

WHY BAPTIZE?

There are well-meaning Christians who believe that **faith** is the only element necessary for salvation based on passages like Ephesians 2:8-10. They maintain that repentance, surrendering one's will to God and baptisms are not necessary for salvation. Formal ordinances of water baptism and laying on hands to impart the Holy Spirit are considered to be works that have nothing to do with salvation. It is sometimes suggested that all we have to do is "accept Christ" by saying a sinner's prayer or responding to an altar call.

But if we are the sinners and Christ is sovereign Lord, it is *He* who must accept us. If we are to have eternal life with Jesus, we must come to Him on His terms (Mark 1:14-15). Saying that **repentance** is unnecessary for salvation results in a shallow commitment that does not transform the life of the believer. Acts 17:30 makes it clear that repentance is a non-optional principle: "He [God] now *commandeth* all men everywhere to repent."

In addition, many misguided Christians dilute the *meaning* of repentance and say it is simply a "change of mind." But repentance means that we "cease to do evil and learn to do well" (Isaiah 1:16-17). It is more than an intellectual decision to "accept Christ." In order to experience transforming power in our lives, we must experience true repentance.

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, *that your sins may be blotted out*, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. - Acts 3:19

Many people who have "accepted Christ" as *Savior* have failed to experience any transformation in their lives because they failed to submit to Him as *Lord* (Acts 2:36). In teaching about salvation, many churches minimize the importance of **obedience** and a change in behavior. But salvation does not occur apart from sanctification; salvation is the beginning of sanctification and conforming our character to Christ (Romans 6:1-2). Before a person can experience newness of life, he must be willing to obey Christ as Lord.

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" And Jesus answering said unto him, "Suffer it to be so now: **for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.**" Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water, and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, And he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven saying, "**This is my beloved Son**, in whom I am well pleased." - Matthew 3:13-17

In Psalm 2:7, the Lord made a prophetic statement: "**You are my Son; today I have become your Father**" (NIV Bible). This prophecy was fulfilled at the river Jordan; the Father proclaimed the Sonship of Christ *after* He was baptized by water and the Spirit. Bible commentator Matthew Henry said, "When He [Jesus] was first raised up out of obscurity, God declared concerning him by a voice from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son' (Matt. 3:17), which has a plain reference to that in the second Psalm." **Baptisms of water and of the Spirit, are the means by**

which we become sons of God (see also Hebrews 1:5; Acts 13:32; Romans 1:4). It is important to keep in mind that simply dipping oneself in water is not enough. Baptism is meaningless unless accompanied by an internal condition of faith, repentance and surrender on the part of the recipient. In fact, without the proper condition of the heart it is *not baptism*.

If a person exercises faith and repents of sin but consciously rebels against submitting to baptismal ordinances, it raises concerns about the sincerity of that person's commitment. John the Baptist preached "**baptism of repentance** for the remission of sins" in Luke 3:3. In John 3:22 & 26, it tells us that Jesus baptized people. In Acts 2:41, it tells us that the 3,000 people who accepted Peter's invitation were baptized and received a remission of sins. And I Peter 3:21 says that "baptism doth also now save us."

For these reasons, it was God's desire that every believer in the New Testament Church be firmly established in the foundational principles of the doctrine of Christ so that they could go on to perfection:

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of **repentance** from dead works, and of **faith** toward God, of the doctrine of **baptisms** [water and Spirit], and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit. - Hebrews 6:1-3

In an attempt to demonstrate that there is only one baptism, believers will frequently quote Ephesians 4:5 which says, "*One Lord, one faith, one baptism* [singular]." But this passage is a call to unity (v. 3) and a reference to the fact that there is only one way for the children of men to enter the kingdom: to be born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5). That is why Hebrews 6:1-3 above refers to "the doctrine of baptisms [plural]."

- Acts 2:37-41

Numerous arguments have been used to distract believers from the pivotal role that **water baptism** plays in saving souls. The most debated scripture on the subject of baptismal regeneration is:

Now when they heard this, they were *pricked in their heart*, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" 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 Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. - Acts 2:37-41

It is the contention of many in the Christian community that rebirth and the gift of the Holy Spirit *always* occur at the point of initial belief and that baptism is unnecessary for salvation. However, in this specific instance, it is clear that the people already believed but had not yet

received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Verse 37 makes it clear that the people *already* believed, yet in verse 38, Peter said, "and you *shall* [future tense] receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." In this instance belief occurred *prior to* receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

A second myth that is commonly perpetuated by otherwise well-intentioned Christians is that the word "for", in verse 38, means "because of", and therefore remission of sins had already occurred prior to water baptism. But if remission of sins and the baptism of the Holy Spirit had already occurred, why did Peter think that they had not yet received the gift of the Holy Spirit? The word "for" was used to indicate that they were baptized *in order to* receive a remission of sins. This is consistent with 1 Peter 3:21.

A third misconception about this passage is that church membership was based on belief, not baptism. But verse 41 tells us how church membership was determined: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Membership was clearly determined by baptism. 1 Corinthians 1:17

Another argument that is commonly used to question the need for baptism is the assertion that Paul somehow separated baptism from the **gospel**. 1 Corinthians 1:17 is used to prop up this particular viewpoint, and it says, "*For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.*" However, this statement does not dissociate baptism from the gospel. In fact, verse 14 tells us that Paul baptized two of them himself (i.e. Crispus and Gaius). It merely says that Paul's *primary work* was to focus his energies on preaching rather than baptizing. In Judea, Jesus also baptized many people (John 3:22 & 26). But by the time He left Judea, He had delegated that responsibility to His disciples (John 4:2). If 1 Peter 3:21 is correct in its assertion that baptism saves us, then baptism is an integral part of Christ's gospel (Romans 1:16-17).

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, "Except a man be *born again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, "How can a man be born *when he is old*? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" 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 3:3-5

Remember that Christ said, "*Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*" Obviously, those who reject the idea that water baptism is necessary for salvation have to explain what being "**born of water**" means. Some say it is the "water of the womb" at our original birth. But the question that Nicodemus asked was, "How can a man be born *when he is old*?" Christ was answering this question when He spoke about being born of water.

A second theory is that "born of water" refers to "washing of water by the word" as found in Ephesians 5:26. But that doesn't make sense either because Ephesians 5 talks about Christ sanctifying and cleansing the church -- those who have already been converted -- with the washing of water by the word. Ephesians 5 refers to the sanctification of those who already believe, not an initiation into the kingdom.

A third theory is that "born of water" means only the Jews in Jesus' day had to receive water baptism before they could enter the kingdom. But in John 3:5, the King James Bible says, "Except *a man* be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The New International Bible says, "*No one* can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." Christ made a far-reaching statement that encompassed all of humanity, not just the Jews of His day. If the Jews were saved one way and everyone else was saved another way, that would constitute another gospel which, according to 2 Corinthians 11:4, simply cannot be. In addition, 1 Peter 3:21 makes it clear that baptism continued to save souls after Christ died on the cross. Acts 10:44-48

Water baptism preceded laying on hands for the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, Acts 8 and Acts 19. In Acts 2, Peter commanded the 3,000 believers in Jerusalem to repent and be baptized. He then promised, "... and ye *shall* [future tense] receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." In Acts 8, they followed this same pattern: Phillip baptized the believers, and *then* Peter and John laid hands on them for the reception of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 19, Paul baptized the 12 men at Ephesus and *then* laid hands on them to convey the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Though water baptism preceded laying on hands for the gift of the Holy Spirit in these three passages, the points are often made that:

1. Peter did not lay hands on the Gentile believers at Caesarea for the reception of the Holy Spirit and
2. The Holy Spirit was spontaneously received by the Gentiles prior to water baptism.

The reason for this exceptional act by the Holy Spirit is readily apparent when we consider that Jewish Christians strongly opposed Gentile baptisms (see Acts 11:1-18). In fact, Peter himself opposed taking the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:14). But, in this chapter, we witness a major turning point in Peter's ministry.

He had to be told in a vision that the Gentiles were "clean" before he would preach the gospel to them. To initiate this process, God sent Peter to a Gentile in Caesarea named Cornelius. There Peter preached the gospel to the Gentiles for the first time.

While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed [Jewish Christians] were *astonished*, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles [non-Jews] also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then answered Peter, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" And he **commanded** them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. - Acts 10:44-48

Why did God choose to directly intervene, in this instance, rather than working through Peter as His designated representative? Why was the order that God established in Acts 2, 8 and 19 reversed? In verse 45, it is apparent that there were Jewish Christians who believed that the gospel was for Jews only. **It was for their benefit, and possibly to remove all doubt from Peter's mind, that God moved in a miraculous manner to confirm that the gospel was for all**

men, not just the Jewish people. In verse 47, Peter was really asking if Jewish Christians still opposed the idea of baptizing Gentiles. At that point, it is interesting to note that Peter then **commanded** the Gentile converts to be baptized. Baptism was not an option; it was a command of God.

Obviously, it is the Holy Spirit's sovereign right to intercede in the lives of men as He sees fit (Numbers 11:25; Matthew 3:16; Acts 2:1-4; and Acts 10:44), but this does not constitute a pattern for *man* to follow in baptizing converts. Nothing about this passage would indicate that baptism is unnecessary. In fact, Peter **commanded** them to be baptized. Acts 10 represents an exceptional act of the Holy Spirit intended to quell opposition to Gentile baptisms.

The pattern that *man* followed is given in Matthew 3:13-17, Acts 2:37-41, Acts 8:12-17, Acts 19:1-7, I Timothy 4:14 and II Timothy 1:6. But this pattern does not negate the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in blessing those whom He chooses to bless.

In John 3:5, Christ did not prescribe an order when He said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." But in setting an example for us, Christ was baptized in water and then baptized in the Spirit (Matthew 3:13-17). Though John the Baptist was a Spirit-filled believer (Luke 1:15), he obviously did not have authority to convey the gift of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11).

Christ's baptism was a demonstration of obedience (Matthew 3:15). After this act of obedience, the Holy Spirit once again moved in a sovereign manner to demonstrate to the world that God was pleased with His Son (Matthew 3:16-17) and that we should follow His example (I Peter 2:7-8 & 21). Regardless of the order in which they are performed, it is obvious that we must be born of water and of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5).

And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." But the other answering rebuked him, saying, "*Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds. But this man hath done nothing amiss.*" And he said unto Jesus, "*Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*" And Jesus said unto him, "*Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*" - Luke 23:39-43

A point that is often made about baptism concerns Luke's account of the repentant thief on the cross. The question is asked, "If *baptism* is necessary for salvation, shouldn't Christ have condemned the thief on the cross?" In response to those who advocate a faith-only soteriology, we could ask a similar question: "If *faith* is necessary for salvation, will a God of mercy actually condemn a person who is severely retarded to everlasting damnation because he cannot grasp the concept of sin, the need for redemption nor faith in Christ?"

The answer to both questions is obviously "no." God will not condemn the *mentally impaired person* incapable of abstract thought, and He will not condemn the *thief* who suddenly believes the gospel and repents but is unable to be baptized. In addition, He will not condemn *little*

children who are unable to grasp concepts of sin, faith in God and redemption. Incidentally, for that reason, it makes no sense to baptize little children.

But he that knew not and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. *For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required:* and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. - Luke 12:48

Therefore to him that *knoweth* to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. - James 4:17

....for where no law is, there is no transgression. - Romans 4:15

But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. - Romans 5:13

The gospel of Mark tells us that *both* thieves reviled Christ. Luke is the only gospel that tells the story of this change of heart. Obviously, one of the thieves, who had not heard the gospel before, experienced a conversion *while hanging on the cross*. It is important to note that we see evidence of not just faith, but repentance and surrender to Jesus as Lord in the life of the repentant thief. God will accept a sincere, **deathbed repentance**, but He will not accept conscious defiance against a command as fundamental to the gospel as baptism. Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Not of works, *lest any man should boast*. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. - Ephesians 2:8-10

For many Christians, it is a principle etched in stone that man is saved by grace through **faith alone**. We *are* saved by grace through faith, but **grace**, as God's power working in us, bears fruit not in just faith, but good works also. It was the Apostle Paul who said, "But I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10). It is God's grace that labors in each of us as we surrender our individual wills to Him. The grace that God grants us is not strictly limited to faith; it must result in good works as well.

Many Christians dilute the *meaning* of faith to the point that it becomes mere intellectual assent: "accept Christ, and you will be saved." Those who subscribe to such thinking consider it abhorrent to add "works" like repentance as a necessary prerequisite for salvation. But scripture bears a very clear witness that more is required than simply faith. A genuine rebirth cannot occur apart from repentance and a willingness to obey. If more Christians understood this fact, they could experience a true rebirth, Christ's transforming power and real victory over sin.

"Not of works" in the above passage tells us that human effort alone will not save. It is only as the believer yields himself to God and allows the Creator to work in him that he can experience rebirth (1 Cor. 15:10). Converts from cultures such as Judaism had been conditioned to believe that their human efforts alone would determine their eternal destiny, but they were mistaken.

A soteriology that is solely based on individual acts of righteousness will not save and does not properly give glory to God who is the source of our salvation. As was said earlier, simply dipping oneself in water is not enough. Baptism is meaningless unless accompanied by an internal condition of faith, repentance and surrender on the part of the recipient. In fact, without the proper condition of the heart it is *not baptism*.

It has been suggested that "not of works" means that baptism doesn't save. If this is the case, why does 1 Peter 3:21 say that "baptism doth also now save us"? The fact is that baptism *does* save, and it is an essential part of Christ's gospel. A saving faith that has its source in the Holy Spirit will not occur apart from a concomitant repentance and surrender. A profession of faith absent a willingness to obey is no faith at all. There are no stages in which the recipient believes in a Savior and then, at some later date, submits to Him as Lord. Those who receive the gift of faith are immediately accountable to obey.

Conclusion

Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but *he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven....And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not*, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell. And great was the fall of it. - Matthew 7: 21-27

Can faith save us? There is no doubt that we are saved by faith, but true faith will be accompanied by obedience. That is why Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." That is why 1 Peter 3:21 tells us that "baptism doth also now save us. That is why Ananias told Paul to "be baptized and wash away his sins" (Acts 22:16). That is why Peter told the 3,000 at Jerusalem to "repent and be baptized for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). If a person feels that the Spirit has touched his heart with the truthfulness of Christ's gospel, and he has opportunity to be baptized but refuses, that person is not a true believer.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because *strait* is the gate, and *narrow* is the way which leadeth unto life, and *few there be that find it*. - Matthew 7:13-14

If we come to Christ, we must come to Him on the terms that He established (Matthew 3:13-16).

Whosoever therefore shall confess me *before men* [more than simply belief in our hearts] him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. - Matthew 10:32-33

Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. - John 3:5

Invitation

Perhaps you have never committed your life to the Lord but you would like to. If the thoughts contained in this material have instilled a desire to know more, we invite you to contact the congregational pastor where you received this brochure. You may have given your life to Christ in the past but now question the effectiveness of that commitment. Many people have followed some designated procedure but failed to consider the condition of their hearts. Some have come to God on their own terms rather than those that Christ gave us. To learn more about this area, we would encourage you to contact your local pastor in Christ's restored church.