

Questions about BAPTISM

There can be no doubt that baptism is an important Bible topic. It is directly mentioned about 100 times in twelve different books of the New Testament. Jesus spoke of it after He rose from the dead, telling His apostles, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19). It is thus Christ’s will that His followers go and teach (make disciples of) all nations, baptizing those who believe and receive His teaching.

The teaching of the Bible about water baptism is not complicated. Unfortunately, throughout history men have often given conflicting answers to questions dealing with baptism, such as how does it take place, who should receive it, and what is its purpose. This has left a great number of people confused. We ask you carefully to consider what the New Testament says about these vital topics. While it is true that various other kinds of baptism are mentioned in the Scriptures, in this tract all references to “baptism” are to water baptism.

SPRINKLING, POURING, OR IMMERSION?

Modern dictionaries of the English language indicate that baptism can be administered by one of three ways: by sprinkling water, by pouring water, or by immersion in water. Today some religious groups accept all three of these as a valid means of carrying out baptism, whereas others insist that only one of these three is acceptable.

What is it that sprinkling, pouring and immersion have in common? Each of them involves the use of water. But do each of them meet all the Bible criteria for baptism? Let us turn to the Scriptures and see:

- ◆ Water is the proper element for baptism (Acts 10:48).
- ◆ John the Baptist baptized in Aenon “because there was much water there” (John 3:23).
- ◆ Baptism involves coming to a place where there is water (getting water and the one to be baptized together, Acts 8:36).
- ◆ Baptism involves a going down into the water (Acts 8:38).
- ◆ Baptism takes place in water (Acts 8:39).
- ◆ After baptism there is a coming up out of the water (Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:39).
- ◆ Baptism involves a burial (“Buried with him in baptism,” Colossians 2:12).
- ◆ Baptism involves a resurrection (Rom. 6:4,5).

The above facts from the Bible clearly point to the conclusion that baptism is a complete immersion of the body in water, and not simply sprinkling or pouring water on someone. The New Testament was written in the first century in the Koine Greek language. The Greek word “baptisma,” from which we get our word “baptism,” is defined simply as “immersion, submersion” (*Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, page 94).

Again, we recognize that many people in our time consider sprinkling and pouring to be legitimate “forms” of baptism. The truth, however, is that Scriptural baptism is an immersion, and using sprinkling or pouring as substitutes for immersion is something that men decided to do long after the Bible was written. Our obligation is to speak and act “as the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11), not the traditions of men.

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

Not every person is a proper candidate for baptism. That is, not every person is one who ought to be baptized. According to the New Testament what kind of person can be baptized? What must he do or be able to do before baptism? Consider the example of the approximately 3000 Jews who were baptized on

the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Before they were baptized *they first heard the word of God preached*, as Peter said to them, "Hearken to my words" (2:14; 2:37). Before they were baptized *they had knowledge about Jesus Christ*, for Peter said to them, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (2:36). Before they were baptized *they were pricked in their heart* (2:37). Before they were baptized *they could speak or communicate*. They were able to ask, "Men and brethren what shall we do" (2:37)? This question also shows that before being baptized *they had a desire to know what one must do to be saved*.

Further, we learn that those who were baptized on that great day *were sinners*. We know this is true because Peter commanded them to repent (2:38), and only sinners can and need to repent. Those who were baptized *understood the purpose* of what they were doing. Peter said, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins ..." (2:38). In addition, those who were baptized did so *as a result of having gladly received the word* (2:41).

Other accounts of baptism in the book of Acts give us the following additional helpful information: those who were baptized were men and women (Acts 8:12), they themselves expressed a desire to be baptized ("What doth hinder me to be baptized," 8:36), they confessed their faith in Jesus as the Son of God (8:37), and rejoiced after being baptized (8:39).

Friends, the above references from the Bible make it plain that the only ones who ought to be baptized are those people who are sinners, have already heard the gospel preached, understand and believe the gospel, are willing to repent of their sins, confess their faith in Jesus Christ, and truly understand the purpose of baptism.

WHAT ABOUT BAPTIZING BABIES?

Should infants be baptized? Some believe that they should, some say that they should not, and yet others think that it does not really matter. What do the Scriptures indicate?

As we have already seen, there are certain things that a person must be able to understand and do before being baptized. Babies and small children simply cannot do these, and thus they are not proper candidates for baptism.

Some groups have traditionally practiced what is called "infant baptism." Is the baptism of babies found in the Bible? If so, in which book, in which chapter, and in which verse do we read about it? Friends, there is no such passage! If in the New Testament there is no command to baptize infants, no example of such, or no implication that God allows it, then we must conclude that infant baptism is not from God, but from men. Where is the New Testament authority to baptize infants? There is none! Therefore, it is not in harmony with God's will to baptize them.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF BAPTISM?

The word of God gives such a plain answer to this question that all who will take the time honestly to investigate the Scriptures will see the Lord's truth. Before Paul was baptized, a servant of Jesus told him, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). According to this statement, what was the purpose of Paul's baptism? Was it not to wash away his sins?

Twenty chapters before this it is recorded that on the day of Pentecost the Jews who assembled in Jerusalem asked the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" What did the Holy Spirit say to them through the apostle Peter? "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). Were those people told to be baptized because they *had already received* the remission of sins before they were baptized, or were they told to be baptized *in order to have* their sins remitted? Peter's statement makes it obvious that the purpose of their baptism was to receive "the remission of sins."

What about Mark 16:16? Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” According to these words of Jesus, who shall be saved? One that just believes? No. One that just is baptized? No. Rather, one who believes AND is baptized.

In the New Testament there are at least six passages in which mention is made of both (1) baptism and (2) salvation or the reception of a blessing from the Lord. *In each case* baptism is mentioned first as the condition of receiving the blessing (or entering a new relationship). The following chart summarizes this:

Mark 16:16	Baptized	Shall be saved
Acts 2:38	Be baptized	Remission of sins
Acts 22:16	Be baptized	Wash away sins
Romans 6:3,4	Baptized	Into Christ, newness of life
Galatians 3:27	Baptized	Into Christ
1 Peter 3:21	Baptism	Does now save

Please take a Bible and read all of these passages yourself. You will see that they do *not* teach that baptism in water is the *only* condition of salvation. But they do show without a doubt that in God's plan one must be baptized in water in order to be saved or to have his sins cleansed.

It is significant that baptism is mentioned in each recorded case of conversion in the book of Acts. This in no way implies that baptism is more important than faith or repentance. But, it does show that, just like faith and repentance, baptism is an essential condition of salvation.

Baptism is not “all” that one must do to please the Lord. After a person has been baptized in harmony with what the Scriptures teach, then he is in Christ (Romans 6:3,4). But as a new creation or babe in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), he is just beginning his life as a Christian. After baptism he has the solemn responsibility to faithfully serve Jesus all the days of his life.

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