

BAPTISM (PART ONE)

Perhaps every protestant denomination accepts and teaches that it is essential to hear, believe, repent and confess that Jesus is the Son of God. Yet, for some reason, the denominations are uncertain or confused about baptism. Some teach that baptism is essential, some that it is not. Some teach baptism as immersion, some as sprinkling and some as pouring. Some baptize children, some do not and on and on and on. The key problem here is that man has allowed his own ideas and doctrines to collide with clear Bible teaching. Let us step back from man's ideas and go to the Bible for our answers.

Our first question may be: Is baptism essential to salvation? The answer is clear from Scripture. We know that baptism was a part of John's teaching prior to Jesus' public ministry (Matthew 3:1-12). We even know that Jesus was baptized by John (Matthew 3:13-17). We also know that Jesus' personal ministry involved the use of baptism (John 3:22, John 4:1,2). So we know that baptism was known of, approved by and used by Jesus Himself.

As our Lord prepared to return to heaven He gave final instructions to His Apostles. He told them: "*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*" (Matthew 28:19). In Mark's account of the same event he records Jesus saying: "*He that believeth and is **baptized** shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*" (Mark 16:16). So we see that baptism was commanded by Jesus as part of the Great Commission.

When asked by believers at Pentecost what they must do to be saved, Peter told them: "*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*" (Acts 2:38). Peter would again remark on the essential nature of baptism when he wrote to the Christians of the first century: "*The like figure whereunto even **baptism** doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:*" (1 Peter 3:21). Peter refers back to the Great Flood and observes that those 8 souls in the ark were saved like we are saved by baptism. Baptism has never been about physical cleanliness as Peter mentions, but about a good conscience toward God. A good conscience comes from obedience to God's commands.

Another excellent example comes from Ananias' instructions to Saul upon the occasion of his conversion. Paul tells what was told him: "*And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be **baptized**, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord*" (Acts 22:16). It cannot be argued that Paul was already a believer, that he had already turned from persecuting Christians and that he still was sinful. Notice that the washing away of sins is connected to the act of baptism. It had been three days since he met Jesus on the Damascus road, yet his sins were still with him. The sins were removed upon his obedience in baptism. So now we have Jesus both commanding and participating in baptism.

So, we have Jesus' disciples teaching that baptism is "for remission of sins" (Acts 2:38), it saves (1 Peter 3:21) and that it washes away sins (Acts 22:16). Next, we will see specific examples of baptism, note the circumstances and observe the results.

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NEXT WEEK: BAPTISM (PART TWO – EXAMPLES)