

New Testament Teaching on Baptism

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I. The Importance of Baptism

In the life of Christ. Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist to fulfill all righteousness. This marks the beginning of His public ministry. The importance of this event is seen as the voice of God acknowledges His Son, the Holy Spirit descends upon Him, and all the Gospel writers describe the scene (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21,22; John 1:29-34).

In the commands of Christ. The last words of a loved one are always held in highest importance. When Jesus left this earth, He delivered to the disciples the Great Commission. Despite the extreme brevity of the instruction, combined with an explicit statement of His full authority, Jesus commanded baptism (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16).

In the record of conversions. The Book of Acts tells of the founding and spread of the early church. One should note that each of the conversions explicitly described includes baptism (Acts 2:38,41-Pentecost; 8:32-38-Philip and the eunuch; 9:18,22:12-16 -Saul; 10:45-48-Cornelius; 16:14,15 -Lydia; 16:33,34 -Philippian jailor).

In the summary of apostolic teaching. It is to be remembered that the epistles are written to persons already Christians. Despite this fact the subject of baptism arises frequently because of its importance in the teaching of the apostles; for example, -one Lord, one faith, one baptism- (Ephesians 4:5); -For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body- (1 Corinthians 12:13); -The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ- (1 Peter 3:21).

II. The Meaning of Baptism

An act of submission-in obedience to Christ. Since man is unable to earn salvation, it is necessary that he receive God's gift on God's terms. Christ

has commanded baptism of His followers, and when man complies with this expressed will of God, he indicates a submission of his own will to God (-What shall we do? Repent, and be baptized...--Acts 2:37,38; -Then they that gladly received his word were baptized- -Acts 2:41).

A burial-in the likeness of Christ's death. God has not arbitrarily chosen that man submit to baptism. There is a deeper meaning in the act itself. As Christ fulfilled the will of God, the most important events in His life were the death, burial, and resurrection. In similar fashion, before a person becomes a Christian, he must die to sin and be buried in the water in likeness of Christ's death (-Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ buried with him by baptism into death...--Romans 6:3, 4a. -Buried with him in baptism...- Colossians 2:12).

A washing-for the remission of sins. The association of water and cleansing is universal. It is entirely appropriate that God should have chosen an act which includes water as significant to the cleansing of our souls. Although no magical quality is attributed to the water itself, God has associated the forgiveness of sins with the blood of Christ and the waters of baptism (-Repent, and be baptized.. for the remission of sins.- -Acts 2:38; -Arise, and be baptized, and was away thy sins.--Acts 22:16).

A union-with the person of Christ. Although baptism is not the only requirement in becoming a Christian, it appears at the threshold marking the entrance. At baptism, one puts on Jesus Christ (-For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.- -Galatians 3:27); in turn he is added to the body of Christ. (-Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.- -Acts 2:41; -For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.- -1 Corinthians 12:13a).

A new birth-associated with the gift to the Spirit. Even as the life of Christ did not end with His burial but led to His final victory over sin and death, so baptism for the Christian becomes the moment of new birth, a raising to the newness of life and the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit (-that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also

should walk in newness of life.- - Romans 6:4b; -Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.- -John 3:5).

III. The Action of Baptism

The language demands immersion. In each case that baptism is commanded the word baptidzo or one of its derivatives is used. The meaning of this Greek word is given as follows; -dip, plunge...- (H. B. Liddell and R. Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, 9th Printing, 1953); -dip, immerse....- (W.F. Amdt and F.W. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Literature, 1957); see also J.H. Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 1889.

The Greek language has other specific words for -sprinkle- (rantidzo) or -pour- (cheo). When the generic meaning--wash- is used of baptidzo, it necessarily carries with it the specific meaning -by immersion- (see Campbell-Rice Debate, p.99)

The circumstances describe immersion. It is noteworthy that all of the attending details of New Testament baptism fit immersion. Not only water, but much water was necessary (-And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there.- -John 3:23). Not only is the presence of water made clear, but in each case, which is made explicit, they came to the water, the water was not brought to them (-and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.- -Acts 8:38).

The figures picture immersion. Only immersion answers the demand made by the various figures drawn from baptism. It is a burial, a planting, a washing (buried with Christ-Romans 6:4; planted with Christ-Romans 6:5, (KJV); wash away thy sins -Acts 22:16; completely encompassed by sea and cloud -1 Corinthians 10:2).

History sustains immersion. Although other practices have been introduced as substitutes, history sustains that these are changes from the original of

pouring occurred in about A.D. 250. This was administered because of Novation's illness and was later called in question (Eusebius, Hist. ecel. 6, 43, 14, 15). Earlier references to practices other than immersion either give preference to immersion or do not deny the originality of immersion (The Didache, written in the second century, maintained that pouring was acceptable, but only in cases where sufficient water for immersion was not available, The Didache 7). The Roman Catholic Church is the earliest source of authority for a change from immersion. Clement V formally recognized sprinkling (but water must flow) as valid baptism in 1305.

IV. Those eligible for baptism

A believer. Although a person will never reach complete knowledge of Jesus Christ in this world, it is necessary that initial belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God precede the action of baptism. Thus a person too young to believe is too young to be baptized in accordance with New Testament example. Irenaeus, A.D. 180, provides the earliest reference to possible infant baptism (Against Heresies 2, 22, 4); but this is contrary to New Testament language, - He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.--(Mark 16:16).

A repentant believer. Intellectual assent to believe what the Scripture teaches must be accompanied with a heartfelt change of life (-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.-- Acts 2:38).

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