

Back to Basics: Baptism

Continuing with our series of back to basics lessons we will be focusing this morning on the significance of baptism by looking at God's word and determine what it says concerning baptism and the part it plays in the Gospel plan of salvation.

One overriding truth as it relates to the verses regarding baptism found within the pages of the New Testament is that baptism **always** takes place **after** belief. Therefore, an infant would not be a candidate for baptism as they have no faith and they have no sin. And if the meaning of baptism could be boiled down to one word, that word would be **identification**. Baptism speaks primarily of a personal, public identification with Jesus Christ as one's Lord and Savior.

Let's take a look at Mark 16:16. Jesus said, **"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."** Where does this verse place salvation in relation to baptism? Jesus said salvation was not until after baptism. This is much like a simple math problem of $1 + 1 = 2$. If you take away either of the "1's" from that equation then you no longer have two as the sum. Likewise, if you take away either **faith** or **baptism**, you no longer have salvation. Someone may respond by saying, "But this verse says you will be condemned if you don't believe, but it doesn't say you will be condemned if you are not baptized." The Bible does not always spell out what we have to do to be lost, but we do know that all are lost because **"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** (Romans 3:23). God's word tells us what we have to do to be saved and He expects us to realize that, if we don't do it, we will be lost. And this verse tells us we must do two things to be saved. To remain lost, you only need to omit one of them. If you don't have faith, you probably would not be baptized. And if you did become baptized but did you not have faith, then the baptism is not going to do you much good. To remain lost is easy – just don't believe and don't be baptized. To be saved is harder, but it certainly is not burdensome. You must both believe **and** be baptized.

Furthermore, the person who has a true, obedient faith will believe that baptism is necessary. Jesus said to believe the Bible because it was the very word of God. What does the Bible say? **"He who believes and is baptized shall be saved."** What if I don't believe that? Then I not only don't believe the Bible, but I am refusing to do what Jesus Christ Himself told me to do.

Note the difference between what men say and what the Bible says:

Men say: He who believes is saved, **and then he may be baptized.**

The Bible says: He who believes **and is baptized** will be saved.

Faith is essential in order to receive salvation as we have discussed in previous lessons. However, Jesus Christ also commands us to be baptized. The believer who realizes the importance of baptism but refuses to be baptized **is in rebellion to God and remains lost in his sin.**

Let's examine another passage of Scripture from God's word to see what it says about baptism: Acts 2:38. Peter said, ***"Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*** Where does this passage place the remission of sins in relation to baptism? Are sins forgiven (remitted) **before** baptism, or as a result of baptism? Note that the purpose of baptism is clearly stated: ***it is for remission of sins.***

Let's consider the people to whom Peter was speaking. In verse 36, Peter had just convicted them of the sin of killing Jesus Christ. ***"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, Whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."*** But they had great sorrow in their hearts for what they had done and they asked in the very next verse what they could do. ***"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'"*** What was Peter's response to that question? He told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. So they did not already have the remission of sins, but stood in need of receiving it. So the command to "repent" proves that these people were not already saved, but were still sinners needing to receive remission from their sins. Clearly these were not saved people. In asking Peter the question, ***"what shall we do?"*** they were asking Peter what they could do to obtain the needed forgiveness for the sins that were on their souls. And the Apostle Peter was telling them ***exactly*** what they needed to do in order to receive that necessary forgiveness. And his answer was, ***"Repent and be baptized for the remission (or the forgiveness) of those sins."***

Consider the parallel to this verse that is found in Matthew 26:28. Once again, Acts 2:38 says, be baptized ***"for the remission of sins."*** Matthew 26:28 says that Jesus' blood was shed for many, ***"for the remission of sins."*** Did Jesus shed His blood because people already had remission of sins? No, not at all. He shed his innocent blood so people who did not have the remission of sins could receive it.

Likewise, baptism is not administered because people already have remission of sins. Baptism is done so that a person who does not have the remission of sins can receive it.

Let's look at what Peter said about the significance of baptism in 1 Peter 3:21: ***"Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,"***

The Biblical story of Noah helps to illustrate how we are saved by the water of baptism. In the days of Noah, eight souls were **“saved through water.”** Noah and his family were **“saved through water.”** The flood waters destroyed the wicked of this Earth, but at the same time it also saved Noah because it bore the ark up, thus delivering up or saving Noah and his family from death. The power of baptism is not in the water but in the shed blood and the death of Jesus. However, we come into direct contact with that shed blood during the act of baptism, for it is at that point that we are clothed in the garments of Jesus Christ, as Paul tells us in our next passage of Scripture, Galatians 3:27: **“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”**

How many people did Paul say are in Christ? Just as many as have been baptized into Him. What if a person has not been baptized into Him? Then that person, by definition, would **not** be in Him.

Why is it important to be in Christ? Because forgiveness of sins is found only in Christ. **“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace,”** writes Paul in Ephesians 1:7. He then tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:10 that salvation is in Jesus: **“Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”**

Jesus says in John 5:11-12 that eternal life is in the Son of God. **“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”**

Paul makes it quite clear in Ephesians 1:3 that **all** spiritual blessings are in Christ, which means that those outside of Christ have **none** of the spiritual blessings. **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”**

As we have seen, if a person is outside of Christ, he does not have forgiveness of sins, salvation, eternal life, or spiritual blessings. So how is it that all of this is achieved? It is achieved through the grace of God when we submit in obedient faith to have our sins washed away in the watery grave of baptism. One must be baptized into Christ, or one will not receive the mercy of the Father.

Hearing, believing, repenting, and confession are all essential steps toward Christ, and as we have seen in previous lessons they are all intricately tied together. Baptism, however, **is the step that puts a person into Christ.** Before baptism, a person is still outside of Christ and still without forgiveness and all those other blessings that are in Christ. If a person wants those blessings, then he must be baptized into Christ.

The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that baptism is **absolutely essential** for salvation. The necessity of baptism was one of the most important and clear-cut doctrines of ancient Christianity.

Baptism in the Book of Romans

In Romans 6:3-4, the Apostle Paul put it this way: ***“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”***

This verse says again (as in Galatians 3:27) that we are baptized into Jesus. But here it says that we are also baptized into Jesus' death.

Why is Jesus' death important to us? Because it was in His death that He shed His blood. And it is His blood that cleanses our souls and saves us from sin! The innocent shed blood of God Himself is the cornerstone upon which Christianity is based. Now ask yourself: How do we come into contact with His shed blood? According to what we have read, we are baptized into it!

Often people who teach the necessity of baptism are accused of not believing in salvation by Jesus' blood. The truth is just the opposite. **Baptism is where the sinner first comes into contact with the blood of Christ!** Those who say you are saved before baptism are saying that you can be saved without the shed blood of Jesus Christ, because they are teaching that the sinner is saved before he ever comes into contact with the Savior's blood! That is teaching that the spilled blood and the death of the Son of God has nothing to do with salvation.

As we have seen, it is in the very act of baptism where we receive the benefits of Jesus' death.

Notice the strength of the expressions the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write. Paul says we who are the disciples of Jesus are: ***“ . . . baptized into Christ . . . ”*** and ***“ . . . baptized into His death . . . ”*** and ***“ . . . buried with Him in baptism.”*** Baptism, then, means at least 3 things in this passage alone:

1. It's a turning from the old life of sin to a new life in Jesus Christ.
2. It's a time of public identification with the **death, burial** and **resurrection** of Christ.
3. It's a total commitment to join the ranks of those who believe in Christ.

When one is baptized, one is, in fact, visually preaching the Gospel. As one stands in the water waiting to be baptized, one symbolizes Jesus dying on the cross.

As one are lowered into the water, one is providing to others a visual demonstration that Jesus was buried in the tomb.

As one shoots back up out of the water, one is signifying Jesus rising triumphantly from the dead, just as He had promised He would do.

And since one personally is being baptized, one is also saying, *“I died with Jesus Christ, I was buried with Him and now I am raised with Christ to a brand-new life, and it’s my intent to live my life under His leadership and for His glory from this point on.”* In short, in one’s baptism one is preaching a sermon without using any words at all!

How important is your baptism? *It is your personal identification with the greatest act of human history – the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

Let’s now examine what Paul had to say as he gave his own account of his conversion in Acts 22:16. Quoting Ananias, Paul said, **“And now why do you tarry? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”**

When does the washing away of sins occur in this passage? Is it before baptism, or does it occur after the act of baptism? The sinner in this story, (Paul), had already done everything most churches say one must do to be saved. The only thing he had not done was be baptized!

Paul had seen Jesus on the Damascus road, he clearly believed in Him, and Paul was willing to obey Jesus to the very end. Paul had even been praying. If anyone could be saved before baptism, it would be Paul. Was he saved? No, he was not yet saved!

Jesus told Paul that he should go into the city and he would then be told what he **must** do. Paul went into the city and Ananias came **and told him to be baptized and wash away his sins.**

If sins are forgiven before baptism, Paul would have had no sins to wash away. But he had his sins until he was baptized. So today, though a person may believe in Jesus and repent, he is still guilty of all his sins until he has been baptized.

That is why in Bible examples of conversion, people never postponed baptism. Always, as soon as the sinner believed in Jesus Christ and repented, he was baptized immediately.

Acts 2:41: ***"That day" 3000 were baptized. "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them."***

Acts 8:36: ***"Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?'"***

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 16:33: ***"And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized."***

Acts 22:16: ***"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."***

When modern denominations postpone baptism of penitent believers to some future date, they are not following the Bible pattern regarding the urgency of baptism. The reason they postpone baptism is that they do not believe in or understand the proper purpose and significance of baptism. They believe the person is already saved, so what's the hurry?

When we understand that the person is still in sin until he is baptized, then we understand why people in the Bible did not postpone baptism. Your guilt before God is removed the moment you are baptized into Christ. *It is your personal testimony to, and the inward assurance of, your passage from the old life into the new life.* In essence, your baptism is a funeral! Remember what Paul said in Romans 6:3-4?

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

Baptism is an act of faith in which we testify, both before God and to the watching world, that the person we used to be is dead and buried, and that we have been raised to walk in a new life. As the Apostle Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

When we go under the water, we are stating publicly in a very visible way that our desire is to be completely committed, totally devoted and undeniably identified with Christ.