

LET'S TALK ABOUT BAPTISM

Is baptism just a necessary ritual, or does it have a deeper meaning?

Jesus said:

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

Sounds serious, should we heed the words of Jesus?

What is baptism? - Is it really necessary for salvation? - What about the thief on the cross? - Aren't we saved by grace, not by works? - Is there a proper way to be baptized? - How old should you be before baptism should be considered? - Can you baptize as proxy for others even if they don't know about it or want it? - Should babies be baptized? - Are there prerequisites for Baptism? - Is there a false baptism? - Why do some denominations baptize for the dead? Perhaps we should start with John the Baptist.

John the Baptist

The apostle John wrote: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light" (John 1:6).

Isaiah wrote: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isa. 40:3).

Even Malachi wrote: “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple ...” (Mal. 3:1).

John’s message must have been of extreme importance to mankind. Do we fully understand its significance? John said: “... repent you: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt.3:2). He preached repentance because the kingdom of heaven was swiftly coming and it is of utmost importance to be prepared.

In Matthew 4:12-17 we see another of Isaiah’s prophecies fulfilled, “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” (Isa. 9:2). Then Jesus repeated John’s very words, “Repent: *for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*”

Later, Jesus tells us more about His coming Kingdom, “... repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem*”

(Luke.24:47). He then told them: "... tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (vs. 49). Something big is going to happen in Jerusalem.

THE EVENTS AT JERUSALEM

The time frame now is after the cross, Jesus has been resurrected, and He is now sitting at the right hand of the Father as our intercessor. Yet, the apostles are found observing an Old Testament Holy Day. Apparently, they weren't all fulfilled and done away at the cross, as we are often told, because, "... when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one *accord* in one *place*" (Acts 2:1). They were observing Pentecost just as they had always done, but this time the full meaning of that very important day became clear.

As we read in verses two through four, a mighty wind and flames of fire came down from Heaven, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. They even spoke in other languages so that all who were present understood them in their own dialect.

John predicted it: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire (Matt 3:11).

The invasion into Satan's ill-gotten kingdom has begun, a beachhead has been established and the seed of the Father has been planted (Matt. 13:31-32). The first step in the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth has come (Rev. 21:1-3, 10). God has come to take back His own, and just as Jesus said it would, it *began at Jerusalem*.

Peter then explains who Jesus was, where he is now; the power given to Him; and then quotes Psalm 110:1. "Sit You on My right hand until I make Your foes Your foot stool" (Acts 2:22-35). Now Peter delivers the condemnation of Israel (*and the world*) to them (vs. 36). "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Finally the Jews understood who they had crucified, and their hopeless situation, so we read in verse 37: "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" "Then Peter said unto them, 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 Spirit." Notice that since the Kingdom in its infancy has come, Peter preaches a more inclusive baptism than John did. A baptism that makes us ready to

receive our comforter, the spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit; the very power of God the Father (John 15:26), which is the seed of the Kingdom.

SEVEN POINTS OF PETER'S SERMON

Peter revealed seven very important points that we should take to heart. 1. Repent (Godly sorrow). 2. Be baptized (immersed). 3. Everyone (no exceptions). 4. in the name of Jesus (not a church or denomination). 5. For the remission of sins (your sins are no longer attributed to you). 6. Receive the gift (neither deserved nor earned). 7. of the Holy Spirit (the very power of God). Peter then tells them that the promise is not only to them but to all that God calls (vs. 38).

Did you notice that Peter covered the first four doctrines of Christ found in Hebrews 6:1; repentance, faith in Christ, baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit.

REPENTANCE

First and foremost is repentance.

Jesus stressed that only those called by the Father could come to Him (John 6:44 & 65). Paul explains that repentance is to the Father and faith is to Jesus Christ. The veil (Christ) protected sinners (all mankind) from the wrath of God. Christ died in our stead, paying our death penalty; our

repentance and belief in Christ's death allows us to stand sinless before the Father. Therefore, it is the Father that does the calling, and it is by His goodness that leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Repentance comes through Christ, as a gift granted by the Father:

To Israel-

“He (Christ) is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, (in order) to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31 NASU).

To the Gentiles-

Peter's vision of unclean foods became clear when the men from Caesarea bid him to come and speak to them. Even as he was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on them. Then those at Jerusalem said, “... Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 10, 11:1-17).

To those who oppose you-

“With gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth” (II Tim. 2:25 NASU).

BUT WHAT ABOUT THOSE NOT CALLED BY THE FATHER?

"The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9). By this we know that all mankind shall have their opportunity for salvation, but in God's own way and time. (See study guides

"GOD'S INTRIGUING CYCLE OF SEVENS" also "IF A MAN DIE").

THE CALLING

Catalysts that open one's mind to the opportunity for repentance could come from: 1. Examples of other Christians. 2. Intercessory prayers. 3. Reading or hearing God's word. 4. Events, tragedies or circumstances of life. 5. Disgust and shame for the failures in one's own life, leading to Godly sorrow (II Cor. 7:10 AMP). But, all true repentance comes by the conviction of the Holy Spirit which produces Godly sorrow.

CONFESSION

A major key to true repentance is confession.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:8-9).

David's prayer is a classic of Godly sorrow. The first four verses set the tone, but read the entirety of Psalm 51 prayerfully. “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is

ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight...” Although our sins may hurt others, the sin itself is against God. It is His laws that we transgress.

Our problem is that we don't see ourselves as God sees us, and we can't unless He shows us. Pray that He will open your eyes to yourself. We must be made to know our hopeless and helpless condition before repentance can begin; but begin it must, or the next step is pointless. Belief alone is not enough. “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). Knowing this, let's go to another of David's prayers:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23-24).

FAITH

From repentance, we go to faith in Christ, the next pillar of the doctrine of Christ. “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). “...for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Peter made plain to the Jews the identity of Jesus as the Messiah and revealed to them their hopeless condition (Acts 2:36). The Ethiopian eunuch as told in Acts 8:26-39 was aware of His condition, but did not know the Messiah until Phillip was sent to explain Isaiah 53 to Him.

Who are you sent to?

We have been given the knowledge that Jesus, our Messiah, has come in the flesh and died in our stead. After three days and three nights was raised (Matt. 12:40), and became the first born of many to follow. When? *At his coming* (I Cor.15:23)! Don't keep it a secret.

BAPTISM, WHEN?

If you have truly repented and believe in Christ, you are ready for baptism; but not until then. However, once that has been established, it should not be delayed, but done as soon as reasonably possible. Some require a waiting period, or a course in their denomination's doctrine, or even a probation period. However, consider the Bible examples, they were without delay. Three thousand were baptized on the day of Pentecost. The Ethiopian eunuch stopped his caravan and was immediately baptized; even the jailer and all his family was baptized that very night (Acts 16:33).

Paul tells us “... the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Therefore, if still in the flesh you cannot please God” (Rom 8:7-8). Doesn't it make sense that the sooner the carnal mind is imbued with the Holy Spirit the better, so any delay would only be a hindrance? The entire salvation process is initiated by the Conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit. There have been occasions of receiving the Holy Spirit before Baptism, but never before repentance and faith. Even then, Baptism was administered as soon as possible.

WE HAVE HELP

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (I Cor. 10:13). You don't need a spiritual college education in Bible knowledge to repent and be baptized into Christ.

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

Back to the question; is baptism just a necessary ritual, or does it have meaning? It is a public profession of faith that symbolically pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and your commitment to Him. It is a new beginning for the believer, symbolizing the death of

the old sinning self, and the resurrection to a new and righteous spiritual life in Christ (Rom. 6:3-8, Col. 2:12).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISM

Is baptism commanded for salvation?

Answer: Mark tells us, “Preach the gospel to every creature and he that believes *and is baptized*, shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be dammed” (Mark 16:15-16). Also, Jesus said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, *baptizing them* in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). Baptism is the first commandment given to the new believer after repentance and belief in Christ. Belief is proven by obedience. You will not receive the Holy Spirit without obedience. “And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that *obey him*” (Acts 5:32).

What about the thief on the cross?

Answer: He may have been one of the early ones baptized and then fallen away. We don't know; but, he obviously had a repentant attitude, and he believed in Christ, and since it was a physical impossibility to be baptized, Jesus accepted his sincerity. It's not the ritual; it's the sincerity of the believer that qualifies one for salvation. The thief's

request was an excellent example of a real sinner's prayer.

**What if the minister that baptized you later
fell from grace?**

Answer: The one who physically baptized you was acting under the authority of Jesus Christ and on His behalf. In effect he was acting as an attorney in fact, or power of attorney. Your baptism does not depend on his righteousness; he is only the physical instrument by which it is accomplished.

**Does the one who does the baptizing have to be a
genuine minister or ordained representative of God?**

Answer: Does it seem logical that the 3000 baptized on the Day of Pentecost were all baptized by the apostles, or do you think they may have had help from those they baptized?

**I was baptized as a child and knew nothing about
repentance or who Christ was, is my baptism valid?**

Answer: Probably not, you should consider starting from the beginning, repentance, belief in Christ and being baptized.

I was sprinkled not immersed, was I really baptized?

Answer: Absolutely not, how could sprinkling picture the

death, burial and resurrection of Jesus? Biblical references were always by immersion. Even the word “baptize” means to immerse.

I was baptized into a church (or denomination), but not into the body of Christ, Was my baptism valid?

Answer: No, the final instructions Jesus gave to the apostles were to, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them *in the name* of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).

I was baptized but I did not receive the laying on of hands, did I receive the Holy Spirit anyway?

Answer: Probably not; however, there were instances where the Holy Spirit was given without the laying on of hands by the presbytery, but they were special cases (Acts 10:45-48).

I was baptized, but I really didn't understand much about it, it just seemed the thing to do at the time. Will God accept my Baptism?

Answer: That's between you and God; have your values, goals, and desires taken a new direction? Very few people know all they should know at the time they are baptized, except that Christ died for them, but there should be a hunger to learn more and a change of attitude in your life.

Some baptize for the dead, is that biblical?

Answer: I Corinthians 15:29 is easy to misinterpret if you don't understand baptism. First of all, there is no record of Paul or any of the apostles baptizing dead people. Baptizing dead people would go against all of their teaching about baptism. We know that before one can be baptized there must be repentance and a belief in Christ, so any baptism that is done without those two imperative conditions would be meaningless. Also, the one being baptized must make that decision of their own free will, or again it would be futile. There is nothing magic about baptism; it is simply an open act of obedience. If God had to save someone just because they were baptized, but without repentance and faith then He would have to save men like Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:13). God is not bound by rituals, He is a discerner of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

Therefore, we know that there is more to be understood about that verse than meets the eye. So, let's put it in context to exam the whole subject. Starting at verse 28 we read: "And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him that God may be all in all. 29 *Else* what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead? 30 "And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? 31

“I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily” 32 “If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die” (I Cor. 15:28-32).

The subject of chapter 15 is the resurrection. The word “else” ties verse 29 back to 28 where the subject is the subduing of all enemies, the last one being death (vs. 26). Baptism being a public display of your avowed faith in Christ identifies you as being a Christian to the entire world. In that place and time, as Paul points out, being a Christian puts you in jeopardy of your life. Verses 30-32 support this view in that if there is no resurrection then why be baptized and face death daily as they all were for being Christian, just live it up while you can.

Those who are baptized are baptized for the (or as if they were) dead. That is to say, that being dead in Christ they will be resurrected in Christ; and baptism being the symbol of the seal of that promise of the resurrection.

Adam Clarke's Commentary has it that believers “receive baptism as an emblem of death in voluntarily going under the water, so they receive it as an emblem of the resurrection unto eternal life, in coming up out of the

water; thus they are baptized for the dead, in perfect faith of the resurrection.”

Taking verse 29 out of context and basing a doctrine on it alone has led some to the ridiculous policy of baptizing dead people.

Paul sheds more light on our subject:

“Do you not know that your body is the temple (the very sanctuary) of the Holy Spirit Who lives within you, Whom you have received [as a Gift] from God? You are not your own, You were bought with a price [and paid for, made His own]. So then, honor God and bring glory to Him in your body” (I Cor. 6:19-20 AMP).

Jesus prayed the Father:

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21).

Can you believe it, Jesus tells us that baptised believers are one with both Him and the Father?

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All quotations are from the King James Bible unless otherwise noted.
AMP = Amplified Bible, NASU = New American Standard Bible
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