

IS BAPTISM NECESSARY?

Why Were You Baptized

This personal question I would like to ask you: "Why were you baptized?" This is an appropriate question, for several reasons. Number one, some form of this word is used 123 times in the New Testament. The form *baptizo*, which means "I baptize," is found 80 times. The noun form, *baptisma*, is found 22 times. *Baptismos*, which is translated "washing," in the sense of washing the entire body, is found four times. *Baptistes* is a word that has to do with John the baptizer. This is how the term ought to be rendered. "Baptist" was not a proper name or noun. It simply told what John did, baptize. So, he was John the baptizer. And the word is found 14 times in the New Testament. The word *bapto*, which is translated in the New Testament, "to dip" or "to plunge," is found 3 times. When you add all these up, the total is 123 times.

But the question I asked: "Why were you baptized?" is important not simply because it is mentioned so many times in the New Testament, but because it is the word of God. "God has spoken." But it is also important because there has been so much misunderstanding of the subject. But the Bible, very plainly and without doubt or obscurity, tells us all about the subject of baptism. As we look a little more carefully at these 123 passages of scripture, we learn **who** can be baptized. By God's word we can know who is a proper subject of baptism. There are some people you cannot baptize. You could not baptize them if you tried! You cannot baptize one who is untaught.

Jesus said: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them. . . ." Baptizing whom? Baptizing the taught (Matthew 28:19, 20). Jesus further said: ". . . they shall be all taught of God. . ." (John 6:44). You cannot come to God without being taught. So you cannot be baptized without being taught. This is one of the reasons I know it is not possible to baptize an infant. You may, like some churches, immerse an infant three times--in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, but you have not baptized that infant, because Jesus said he must first be taught.

One Must Believe

We also learn from reading these 123 verses that one must believe to be baptized. Jesus, as he issued the Great Commission, said: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15, 16). An important man, of whom I read in the Bible, asked the question: "What hinders me from being baptized?" An inspired man answered him: "If you believe with all of your heart, you may" (Acts 8:36, 37). He answered and said: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." You cannot baptize a person unless he believes--unless he has the ability to believe, is willing to believe and does believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. You may dip him; you may immerse him 100 times, but you have not, according to God's word, baptized him, unless he believes this all important truth.

One Must Repent

The Bible tells us that only those who repent can be baptized. When, on the day of Pentecost, men inquired: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter, answering for all the twelve apostles, said: "Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . ." (Acts 2:37, 38). So, one must be able to repent--that is, he must have the ability to repent. Also, he must have the will to repent. And, without that, you cannot baptize him. You cannot baptize an infant; you cannot baptize an imbecile (a mentally deficient person); you cannot baptize one who is not accountable to God; you cannot baptize one who is not willing to repent.

A picture stands out clearly in my mind. A man, seriously injured in World War II, used to drive to my house occasionally and ask me to baptize him. Without fail he was drunk. I knew I could not baptize him. I would not so much as go through the form, because my Bible teaches that before you can be baptized, you must repent.

So, you see these passages in the New Testament tell us who is a subject of baptism one who can be taught, one who is able to believe, and one who can and will repent. Otherwise, what is called baptism is a farce and a mockery.

The Element Is Water

These verses tell me something else about New Testament baptism: the element, the physical substance of baptism is water. Peter asked: "Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we" (Acts 10:47)?

Philip and the Ethiopian nobleman were traveling from Jerusalem in the nobleman's chariot. ". . . they came to a certain water: and the eunuch said, 'See, here is water . . .' and he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water..." (Acts 8:36-39). Four times in that single verse, water is said to have been the element. Why was water the element that the Lord commanded? I do not know; but if the Lord had said "sand," "apple cider," or "milk," I would believe that. What I am saying is, God designates water as the element to represent the burial and resurrection of Christ from the dead.

The Mode of Baptism

Examining these 123 passages on baptism, I am told that the manner of baptism is immersion. I have read the standard scholars in the New Testament language, and they say that the word baptism means "to dip," "to immerse..... to submerge..... to plunge," or "to wash completely." In the heart of that man desiring to become a citizen in the kingdom of God and acknowledging Jesus Christ as the Saviour of men, to him baptism is a burial and resurrection. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were 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 also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3, 4).

The parallel passage in Colossians 2:12 reads: "Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him. through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." As important as all of these things are which I have read to you, there is nothing that is more significant, nothing that is of greater consequence than, "Why Were You Baptized?"

There is nothing more important than, Why Was I Baptized? Or, as to that matter, why do I do anything in my service to God? What is your purpose? What is your aim and design in serving God? There is not anything of greater weight, or moment, than this--whether in the religious realm, or in the social and secular realm. This is true of anything in life, the Why. Why a home? Why marriage? Why the particular companion you have? Why did you select that companion?

The Bible tells us why. It gives us the purpose, the reason, the design, for these and other things in our lives. Why did you marry your wife? or husband? I have heard of those who married for money. That is not a good reason. It is a poor foundation for marriage and the home. There are those who have married because of a strong physical attraction. This plays a part, and should, in drawing two people toward each other; but if this is the primary reason for marriage, it will serve as a poor beginning. I have heard of those who would marry an American man or woman in order to gain entrance into the United States that he or she may be granted a permanent residence visa for this country. Some marry women for their good looks--mainly because they are beautiful. Other marriages are contracted on the grounds of popularity. It is also true that men go through the form of obeying God for the wrong reasons.

Jesus Taught On Attitude

This lesson was clearly taught and emphasized in His Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said that there were some in their giving who sounded a trumpet before them so they might be honored of men (Matthew 6:2). He also said that some pray standing on the street corners and in the synagogues that they may be seen and heard of men. That's the wrong purpose. No prayer will rise higher than the ceiling, if that's the purpose. He said that when some fast they look somber and disfigure their faces to show men that they are fasting (Matthew 6:13). Those are the wrong purposes. Jesus said, "Be careful to do your acts of righteousness not to be seen and praised of men." It was the wrong purpose to do these things to be seen and heard and honored of men. What is our Lord saying in all of this? That the purpose for which you do any service to God is tremendously important. He is pointing out that the acceptance or rejection of a person turns upon this very principle. It is very important that you do what God says, and because he has said it! But the why of anything is exceedingly important.

Why Was I Baptized?

Look back over that event in your life, examine it in your mind, inquire about it carefully, inspect it closely, interrogate it thoroughly to find out whether or not it was done for God's purpose, and whether, therefore, your baptism is right and acceptable in His ight.

Examine These Thoughts

Was I baptized for some personal motive? Was it to gain the hand, the heart, the approval and the acceptance of a companion? Did I do it to enhance my own personal affairs? Will it help me in some way in my business relationships, or my social reference to others? Or, when I was baptized years ago was I very young and impressionable, and did it upon the urging and insistence of my parents? Or, was it the popular thing to do because my peers were doing it? Was it that a gospel meeting was in progress and several of my friends thought we should be baptized? Why Was I Baptized? Was it for the social reasons of being accepted into a group whose fellowship I both desired and needed? This may not be a completely bad reason, but it is not good enough to serve as the Divine design of baptism. Did I do it to become identified with a particular religious group, or church? When I was baptized, did I join the church? Were you taught that you were saved at the point of your faith and you wanted to be baptized because you were saved? Was that the reason? Did the preacher ask you: "Do you believe that God for Christ's sake has pardoned your sins, and you wish to be baptized because your sins are already pardoned?" This question is asked and this doctrine is taught very widely throughout the religious world. Were you very young when you were baptized and did not understand how important it was--the moral and spiritual implications of it? You see, there may be a number of wrong reasons for being baptized.

Some Were Baptized Again

I read about some people who were baptized unto John's baptism in the 19th chapter of Acts. They were not baptized for the right purpose. "And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5).

Bible Reasons for Being Baptized

God's reasons for being baptized are the only satisfactory, adequate, pleasing motive for that act or any other. And here are some of those Biblical, justifiable reason:

1. **Baptism is for salvation.** I am not talking about it as a sacrament, for I do not believe it is a sacrament--that it has some particular merit within itself, and that by simply going through the act of baptism one is going to be saved. I do not believe that it is "water salvation" or "baptismal regeneration." The Bible does not teach that. Those who believe the word of God stand diametrically opposed to that teaching.

My son was born in a Roman Catholic hospital. A bit of minor surgery was done on him the first night of his life and he almost bled to death. The nurses in that hospital conveyed to us the message that he had been taken and baptized. They believed that he came into this world with Adam's sin, that he was wholly and totally depraved, that he had inherited this sin and corruption. Many churches teach that an infant comes into this world totally, hereditarily depraved. And so they "baptized" him. That's what you call "water salvation," or "baptismal regeneration." That's what you call a sacrament.

Baptism is not that. And, yet, the Bible teaches that baptism is for salvation. Mark 16:16 reads: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Let me ask the question, "Who shall be saved?" Now, answer the question according to Jesus' language, "He that

believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Do not say: "He that believeth shall be saved and may be baptized if he chooses to do so." Do not say, "It is not necessary to be baptized." Answer what the Lord said. That is about as simple as saying, "Two plus two equals four." What equals four? Do not say, "Two equals four." Even a child knows better than that.

The Apostle Peter, long years after Jesus had issued this command, said: "The like figure whereunto baptism does also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), . . ." (I Peter 3:21). Reading it in a more modern speech translation, it says: "And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also....."

2. **It is for the remission of sins.** Peter gives the answer to men who had inquired, "Men and brethren, what shall we do? ... 'Repent and be baptized ... for the remission of sins' " (Acts 2:37,38). In case you do not know what "remission of sins" is, it means the "forgiveness of sins." More literally it reads: "Repent and be baptized that your sins may be sent far away." The word for "remission" in the New Testament language is "aphesin," and means to send away.
3. **It is in order that your sins may be washed away.** Why were you baptized? If you answer that question with the Bible answer, it will be: "That your sins may be washed away." Ananias, a disciple of the Lord in Damascus, was instructed to go tell Paul: "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord!" (Acts 22:16). The exact reading of it in the New Testament language is: "Arise and get thyself baptized and get thyself washed from thy sins." Paul, at that time, still had his sins. Do not say that he was saved back on the Damascus road, because the Lord had said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and there it will be told you what you must do" (Acts 22: 10). And Ananias told him what the Lord said he must do. In that command he used the possessive pronoun "thy" sins, and that conveys the fact that he still had his sins. You must not say that Paul was saved on the Damascus road when he first believed Jesus. He was not saved then, and for two evident reasons: (1) The Lord said he would have to go into the city to learn what he must do, and (2) He was told to arise and be baptized and wash away his sins. And he simply could not wash away sins which he did not possess. That's the purpose of baptism. That's the Bible reason for it. If that is not the purpose for which you were baptized, you need to take a very close and serious look at what you need to do to get right with God.
4. In reading those 123 verses in the New Testament which discuss baptism, they show that its purpose is to put us into the **proper spiritual relationship with Christ**. "In Christ all of you are children of God by faith; for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26, 27). How can you be saved? "Baptized into Christ." How can you change that spiritual relationship from the world to God? "Baptized into Christ." Are you in Christ? How did you get into Christ? The Bible says, "Baptized into Christ." Also read Romans 6:3, 4: "Do you not know that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?" Can you be saved outside of Christ? If you cannot, then you must be baptized into Christ! Jesus had said in Matthew's record of His commission: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" ((Matthew 28:19). What he was indicating here is a change of relationship. You were in the world; you were under the dominion of Satan. You sustained a spiritual relationship to him as his child. Now you can change that relationship by being baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

5. The Bible says that baptism is for the purpose of **becoming a new creature** -so that one may become a new man. We arise to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). That is, baptism is the starting of a new life. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). Ephesians 4:22, 24 are two verses which tell us that we have put off the old man and we have put on the new. Colossians 3:9, 10 informs us that we have put off the old self and have put on the new self that "is renewed in the likeness of Him who has created us."
6. There is another reason why one should be baptized - **to get into the Lord's body**, the church. "For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body" (I Corinthians 12:13). By the teaching, guidance and direction of the one Spirit we were baptized into his spiritual body, which is His church. What does all of this mean? Well there are some things it does not mean. As I read and examine these 123 Bible verses, it does not mean that baptism is merely some established form or ceremony. As far as the Bible is concerned, it is not a piece of religious pageantry or parade. It is not some kind of drama or exhibition.

I resent (especially while living in a land of great literacy, a land of Bibles) a religious teacher turning his collar "hind part before," and taking a little innocent baby up in his arms and sprinkling a few drops of water on its head and calling it baptism. And I am shocked that people respond to that kind of ceremony by saying: "Wasn't that a very beautiful, sacred, moving service?" It is no less than paganism in the midst of our enlightened country.

7. **Baptism is, in actuality, a picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.** "God be thanked that while you were the servants of sin, you have obeyed from the heart that form of teaching delivered you. Being then made free from sin, you became the servants of righteousness" (Romans 6:17, 18). That word "form" means an outline, a likeness, a picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
8. And, as significant as anything else I have said, **the purpose of it is simply to obey Christ.** "Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 10:47, 48). Just in that connection, it spells a total submission to the will of God. He said, "Be in subjection to the Father of Spirits and live" (Hebrews 12:9). "Submit yourselves, therefore, unto God" (James 4:7). This is an arranging of ourselves under the will of God. It is this spirit that must characterize each one of us, else we cannot obey God acceptably in anything.

I Must Choose God's Way

When we decide our own course, when we map out our own way, when we say, "This is what I choose to do," without reference to or consideration of what God has said, you cannot obey God at all. I could not baptize you. You may come to Christ anytime you decide, but if you do not come submissively, resigning your own will, freely delivering yourself up, and saying: "Here, Lord, is my life. Take it and use it," there is no way you could become a Christian. For, you see, becoming a Christian means total submission and obedience to the will of Christ.

The Essentiality of Baptism as Seen in the Passover

In I Corinthians 5:7, Paul says, For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. That is such a simple yet significant observation. But what does it have to do with baptism? When Paul was writing to the church at Rome, he said in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation. . . ." To fully appreciate this, one must recall the background of the author as Saul of Tarsus. He points out where the true power is located. It is not in the words of men but the words of Jehovah God. That word is preserved for us through the scriptures: (II Timothy 3:16.) Therefore it is to that word that we must turn for the answers to eternal life. It makes no difference what man might say or think only what God has said.

In Romans 3:23, we are told that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; . . ." (Each one of us). As a result, we are told in Romans 5:12 that ". . . as, by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." The consequences of our sin is clearly death. That corresponds with the teaching of Romans 6:23. What a depressing condition in which we find ourselves! But take courage! Our study does not end here. Notice the message found in Romans 5:8-10, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Please don't miss what Paul is saying: God has shown us his love by giving His Son to die for us. What a hopeful condition in which we find ourselves!

In Romans 5:8- 10, the passage just cited, there are a couple of very important words to consider. Begin with verse 10. In it you find the word "reconciled." It is important to clearly understand what this word means. Maybe an illustration will help us to arrive at that understanding. You have a best friend and your relationship is very close. Suddenly something happens to that relationship and now you are not close at all-perhaps not even speaking to one another. Someone or some things brings you back to your original friendship. In that case, your friendship has been reconciled. We are talking about a relationship that was once close, severed and then restored again. That is exactly what has happened to man and his relationship with God. When man was created, his relationship with God was a beautiful one. But when sin entered his life, his relations with God was severed. And now someone or something was needed to bring us back to that original relationship. Romans 5: 10 tells us it is by the death of God's Son that we are reconciled. Though enemies because of our sin, yet we are reconciled because of the sacrifice of Jesus.

While you are still allowing that to soak in, look at another word found in verse 9-the word "justified." It too is a word that we must come to see clearly. I remember having it explained to me like this: to be justified means that I can appear before God "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned. Please capture what that means. If it is sin that severs my relationship with God, then it is justification that regains that relationship. How can I be justified? Again, remember the power is in the gospel-so don't accept what man has to say. Look to God's word. What does Romans 5:9 say about what justifies us? "By his Blood." This ties in with Paul's statement about Christ being our Passover.

Put on your thinking caps for just a moment. Does the term Passover mean anything to you? Do you recall anything about what this term refers to? Think back to the time when God's people were in bondage in Egypt. Moses had been sent to secure the release of God's people. But

Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he would not allow them to go. God brought many plagues upon the land in an attempt to soften Pharaoh's heart. Initially, he would soften, but then would turn callous again.

Finally, in Exodus 11-12, God called Moses and informed him that yet one more plague would be brought upon Egypt. Following this plague, Pharaoh would plead for them to leave. What was this final heart-changing plague to be? It was the death of the first-born of every household in Egypt. But along with the announcement of this plague, God also offered a provision.

Do you recall the provision? God's people were instructed to take a lamb, sacrifice it, take the lamb's blood and spread it upon the door posts of their homes. In Exodus 12:12, 13, God made it clear to Moses that when He came into the land to execute this judgment upon Egypt, when He came to a house where He saw blood, He would "Passover" that house. They would not taste of the punishment of death. Now consider the significance of Christ being our Passover. His blood justifies us before God.

The judgment for our sin is death; but God has also made a provision and that is Christ, who is our Passover. Just as it was necessary for the people in Egypt to be in contact with the blood of the Passover lamb in order to escape the consequences of death, so too, it is necessary for us today to be in contact with the blood of the Passover lamb in order for us to escape the consequences of death. In connection with that, do you recall how John the Baptist first referred to Jesus? John was baptizing in the Jordan river, saw Jesus approaching, and announced his arrival by saying, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). God sent us this "lamb" as our provision.

When Jesus was crucified, the religious leaders wanted to have the bodies taken off the crosses before their Sabbath observance. But this was not just any ordinary Sabbath. Notice John 19:31, "The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day, (for that Sabbath day was an high day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away." This then was the day prior to the Sabbath. It was a Friday and this day was used to prepare for the Sabbath or seventh day or Saturday. But this was not only a Sabbath day approaching. It was signified as a high day. That simply means it was a day of a special feast. Would you want to venture a guess at what special feast day this particular Sabbath was going to be? Right, it was the Passover. Our Lord died on the day when the Jews were preparing for the Passover meal. Part of that preparation would have included the slaughtering of the lambs to be used in the feast. Do you make the connection? The "Lamb of God," our "Passover," was sacrificed at approximately the same time the lambs were being offered in preparation for the morrow's feast.

When God passed through Egypt, and came upon a house that did not have the blood of the lamb, He knew that was a house that was not in harmony with His will. As a result, they would taste of death. On the other hand, when He came upon a house that did have the blood, He knew that was a house that was in harmony with His will. As a result of taking advantage of God's provision, that house was justified in God's sight and escaped the death penalty. In like manner, when we stand before God, if He does not see the blood of the Lamb, He knows that we are not in harmony with His will. As a result, we will taste the eternal death. On the other hand, when

we stand before God, and He does see the blood, He knows that we are submissive to His will, And as a result of taking advantage of God's provision, we will stand justified in God's sight (just as if we had never sinned) and will thereby escape the death penalty. Thanks be to God who gives to us the victory through Jesus Christ!

Now the only question that remains is how do I come in contact with that blood that justifies me? How do I appropriate that death that reconciles me? Again, remember the power is in the Word of God and not in the thoughts or wisdom of man. So to find the answer to that, stay in God's Word. Listen to the words of Paul in Romans 6:3, 4, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into His death; that 'like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.'" The remainder of chapter six goes on to tell us that we are freed from the bondage of sin and because we are dead with Christ we shall also live with him.

When you understand baptism in this light, surely there is no complaints about its necessity. Instead there should only be joy and thanksgiving at its availability. Through it we contact the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. Through it God adds us to the Body. Through it we are truly "born again," and behold all things have been made new. We are no longer servants of sin but now bond-servants to Christ. There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death.

The essentiality of baptism is seen in the Passover.

Do not delay. Take advantage of God's provision, the very Lamb of God-Christ, who is our Passover. "And now why tarriest thou? arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).