

## Lesson 9--HOW TO EXPLAIN ABOUT BAPTISM

### Lesson Text

Baptism has become one of the most controversial subjects among those claiming to be Christians. Although it is mentioned almost a hundred times in the New Testament and is reported as a part of every conversion story that is told, there are many different views about it today.

### What are some of the different positions about baptism?

Some say that baptism is unnecessary and has nothing to do with one's salvation. Others say that baptism is a command to be obeyed after one has been saved. Thus, it is a good work which Christians do. Some say baptism is required to be in their denomination but it is not required to be saved. Still others say that baptism is "for remission of sins" and must be performed even on babies so they can be saved. Some baptize by immersion, some by pouring water over a person, some by sprinkling, and others by just touching a finger in water and placing that finger on someone's head.

### How did these differences arise?

Actually, the Bible teaching on baptism is rather simple and clear. There is really not much controversy over how the early church practiced baptism. The differences in belief and practice have come as some have thought that changes from the original practice would be acceptable. Different views of salvation and a desire for convenience have figured into current views.

For our study, we will seek to know the teaching of scripture, by precept, example, and inference, about the practice of baptism. Basically there are three questions which must be asked about baptism: who should be baptized? how should one be baptized? and why should one be baptized? By answering these three questions, we can find the basics on baptism from scripture.

### 1. Who is ready to be baptized?

Of course Jesus commanded everyone to be baptized. In Matthew 28:18 He says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." The question of "Who should be baptized?" really asks, however, "Who is prepared to be baptized?" Are there prerequisites for baptism?

The scriptures say that before one can experience a valid baptism, he/she must first believe. Jesus said, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Thus, He put believing before baptism. 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." Again, belief before baptism, and here the believing is said to be in the good news about Jesus and the kingdom. Romans 10:9-10 says, "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from



the dead, you shall be saved." Believing and being willing to openly confess that faith is, then, an essential and precedes a valid baptism.

Thus, the answer to the question of "Who should be baptized?" is this: a penitent believer. Only believers in Christ who have rejected sin as their way of life can have a valid baptism.

This speaks, of course, to the point of infant baptism. Since an infant lacks the mental capacity to believe and repent, such a one cannot be a candidate for a valid baptism.

Infant baptism is based on a doctrine of "original sin" which teaches that all are born guilty of sin and must, therefore, be forgiven through baptism lest they die in sin. The Bible does not teach this. While Adam passed physical death to all humans, Christ will someday raise all humans from this death (I Corinthians 15:22). But Adam did not pass his guilt to anyone else. "The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity" (Ezekiel 18:20). The dead are judged "according to their deeds" (Revelation 20:13). So physical death comes to all from the sin of Adam but spiritual death comes to all from their own sins for "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23). Since babies are not yet capable of choosing sin, they do not transgress any of God's teachings. When they are old enough to be accountable for their own decisions, then they are capable of sin and must choose to accept God's plan for forgiveness.

So infants, having no sins, do not need to be forgiven. Since they cannot believe or repent, they cannot qualify for scriptural baptism. Since a person baptized as an infant did not do so by his/her choice, they are neither harmed or helped by it. As such a person comes to accountability, they still must meet the teaching of scripture about how to be saved regardless of what happened when an infant.

## 2. How should one be baptized?

Several forms of baptism have arisen, but every careful student of the Word agrees what the original form was immersion. The word "baptize" is the Greek word for immerse, dip, plunge, submerge. It was used by the Greeks to describe submerging a cloth under the water to dye it or to describe the sinking of a ship. The accurate way to have translated this word would have been to use the word "immerse." Thus, Mark 16:16 would read, "He that believes and is immersed shall be saved."

The word "baptism" actually is the spelling of the Greek word baptizo with English letters. Early English translators did not want to use "immerse" because some already practiced sprinkling. To translate baptizo as immerse would have been an embarrassment to them.

But there are other ways in which the scriptures make clear that baptism originally was immersion. After Jesus was baptized, he "went up from the water" (Matthew 3:16). When the Ethiopian was baptized, he is described as "going down into the water" and "coming up out of the water" (Acts 8:38-39). In both Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12, baptism is called a "burial," and "resurrection" that reenacts Jesus burial and resurrection. This picture would fail if baptism were only touching a drop of water to the forehead.



Records from after the first century make it clear that immersion was the universal practice of the church for many years. About 250, a man named Novation had water poured over him as he lay in bed because he was thought too sick to go to a baptistry. It was not until the fourteen hundreds, however, before anything other than immersion was commonly practiced.

Many churches built in Italy during the Renaissance typically had a bell tower, a separate small building with a pool for baptizing by immersion, and a meeting place.

Those who would follow the meaning of the word “baptism” would practice immersion. Those who would follow the example of the church while it was led by inspired apostles, would practice immersion. Those who would follow the clear implication of scriptures that speak of baptism as a burial, would baptize by immersion. Those who do otherwise are clearly venturing into unauthorized territory.

### 3. Why should one be baptized?

Does baptism precede or follow forgiveness of sins? Is it an “outward sign” of the “inner grace” already received? It is an act of obedience expected of those who have already been forgiven? Or is it the point at which Christ has promised to remove one’s sins?

Answering these questions is vitally important. If one believes that our salvation in heaven depends on our obeying what the Bible says about forgiveness of sins, then doing the right thing about baptism is certainly crucial.

Many scriptures place forgiveness of sins or salvation following the point of baptism. Mark 16:16: “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” Salvation follows belief and baptism. Peter told those who had indicated their belief by asking what to do to “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). This passage is particularly clear because it says that just as forgiveness of sins follows repentance, it also follows baptism.

The case of Paul is especially enlightening on this point. As he recounts his own conversion before the Jews who were trying to kill him, he tells that he saw the vision on the road and, thus, was convinced by the evidence that Jesus was the Christ. As Christ told him to do, he went into the city of Damascus where he fasted and prayed. These actions, along with the fact that he did not persecute Christians as he had come to do, indicate his repentance. When, at this point, Ananias came to him, he told him, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins.” Paul had believed but still had his sins. He had repented but still had his sins. Now, to complete his obedience, he must be baptized to wash away his sins. Not until baptism, then, were his sins forgiven.

Romans 6:5 adds a significant element to this point. It says that in baptism we are “united with Him in the likeness of His death.” We must have a connection with the death of Jesus for it was in His death that He shed His blood to take our sins away. Baptism is this point of contact with the blood of Christ. Without baptism, we have not had contact with His blood that saves.



Bible writers often used analogies to teach about baptism and every analogy clearly demonstrates that God's grace covers our sins only after we have been baptized, and not before. Galatians 3:27 says we are "baptized into Christ." If baptism is the point at which one enters Christ, then prior to baptism he was out of Christ, thus not yet in a saved state. This same verse also uses the picture of laying aside old clothes and putting on new ones. At baptism, the verse says, we "put on Christ." Before baptism, we wear the old clothes; after baptism we wear Christ.

In Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12, Paul uses the analogy of a burial and resurrection to picture baptism. A burial signifies the end of an old life and a resurrection the start of a new one. This transformation, these verses say, take place at baptism.

Ananias spoke to Paul, Acts 22:16, of washing away his sins in baptism. Thus, as one would wash a dirty garment to make it clean, God washes us in baptism to take away the filth of our sins. Not until baptism, then, is one washed clean from sins.

In I Peter 3:21, Peter makes a similar analogy. Here he likens baptism to the time Noah was transported to a new world by water. Thus, the waters of baptism transport us out of the old world of sin and into new world of righteousness. It is at baptism that we move from the old to the new. Thus, he says, "baptism now saves us."

Jesus spoke to Nicodemus of the new beginning in the kingdom as a birth, a birth which He said was "of the water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). Thus, again, the water of baptism is the point at which something very significant occurs: we are "born again." We must be born again, but this birth takes place when we contact the water of baptism and the Spirit gives us new life.

All of these analogies teach the same lesson: baptism is the point of demarcation between the old and the new, between lost and saved. Baptism is the point of birth of water and spirit, the point of change from outside of Christ "into Christ," the point at which one lays aside the old clothes and puts on Christ, the point at which the "dirt" of sin is washed away to make one clean, the point at which one buries the old and is raised to the new, the point at which we leave the old world and are saved in the new one.

Of course, the water of baptism has no power in itself. It is the grace of God that saves through faith. Yet, God has decreed that He will extend that grace that forgives our sins to those who have believed in Jesus, have repented of their sins, and who have submitted to His command to be baptized into Christ. This is the plan of God for bestowing His gift. We should not fall short of it or seek to change it.

So, three basic questions about baptism Who should be baptized? A penitent believer. How should one be baptized? By immersion. Why should one be baptized? For forgiveness of sins.

