



Water Baptism

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WATER BAPTISM

Baptism which involves the application of water to the body of a person, remains one of the most significant practices of the Christian church. Widely differing interpretations of the act exist among Christian groups. Different views exist on:

- the IMPORTANCE of baptism
- the NATURE of baptism
- the CANDIDATES for baptism
- the MODE of baptism
- the baptismal FORMULA

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM

Matthew 28:19 - Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost (Spirit)

There are those who believe that the ordinance of baptism is an unscriptural practice for today, as baptism, in their opinion, was strictly a Jewish custom which ceased after the resurrection of Christ. The scriptures, however, show the opposite.

- Jesus said 'make disciples of all the nations' (Matt.28:19)
- Samaritan converts (non-Jews) were baptized (Acts 8:5,12)
- Philip baptized an Ethiopian (Acts 8:27-38)

The book of Acts is full of accounts of people who, after receiving Christ, were baptized in water (Acts 2:38; 8:16, 36-39; 10:47-48; 16:33; 19:1-5), proving that the practice of water baptism continued after the resurrection of Christ.

Reading through the New Testament you will find that not only was there great emphasis placed on the ordinance by Christ and the apostles, but you will be struck by the suddenness with which believers responded.

Acts 8:41 - Then those who received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Acts 9:18 - Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

Acts 22:16 - And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, ...

It is imperative that believers, upon their acceptance of Christ as Lord and Saviour, follow on through the waters of baptism, as it is not just a mere human ritual but a direct command of Christ.

2. THE NATURE OF BAPTISM

Three major views on the nature of baptism exist among Christians. Baptism is either seen as:

- a SACRAMENT
- a COVENANT
- a SYMBOL

2.1 Baptism as a Sacrament

According to this belief, the person baptized receives remission of sins, and is regenerated. The act of baptism itself produces a change in the life of the believer.

2.2 Baptism as a Covenant

The covenantal view regards baptism as a sign and seal of God's covenant with man. Baptism serves the same purpose for New Testament believers that circumcision did for Old Testament

believers. For the Jews, circumcision was the external and visible sign that they were within the covenant that God had established with Abraham. Converts to Judaism (or proselytes) also had to undergo this rite. But now under the new covenant baptism instead of circumcision is required.

2.3 Baptism as a Symbol

This view stresses the symbolic nature of baptism by emphasizing that baptism does not cause an inward change or alter a person's relationship to God in any way. Rather than producing regeneration, baptism always comes after faith and the salvation that faith produces. It serves as an outward indication of the inner change which has already occurred in the believer's life. Baptism becomes a sign by which a person shows publicly his identification and commitment to Christ.

2.4 Baptism is NOT Salvation!

It is unfortunate that some equate baptism with salvation, believing that without the practice of baptism a person cannot be saved. This of course runs contrary to the New Testament, and to the whole teaching of salvation.

a. The Bible and Baptism

Nowhere in the Bible is baptism administered to wash away sin, or complete salvation. Not one time does any scripture say that sins cannot be remitted without baptism. Nor does the Bible say, without water baptism sins cannot be remitted, but it does say,

"...without the shedding of blood is no forgiveness." (Hebrews 9:22)

Many Jews and Gentiles were saved both before and after Christ's crucifixion and nothing is said of baptism. (John 7:31; 8:30-31; 11:45; 12:11; 42; Acts 9:42; 11:21; 13:12, 43-48; 14:1; 17:4, 12, 34; 19:18)

Those who come into the error of baptismal regeneration, usually confuse the following passages of scripture with water baptism.

I) John 3:5 and 1 John 5:8

In John 3:5 and 1 John 5:8 the water to which Christ and John referred is the word of God, not water baptism, as proved by John 15:3; 17:17; Ephesians 5:26; 1 Peter 1:18-23 and James 1:18.

II) Galatians 3:27

In Galatians 3:27 it is a baptism into Christ and not into water.

III) Romans 6

In Romans 6 it is a baptism into Christ and into His death and not into water.

IV) 1 Corinthians 12:13

In 1 Corinthians 12:13 it is a baptism into the body of Christ and not into water.

b. Jesus and Baptism

Jesus never taught or practiced baptism as a means of salvation. He forgave many their sins without baptizing them.

He forgave:

- An unnamed sinner woman (Luke 7:36-50)
- A palsied man (Matthew 9:1-8)
- A publican (Luke 18:9-14)
- Zaccaeus (Luke 19:1-10)
- A nobleman and his house (John 4:49-53)
- A thief on a cross (Luke 23:43)

Jesus said: *"For this is my blood of the covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matthew 26:28). Scripture is abundantly clear that purification from sin is through faith in the blood of Christ and not water. (Romans 5:9; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:22; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 1:5)

c. Paul and Baptism

Paul was converted, filled with the Spirit and healed before he was baptized in water. (Acts 9:17-18) Paul stated that God had not sent him to baptize but to preach the gospel. 1 Corinthians 1:17) He even thanked God that he had baptized none except Crispus and Gaius and the house of

Stephanus (1 Corinthians 1:14)

d. Peter and Baptism

Cornelius and his household experienced salvation apart from baptism (Acts 10:30-32; 44-48). Cornelius was told to send for Peter who would tell him words whereby he and his house would be saved (Acts 10:6; 11:13-14). There is not one reference to baptism in water to be saved. Cornelius and his whole household were saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit when Peter preached to them and afterward were baptized in water.

2.5 Baptism does NOT replace circumcision

Not one scripture refers to baptism as replacing the circumcision, or as being a seal of God's covenant with man. Man enters into a covenant with God through the exercise of personal faith in Christ, and is thereby sealed with the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

2.6 Baptism is an Act of Identification

Romans 6:4 - *Therefore we are 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 should walk in the newness of life.*

2.7 Identification with Christ

Baptism symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and our identification with it. Our old sinful life without God which is spoken of as being now dead to the believer, is identified with Christ in His death and burial. Our new life with which we are made alive to God through the new birth is identified with Christ's resurrection.

Baptism symbolizes the beginning of spiritual life. It is therefore performed once only and is not a re-occurring event in the life of the believer.

2.8 Identification with Believers

Not only does baptism symbolize the identification of the convert to Christ, it is also a visible means of identifying the baptismal candidate with the local body of believers. As he becomes a member of the body of Christ, he should also identify himself with the local assembly. When an individual responds to the call of salvation, he should, as the New Testament believers did, be baptized and be initiated into the Christian community. (Acts 2:41)

3. THE CANDIDATES FOR BAPTISM

Another issue over which Christian groups disagree is the question of who should be baptized. Two major positions concerning the candidates for baptism that exist, namely:

- INFANT baptism
- BELIEVERS baptism

• 3.1 Infant Baptism

Those groups who adhere to the sacramental view of baptism see the baptism of infants as necessary since unbaptized infants who die cannot enter heaven. If this fate is to be avoided, they must be baptized in order to remove the guilt of their sins and receive new life.

Supporters of the covenantal view of baptism also consider the baptism of infants as being necessary. Since baptism has, in their opinion, now replaced circumcision, it is natural that it should be administered to children, as circumcision was administered to infants in the Old Testament.

• 3.2 Believers Baptism

Believers baptism is restricted to those who actually exercise faith toward God. This would exclude infants who cannot possibly have such faith. The proper candidates for baptism are those who already have experienced the new birth on the basis of their personal faith and have given evidence of this salvation in their lives.

3.3 Baptism requires Repentance and Faith

In the New Testament repentance and faith came first, followed by baptism. The condition required for baptism was personal, conscious faith. Without this, baptism was not administered. (Acts 2:37-41; 8:12; 10:47; 18:8; 19:4-5)

Nowhere in the Bible is there a direct command nor is there any evidence of people baptizing infants. In every instance in which the specific identity of the persons was known, the persons being

baptized were adults. The practice of infant baptism became prominent when churches began to teach baptism to save the soul and remit sins. It was natural for those holding to this doctrine to believe that everyone should be baptized as soon as possible. Hence, infant baptism was introduced. Salvation, however, is a personal experience and children must be old enough to accept salvation before they are commanded to be baptized. Scripturally, baptism always took place after repentance and faith, never in anticipation for it. Children until they become responsible, whether their parents are Christians or not, will be taken to heaven if they die **before the age of accountability**. (Matthew 18:1-10; 19:14)

Baptism is not an act which is to be forced on anyone. It is an act in which the candidate for baptism participates willingly, and exercises personal faith in Christ.

Acts 8:36-37 - *Now as they went down on 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."*

Notice that the eunuch possessed three important requirements for baptism.

- He had a DESIRE to be baptized
- He BELIEVED on the Lord Jesus
- He CONFESSED this belief.

4. THE MODE OF BAPTISM

Another major issue is the mode of baptism - whether by immersion, pouring or sprinkling. On this issue Christian groups organize themselves into two major camps, namely:

- the PLURALISTIC position
- the IMMERSIONIST position

• 4.1 The Pluralistic Position

Holders of this view believe that immersion, pouring and sprinkling are all appropriate forms of baptism.

• 4.2 The Immersionist Position

Immersionists believe that immersion is the only valid form of baptism. The majority of immersionists practice single immersion while others perform triple immersion.

4.3 Baptism is by Immersion

• a. The Scriptures imply Immersion

John 3:23 - *Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there...*

John was baptizing in Aenon because there was much water there, that is, a sufficient depth of water for baptism and not just a bowl full to sprinkle or pour.

Acts 8:38-39 - *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...*

• b. The word 'Baptism'

The Greek word for 'baptize' is 'baptidzo' taken from 'bapto' which means to dip, immerse, to plunge, to sink, submerge and cover wholly. When wetting or washing only a part of the body, the Greek word 'nipto' is used. (Matthew 16:17; 15:3; John 13:5-14) However, 'nipto' is never used with regard to baptism.

• c. Church History

It is the testimony of the early church fathers that baptism by immersion was the only mode used. Pouring and sprinkling came about because of water shortages and as a convenience for the aged and infirm.

- **d. Reasoning**

Reasoning affirms that baptism by immersion is the correct mode for it accurately depicts the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and the believer in union with Him. It is for this reason that single immersion is preferred.

5. THE BAPTISMAL FORMULA

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

Acts 2:38 - *Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..."*

In an effort to reconcile the words of the Lord Jesus and Peter's, there has arisen fierce debating and controversy concerning the baptismal formula to be used. ie what should be said whilst baptizing an individual. One of two formulas exist, namely:

- the TRINITARIAN formula
- the ONENESS (Jesus only) formula

- **5.1 Trinitarian Formula**

Trinitarians baptize using the words of Christ found in Matthew 28:19 - 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost'

- **5.2 The Oneness Formula**

Those using the oneness formula baptize using the words of Peter found in Acts 2:38 - 'in the name of Jesus Christ'.

- **a. Baptism is in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost**

The only command given in the entire Bible to those administering the baptismal ceremony is found in Matthew 28:19. It is unthinkable that the Lord's disciples disobeyed their master's direct command. Logically, they not only baptized, but baptized "... in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." There is not a single record in the Bible, neither in any other first century book where the formula used contradicts that of Matthew 28:19.

In Acts 2:38 Peter is not referring to a baptismal formula, but commanded the people to receive baptism in the name of (by the authority and command of) Jesus Christ. By being baptized in the name of Jesus has reference not to a baptismal formula, but rather it speaks of identification with Christ. He is the central figure in baptism. Jesus is the one who died and rose again; not the Father nor the Holy Spirit. It is into His death that we are buried; and it is into His resurrection that we are raised to walk in newness of life.

6. CONCLUSION

The idea of an unbaptized Christian is simply not entertained in scripture. If you have come to a place of repentance and faith in Christ, you are commanded to receive baptism. (Mark 16:15-16)

Although baptism in itself is not your salvation, it does however, remain an integral part of your commitment and obedience to Christ.

Jesus said: "He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me...and I will love him and manifest myself to him." (John 14:21)

WHAT HINDERS YOU FROM BEING BAPTIZED?