the Greek word, BAPTIZO. It is a frequent form of BAPTO, meaning to dip. It was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another. According to the Greek, the use of the term baptism, meant a complete submerging.



The Significance Of Water Baptism

We see the significance of baptism in water from the scripture Romans 6:3-6. *"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death. Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too, may walk in the newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."*

In baptism a person identifies himself with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It says in Colossians 2:11,12 *"And in Him you were also circumcised, with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead."*

When we are baptized, it is like the circumcision, or the removal of the body of flesh, being buried with

Him in baptism. Also, in baptism, you are raised up with Him through faith in the working of God. Baptism identifies a person with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is allowing the old man (the self or the sinful nature) to die and be buried under the water, and coming back out of the water, as in resurrection, to live in newness of life. Therefore, there is the emersion, the submersion and the emergence.

Baptism by emersion is symbolic. It is symbolic of what has taken place inside an individual's heart. When a person is baptized in water they are identifying themselves with the person of Jesus Christ. They are saying, "I was crucified with Christ and I died with Christ, and as Christ was raised from the dead, now I will live in newness of life." In baptism, a person is saying that Christ has become their Savior and Lord.

Baptism in the New Testament

How did people react who received the Word of God?

Acts 2:41 *"So then, those who had received His Word were baptized, and there were added that day, about 3,000 souls."* When Peter preached the Word of God, those who received his word were baptized.

What did the people of Samaria do after they believed Philip's teaching?

Acts 8:12 *"But when they believed Philip, preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the*

name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike."

What did the Ethiopian eunuch desire after he heard the message of Philip?

Acts 8:35-37 *"And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this scripture he preached Jesus to him. And as they went along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'Look, water! What prevents me from being baptized?' and Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'"*

In what way was the eunuch baptized?

Acts 8:38,39 *"And he ordered the chariot to stop and they both went down into the water; Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away and the eunuch saw him no more, but went on his way rejoicing."*

Baptisms in the New Testament were all done by emersion, submersion and emergence. They went down into the water and came up again. The water represented the grave where burial takes place.

What did the Philipian jailer do after believing Paul's message?

Acts 16:29-33 *"And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas. And after he brought them out, he said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' and they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved, you and your household.' And they spoke the Word of the Lord to him together*

with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household."

When was he baptized? It says, immediately, that very hour. When were those who heard Peter's message baptized, in Acts 2:41? It says they were baptized that same day. Note, the lack of delay between believing and being baptized. So also we should be quick to respond to God's Word in obedience.

In what name did Jesus tell the disciples to baptize?

Matthew 28:19 *"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."*

In what name did the disciples baptize?

Acts 2:38 *"Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."*

Acts 8:14-16 *"Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen upon any of them. They had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."*

Acts 10:48 *"And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."*

Acts 19:5 *"And when they had heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."*

What the disciples did was not contradictory to what Jesus told them to do. Jesus said to baptize in

the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The disciples had the understanding that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ was the fullness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Just as, in Him, all the fullness of deity dwells. Having the same understanding as the disciples, we baptize in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In some circles the validity of baptism is based upon the words spoken over you as you are baptized. For instance, some would say, "Unless you were baptized in Jesus' name, you were really not baptized. If you were baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you need to be re-baptized for the other baptism would not be valid."

What determines the validity of the baptism is not the words pronounced over you (although it does need to be done according to scripture), but your heart and attitude as you are being baptized. In your heart, you are agreeing that the sinful nature is being buried with Christ, that you are being raised up into newness of life, no longer a slave to sin.

God's Way of Salvation

The scripture has an order to it upon which God gives, and we receive, all things. That order is mercy, grace, faith and works. God sees us in our sinful humanity and in our inability to earn His favor in any way, and He has mercy. The mercy of God leads Him to respond to us with grace. Grace is the basis of all He has given.

We, however, do not automatically become the beneficiary of God's grace, unless we receive it. This is done by simple faith, believing and accepting in our hearts. The normal response of faith is works. It is, in fact, a part of true faith. Without works, it is not real faith. This is the doing part, the action part of true Christianity and true discipleship. Works are a display of faith.

So, for salvation, we see the mercy of God on sinful man. We see the grace of God given in Jesus' sacrifice for forgiveness of sin. Man receives God's grace by simple faith alone. Then, as a result of his faith, man responds in obedience to God's Word.

Baptism is a matter of obedience to faith after one has received God's grace. This act of obedience is not simply a take-it-or-leave-it issue. While it isn't essential for salvation, it is certainly expected of the believer.

Baptizing Children

It is the practice of many churches to baptize infants a few weeks after they are born. The basis of this belief, is that through the baptism, God does an act of grace in the life of the baby, giving that baby spiritual life.

At this point beliefs vary. Some believe that no matter how the child responds to the Lord as an adult, this person will be saved, because they were once baptized. Others believe that although the child has received spiritual life, they must be nurtured in the ways of the Lord, to

a point where they can consciously determine for themselves to follow after God. If not, they will lose that spiritual life that was received at baptism.

Your question may be, "If I was baptized as an infant, in the church that I grew up, was that a valid baptism? Have I been baptized according to the command of Jesus, or do I need to be baptized again?"

The Bible must be the foundation for our beliefs and our practices. In New Testament times, the typical Christian baptism was that of a believer. In Acts, baptism was the regular response of those who heard or received the Word, those who repented and believed. A major meaning of the word baptism, found throughout the New Testament, is its symbolic representation of identifying with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. With the basis that baptism is an outward sign of what has already taken place in the heart of a believer, baptism does not determine the destiny of any person. What determines it is what has taken place in the heart.

Therefore, one who has accepted Christ, recognizing that he has died with Christ and was raised a new man with Christ, has salvation. If he dies before he is baptized, he is still saved. Yet, this does not excuse a person from responding to the command of Jesus.

Also, since baptism is an outward sign of what has taken place in the heart, what is the purpose of baptism before one can make that decision of faith in his heart?

When should a child be baptized?

There is a time, in the life of a child, where there is no conscious recognition of something being good or evil. We see examples of this in scripture. In Deuteronomy 1:39 Moses was speaking to the Israelites who had disobeyed God by not going into the Promised Land and he says, *"Moreover, your little ones, who you said would become a prey, and your sons, who this day, have no knowledge of good or evil, shall enter there. And I will give it to them, and they shall possess it."*

In Isaiah 7:14-16 we see prophecy of Jesus, and it says, *"Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a virgin will be with child, and bear a son, and she will call his name Emanuel. He will eat curds and honey at the time he knows enough to refuse evil and choose good. For before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken."*

This says that even in the life of Jesus, there was a time in his early years when he would not know enough to refuse evil and choose good. The time of coming into a conscious realization of good and evil is what we call the age of accountability. This is when a child, or young person, becomes accountable for their actions because they understand the difference between good and evil. At this time a child can make a conscious decision to live for Christ, to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord.

The age that this happens varies between children. Some will have that consciousness at a very early

age. Others will not have that consciousness until they are older. There is no set age of accountability. There is no set age for a child to receive the Lord, or to be baptized.

Although a child is born into this world with the sinful nature, yet that sinful nature does not bring its death blow into spiritual death until that child can acknowledge right and wrong.

Paul said in Romans 7:9 *"And I was once alive apart from the law but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died."* Spiritual death comes at a point of consciousness of sin. That is the point where a child can choose to make Jesus his Savior because he can acknowledge his own sinfulness and his need for a savior.

Some question whether a young person, who has accepted Jesus into his heart, should be baptized until they can more fully understand its significance. Young people will often respond with a desire to be baptized because they have heard or read about it and they want to be obedient. One who is seeking baptism for this reason should not be denied it even if they do not fully understand all its meaning. It is important, however, to continue to follow up with such a one to teach and train about the significance of what they have done.

Some believe that baptism is an initiation of an individual into the church or into the body of Christ. Therefore, baptizing infants is the good intentions of believing parents, to initiate that child into the church, the body of Christ, into Christianity. However, the Bible

speaks of one way of coming into the kingdom of God. Jesus spoke in John 3:3 *"Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* Being born again is the initiation into the body of Christ. Without that, one cannot enter, even if he has been baptized.

Salvation is based on the grace of God and our receiving His grace through faith. Then, we respond in obedience and identify ourselves with Christ through baptism. Baptism is our public profession that I have identified myself with Christ, I have been crucified with Christ, buried with Him and raised up with Him to walk in this new life as a redeemed child of God. The appropriate time for baptism is after a person has made this conscious decision.

It is important that we become obedient to the simpleness of God's Word and Jesus' command *"That he that believes and is baptized shall be saved"*.