

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES

for New Church Members

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THE BAPTIST CENTER MALATE, MANILA, PHILIPPINES

LESSON THREE -

BAPTISM

INTRODUCTION

One of the first and most important steps that a new believer should take as a follower of JESUS is to obey JESUS' command to be baptized. But before a new follower of JESUS is baptized he should understand the meaning and purpose of baptism and why he is being baptized. There are many examples, so let us examine GOD's Word and learn what is the true meaning of baptism.

Why should we be baptized? Is it something more that one must do in order to obtain salvation? No! Contrary to the opinion of many, baptism does NOT help us obtain salvation. There is NO power in the act of baptism that can cleanse us of sin and make us a child of GOD. We have already experienced these things if we have accepted JESUS by faith as our SAVIOUR. He is an all-Sufficient SAVIOUR and nothing else need be added to Him and His power for a person to be saved.

We should now be baptized BECAUSE we are believers and because we ARE already saved. Baptism is for BELIEVERS only. Several examples in the Bible will readily show us that the apostles baptized people AFTER and BECAUSE they believed in JESUS.

The salvation experience of the Ethiopian eunuch whom Philip led to CHRIST is recorded in Acts 8:26-40. Following his conversion, the Scriptures say:

"And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 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." (vss. 36-38). After the eunuch believed he was ready to be baptized.

The experience of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16 also testifies to baptism after belief: **"And he brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved: And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house . . . And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his straightway"** (Acts 16:30, 31, 33).

These are only two of the many Scriptures that clearly teach that baptism is to follow salvation through belief in JESUS. (See also Acts 2:37-41; 10:44, 47-48; 16:14-15)

If we are not baptized in order to obtain salvation, then why should we be baptized?

I. WHY SHOULD WE BE BAPTIZED?

A. BECAUSE IT IS COMMANDED IN GOD'S WORD

Just before JESUS ascended into Heaven He commanded His disciples to make disciples and baptize them, saying: "**Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.**" (Matthew 28:19-20). From this we can see that JESUS wants every one of His followers to be baptized and to be taught to observe all of JESUS' commands.

In obedience to JESUS' command, Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost and told his hearers, "**Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins**" (Acts 2:38). On that day 3,000 responded to the command by believing and being baptized. It is important to understand that the word "for" in the above verse is the preposition, "eis" which means, "because of" - be baptized because your sins have been remitted, or "because" you are saved and not to "be" saved.

B. BECAUSE OF JESUS' OWN EXAMPLE

At the time of His own baptism, JESUS said concerning baptism: "**Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.**" (Matthew 3:15). JESUS set the example for believers by being baptized Himself. We, as His followers, should also be baptized. Just as baptism in the case of JESUS marked the beginning of His public ministry - so to does baptism mark the beginning of our walk in newness of life.

C. BECAUSE OF THE EXAMPLE OF THE EARLY BELIEVERS

Philip, a fervent preacher for CHRIST declared the Gospel to the lost. When they believed on JESUS, they were baptized. "**But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women**" (Acts 8:12).

When Saul of Tarsus found CHRIST on the Damascus road, the Scriptures tell us that after having his sight restored his first act was to be baptized. "**And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized**" (Acts 9:18).

These are important reasons why we should be baptized. In addition we will want to be baptized because of what baptism means and what it's purpose is. Let us see just what these are and why

JESUS commanded baptism.

II. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE AND MEANING OF BAPTISM?

A. BAPTISM IS A PICTURE

Baptism is a dramatic picture of a man dying, being buried and then being raised to new life. As such it is an outward physical act which portrays the inward, spiritual experience that has already happened in the life of a believer in JESUS CHRIST. In II Corinthians 5:17 this experience is described: **"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."** In baptism the believer is declaring to the world that he has died to his old life in CHRIST: **"For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection"** (Romans 6:5).

B. BAPTISM IS A SYMBOL THAT IDENTIFIES A BELIEVER IN CHRIST

Baptism is like putting on a uniform -- the uniform of CHRIST. Students in the Philippines wear a uniform that quickly identifies them as being students of a particular school. The color and pattern of their uniform tells everyone that they are a duly enrolled student of a particular school. Like the uniform of the school student, baptism tells the world that we have joined the kingdom of GOD, having become His children by faith in CHRIST JESUS. **"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."** (Galatians 3:26, 27). JESUS asks us to openly profess our faith in Him so that men may know that we are not ashamed of Him. Many people are willing to say they believe in CHRIST, but they falter at the command of baptism. They are ashamed to tell the world that they belong to CHRIST. Are you willing to put on the uniform of baptism as a testimony of your experience of having been born into the family of GOD?

It is possible for a person to put on the uniform of a school, but to not really be enrolled in that school. Merely putting on the uniform will not make a person a student of that school. He must first register and complete all the necessary requirements. So, it is possible to be baptized without having first been made a child of GOD. A person must first experience the new birth by faith in CHRIST, then he has the right and responsibility to wear the uniform of baptism. Not only does he have the right, but he should wear the uniform as testimony to others.

C. BAPTISM IS A REQUIREMENT FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

According to the Scriptures baptized believers (the church) are the body of CHRIST: CHRIST is the Head of the church and the believers are the individual members making up the body. Paul in 1 Corinthians speaks of being baptized into the body of CHRIST: **"For by one SPIRIT are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit"** (I Corinthians 12:13).

As we study the New Testament we find that the new believers banded together in groups to form a local church, as JESUS planned, that they might strengthen one another through worship together, and might co-operate together in spreading the Gospel. The New Testament seems to indicate that baptism was the sign that a believer was joining with other believers to be identified

as one of CHRIST's followers with the church. Examples of this can be found in Acts 2:41 and 47: **"Then they that gladly received His word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls . . . And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."**

Therefore today baptism is a requirement for a new believer to become a member of the church. It demonstrates his sincerity and his desire to be identified as one of CHRIST's followers.

III. WHEN SHOULD WE BE BAPTIZED?

A. WHEN WE ARE OLD ENOUGH TO THINK AND CHOOSE OURSELVES

Although JESUS loves even the very young children, there is no record in the Bible that a young child was ever baptized. The early disciples preached the Gospel to those who were old enough to reason and decide for themselves. An example of this is found in Acts 17:2 where it says, **"And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures."** In the city of Berea, the apostle found people who **"received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so."** (Acts 17:11). An infant cannot reason, cannot receive the Word and cannot search the Scriptures. Until a child can hear GOD's Word himself and personally trust in CHRIST, he should not be baptized. Neither does he need to be baptized since an infant is innocent until he is old enough to deliberately choose to sin.

Nehemiah 8:2-3: **"And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law."**

B. AFTER WE HAVE COME TO KNOW JESUS AS OUR PERSONAL SAVIOUR

We have already stated that baptism is a picture of the spiritual experience of salvation. A person must have this experience first before he is baptized. Otherwise, his baptism has no meaning. According to the Bible, in order to experience salvation, we must:

- (1) repent (have a godly sorrow) of sins;
- (2) receive by faith JESUS CHRIST as personal SAVIOUR;
- and
- (3) confess with our mouths the LORD JESUS.

When we do this GOD "puts" us in CHRIST, and we receive a new life in CHRIST. II Corinthians 5:17 describes this: **"Therefore if any man be in CHRIST he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."**

As newborn children of the Kingdom of GOD, we are now eligible for baptism. Now our baptism will have meaning, for it will picture outwardly that which we have already experienced inwardly -- the death and burial of the old self and the resurrection of a new creation as a child of

GOD. Again, let us emphasize and remember that baptism does not save us from our sins; it only pictures to the world the salvation experience that comes to us through trust in JESUS CHRIST.

IV. HOW SHOULD WE BE BAPTIZED?

According to the Scripture we should be baptized by immersion. The very word "baptize" comes from a Greek word which means to immerse or dip. It comes from the idea of dying a garment by continually dipping it into the dye. True baptism requires enough water to submerge the whole body. The Bible tells us that on one occasion; **"John was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized"** (John 3:23). When the Ethiopian was baptized by Philip it speaks of them both going down into the water and coming up out of the water. (Acts 8:38-39).

Many churches for convenience sake and other reasons have rejected true baptism by immersion and have substituted sprinkling. Why does it matter? Why is true baptism by immersion so important? It is important because of the very meaning and purpose of baptism which we have already discussed.

Only baptism by immersion can give the true picture of salvation. Baptism requires a burial in water in order to picture the death and burial of our old lives of sin. It requires a raising up out of the water to picture the raising up from death by GOD's grace of a new life in CHRIST JESUS. Paul describes it for us in Romans 6:4: **"Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death; 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."**

The sprinkling of water in place of immersion cannot possibly picture this experience which Paul has described. The beautiful symbolism which baptism is intended to portray is completely lost in the act of sprinkling. (See also Colossians 2:12) Following the Scriptural pattern of baptism by immersion makes it possible to beautifully and accurately picture our experience to others that they also might come to know CHRIST as their personal SAVIOUR

CONCLUSION

We do not have to be baptized in order to be saved, but we do have to be baptized in order to be obedient to CHRIST.

~ end of chapter 3 ~
