

530 What Does the Bible Teach about Baptism?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

I received an email the other day from a viewer in Rutherford county, Tennessee, asking about baptism. He could not understand why there are so many differences on baptism and wanted to know what the Bible teaches about the subject. We should always look into the Bible to find the answer to every question. We are interested only in what God has to say on any matter. So stay with us as we look into this important matter—baptism!

From the very beginning of the church and all through the New Testament, the Bible never considers the idea of a Christian who hasn't been baptized. In fact, in the great commission of Mark 16:15-16, Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." Jesus told Nicodemus in the strongest of terms that he had to be born again. "Truly, truly, (Amen, Amen) I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

So baptism was an important matter to Jesus. On the day of Pentecost, when Peter preached about the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus from the dead, He concluded his sermon by saying, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." Acts 2:37 shows how this fact stung the people. "Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" They were responsible for the death of Jesus and felt the sting of guilt. They wanted to know how they could find forgiveness.

Peter *said* to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:38-41)

The Scriptures are very clear about how people became Christians in the New Testament. When they heard the gospel preached, they believed, repented and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Some people say about this phrase, "for the forgiveness of sins" that it means their sins were already forgiven, that is, "repent and be baptized because your sins are forgiven." But this really doesn't make sense. Why would they ask, "what shall we do?" if indeed their sins were already forgiven. What they were interested in was to get forgiveness, to be freed from their guilt.

They had awakened to the awful reality of the seriousness of their sin. 'They had killed the Son of God; their hands were stained with blood. They knew that they had sinned against their God in the most grievous way. It would be absurd to tell them they are already forgiven. It is guilty men who ask this kind of question (what shall we do?) not innocent men, desperate men who know in their hearts that they are carrying a burden with eternal consequences. Do you not think that these Jews would have done anything to have this stain removed. Their greatest desire is to be forgiven for this sin and to be reconciled to the God that they love.

In fact, a number of versions of the New Testament help us to see Peter's answer very clearly. *God's Word to The Nations, 1995*, Peter answered them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the Name of Jesus Christ so that your sins will be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

New Revised Standard Version, 1989, Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

International English Bible, 2001, Then Peter answered, "Change your hearts and each one of you must be immersed by the authority of Jesus the Messiah, so that your sins may be forgiven. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

In fact I have a list of more than a dozen recent versions which make Acts 2:38 clear that one is not forgiven until he is baptized. This becomes even more clear with the case of Saul of Tarsus in Acts chapters 9 and 22. Saul who later became the apostle Paul did not become a Christian until he was baptized into Christ.

Let's look at the story as Luke records it from Acts 9: Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He *said*, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do." (Acts 9:1-6) Acts 9:9 says that Saul was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Verse 11 tells us that he spent that time "praying." Here was a man who prayed a desperate prayer, fasting while he prayed, because of the deep guilt upon him for his persecution of the church. He was a murderer, a blasphemous, and a violent aggressor. Though he thought he was doing the right thing, Saul of Tarsus was fighting against God.

God appeared to Ananias to convince him to go to Saul and help him. Ananias was at first concerned, because he had persecuted the church. Ananias said, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16). Saul needed his sins washed away because he was still in his sins. All his fervent prayers with fasting were not enough. He needed the blood of Jesus to wash away sins. Jackie and I wash our clothes because they are dirty; we don't wash the clean ones. If Saul were clean from his vision or from prayer, why did he need to wash?

He needed to wash, because a person is not freed from sin until he/she is baptized. Paul said in Romans 6:3-7, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin."

This passage teaches us some important things about baptism. **First, we are baptized into Christ.** That's how we get "into" Christ and into his church. We are baptized into Him. In Galatians 3:26-27, Paul said, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

Second, we are baptized into his death. He shed his blood in his death to free us from sin. We are baptized into his death where we are free from sin by his blood. Revelation 1:5 reminds us that we are

“loosed” from our sins by his blood. You get to the blood by going to the water.

Third, in baptism we are buried with Him and raised with Him to walk in newness of life. Just as Jesus never saw new life until he was raised from the dead, so we don't have new life until we are raised up with him in baptism. It is only “in” Christ that the old passes away and we become new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Fourth, the old man of sin is crucified with him in baptism, so that the sin can be done away with. That's how we are crucified with Christ, by dying with him in baptism, so we can be born again! Fifth, when we die with Christ, we are freed from sin and its enslavement. By faith and baptism sin is no longer our master. Jesus is now our Lord. According to Paul, baptism is an act of faith in the working or “operation” of God (Col. 2:12-13). We submit to baptism so that God can change our lives. In baptism, God is the active one and we are passive. God works on us.

It is God who forgives us, God who takes away the old man of sin, and God who raises us up to walk in newness of life. Baptism is the marvelous time when God acts upon us to save us from sin and to cause us to be born again as His child, forever changed from that old life. In baptism, God is the Savior, the forgiver; and we are the forgiven, the saved.

One more point needs to be thought about baptism is patterned after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism, then, is a burial, a complete covering up.

The Greek word for baptize in the New Testament is *baptidzo*. According to the Greek lexicons, *baptidzo* means “to use water for purpose of renewing or establishing a relationship with God, plunge, dip, or immerse.” When Philip baptized the Eunuch, they went down into the water and came up out of the water (Acts 8:38-39). When John baptized, he found a place with “much water” (John 3:23). The baptism of the New Testament was a complete burial in water, signifying the death of the old man, and the raising of a new man pure and clean in Christ. Baptism is how we unite with Christ.

This is why in churches of Christ, we only immerse when we baptize people who believe and are repentant. Sprinkling a little water or pouring some water on someone's head is not *baptidzo*. One is baptized when he is dipped or immersed under the water. There are other words in the New Testament which mean to sprinkle or pour (*rhantidzo* & *ekcheo*). We have no authority to substitute one action for another in fulfilling God's commandments. Though one may think he has been “baptized” by sprinkling or pouring, one has not been scripturally baptized unless he/she is immersed.

The practice of the churches during the time the New Testament was written was unquestionably to immerse them in water. It was not until many years later than they began to substitute sprinkling or pouring. The question is always whether we will do it according to the teaching of Scripture or according to the traditions of men. All the

human traditions in the world cannot change the will of God in this matter or any other. Let us always put God and His will first in every matter, do Bible things in Bible ways and not be tripped up by the traditions of men.

Ananias asked Saul of Tarsus, “Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16). What are you waiting for? If you love the Lord, believe in Him, have repented of your sins, then be baptized. Don't let anything build a barrier between you and God. Obey the teaching of the Scripture by being immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins. The Lord will bless you and save you and add you to His church. Won't you do that today!

There are times when being baptized does not make any difference. When a person is baptized but does not believe in the Lord, his baptism is merely getting wet. The Hebrew writer said in Hebrews 11:6, “And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” When we were kids, my brother and I used to get out in the pool and pretend we were baptizing one another. This was play; no faith was involved. I don't believe in baptizing people who don't understand what is happening or who don't want to be baptized. Jesus said in John 8:24 “that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins.” Being baptized without faith does no good at all.

Being baptized yet refusing to repent won't do any good either. The Lord commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). Peter told the people at Pentecost to “repent and be baptized every one of you.” A person who is baptized but does not change his heart or life is fooling himself if he thinks that he is right with the living God. Repentance comes before forgiveness.

This week we are offering a pamphlet entitled, “Acts 2:38 So That Your Sins May Be Forgiven.” This free pamphlet will explain the purpose of baptism, which is so that we might have the forgiveness of sins. We'll send it to you by mail or email, or you can download it free from our website: www.God-answers.org. I'll send you one by email if you write to me, phil@God-answers.org. We believe you'll come to a better understanding of the purpose of baptism if you'll read this pamphlet.

We *do not ask* for money on this program, because all the expenses are paid by your friends at Concord Road Church of Christ in Brentwood, Tennessee. If you are in our area, worship with us some Sunday at 9 am or 6 pm. You are always welcome and wanted. If you cannot visit us, there is a wonderful congregation of the churches of Christ near you. We'd love to hear from you. Until next week, we remind you to look to God for all your answers. God bless you and we love you from Concord Road.

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