

Baptism

by Roger Hillis

Baptism is a Bible subject that has been perverted from almost every possible angle. There is more confusion on this topic than perhaps any other. People have misunderstood the purpose of baptism, the action of baptism, the subjects of baptism, and other unique qualities of the one baptism (Ephesians 4:5).

Let it be clearly known that this misunderstanding is not God's fault. "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace ..." (1 Corinthians 14:33). The scriptures are clear on each of these various aspects of baptism.

The Action of Baptism

The religious world in general considers three different actions as acceptable baptism. These actions include immersion, sprinkling, and pouring. Immersion and sprinkling seem to be the most common. The question is -which does the Bible teach? Which is the one baptism? The Bible teaches clearly that scriptural baptism can only be immersion. Think on the following considerations.

John the Baptist practiced immersion. The Bible reveals that John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13-17). Note the teaching of verse 16 in this context: "Then Jesus, when He had been baptized, came up immediately from the water ..." The Christ, in His baptism, was immersed. Another example of John's baptism is recorded in John 3:23. "Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized." Why was "much water" required? Because John immersed!

The scriptures also point out plainly that baptism must be a burial (Colossians 2:12). Perhaps this is best understood with a look at Romans 6:4-5. "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection." This passage from Romans 6 gives us a clear illustration. Jesus Christ was dead, buried, and then raised to new life. We are dead in sin, buried in baptism (immersion), and raised in newness of life. What is required for a burial? It requires a complete covering. A dead person is not buried by sprinkling some dirt on him. Neither is an individual "buried by baptism" when a few drops of water are sprinkled on his or her head.

Once again, the Bible has provided us with an excellent example. Read the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:27-40. Notice verses 38 and 39. "So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away ..." There really is no doubt that the Bible teaches immersion as true scriptural baptism. The only problem comes when people (however sincere they may be) deny the simple truth of God's word and seek to follow the doctrines of men (Matthew 15:8-9).

The Purpose Of Baptism

The Bible teaches us all that we need to know concerning the purpose of baptism. If we will accept and follow God's word on this subject (and all others), we will be obedient to His doctrine (Romans 6:17).

Forgiveness Of Sins

It is through the simple act of immersion that all of a person's sins are forgiven. "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38). The word "remission" means the same as "forgiveness." These people were sinners; they had crucified Jesus. When they asked Peter what to do, he told them to repent and be baptized.

Ananias told Saul the same thing. "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16). Baptism took away his sins! It is God's method whereby man is purified and cleansed of his unrighteousness (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Entrance Into Christ

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:26-27). Baptism is the final step of obedience that places us INTO Christ. This gives us the right to "put on Christ" or to wear His name. As obedient disciples, we are then called Christians (Acts 11:26). We wear no other name. Faith is UNTO righteousness (Romans 10:10). Repentance is UNTO eternal life (Acts 11:18). Confession is UNTO salvation (Romans 10:10). But baptism is INTO Christ. Note Romans 6:3 -"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"

NOT To Join The Church

Baptism is not some type of an initiation that all church "candidates" must undergo before final acceptance. It is not a "church of Christ" ordinance. Baptism is a law of God. When 3000 people obeyed the gospel on the day of Pentecost, they were then "added to the church" (Acts 2:47). The Lord did the adding, not the disciples. Upon immersion, God adds the saved to the church. The individual does not JOIN the church.

Salvation

"There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 3:21). How much plainer could God state it? BAPTISM SAVES US! The cleansing power is not in the water itself. It is BY THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST. That is where baptism receives its power. Colossians 2:12 states: "Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." God has put that saving power in water baptism. The same God who raised Jesus from the dead has dictated that BAPTISM SAVES!

The Subjects Of Baptism

Who should be baptized? What does the Bible teach about the acts which precede immersion? Is there a certain age when one should be baptized? What do the scriptures reveal about the subjects of baptism?

The Bible points out that those who BELIEVE should be baptized. In Mark 16:16, Jesus Christ spoke these words: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." The Savior clearly states that believers should be baptized. Recall

the incident of the Ethiopian nobleman. Philip was with him in the chariot, preaching about Jesus to him. "Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?' Then 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.'" (Acts 8:36-37). Verse 38 continues on to teach that, upon this confession, the eunuch was immersed.

Also we read that those who REPENT should be baptized. On Pentecost (Acts 2), a multitude of Jews asked Peter what they should do (because they had crucified the Son of God). "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (verse 38). Repentance is a change of mind that results in a turning from sin and a turning toward God.

HOW OLD should a person be to be baptized? Certainly this would vary from individual to individual. There comes a point in everyone's life when he begins to truly understand right and wrong. When a person attains that knowledge and chooses to do wrong, he has committed a sin (1 John 3:4). He then has reached an age when he (or she) is accountable for that sin. Upon knowing of the salvation offered by the gospel of Jesus Christ, the person must believe, repent and then be immersed for the forgiveness of all of his sins. If the person continues in that state, without obedience, sin will cause his soul to be lost eternally (Romans 6:23; James 1:15)

Conclusion

Baptism is the final step in the primary obedience of a sinner. It must be preceded by faith (Mark 16:16), repentance (Acts 2:38) and confession (Acts 8:37).

Have you been humbly, penitently immersed into Jesus Christ in order to have your sins washed away by His saving blood? If not, why not obey Him while you still have the opportunity? Examine your life and "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."
(Philippians 2:12).