

"ARISE, AND BE BAPTIZED" (2)

Years ago, three-legged milking stools were common. Picture a three-legged stool in your mind. Then, imagine that one of the legs is removed. What would happen? (In my mind, I see a man trying to balance on the damaged stool as he milks a cow and finally toppling to the ground as his milk bucket goes flying!) Obviously, a three-legged stool cannot stand on two legs.

Three elements are involved in scriptural baptism: It must be done in the right way (the "How" of baptism); it must be done for the right reason (the "Why"); and it must be done to the right person (the "Who"). Each of these elements is similar to a leg on a three-legged stool: Each is needed; each is essential.

In the previous lesson, we started our discussion of the "Why?" of baptism. In this lesson, we will complete that discussion and will also cover the questions of "How?" and "Who?"

BAPTISM: THE "WHY?"

If it has been a while since you studied the previous lesson, you may want to review what Mark 16 and Acts 2 say about the purpose of baptism.

Other passages also answer the question "Why be baptized?" I will list several below. Be sure to read these in your own Bible, paying attention to the context of each:

Acts 22:16: The preacher told Saul, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." It is not the water that washes away sin; there is nothing magical or holy about the water at the place of baptism. The blood of Jesus washes away our sins (Matthew 26:28; Revelation 1:5). Acts 22 tells us that the blood of Jesus does this

at the point of baptism.

Galatians 3:26, 27: Paul told the Galatians, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (v. 26). When did they become "sons of God through faith"? Paul continued, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ¹ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (v. 27). If you want to be *a son of God*, you need to believe and be baptized. If you want to be a part of Christ, you need to be baptized *into* Christ. If you want to *clothe* yourself with Christ, you need to be baptized.

1 Peter 3:21: After Peter explained how Noah and seven others were saved in the ark, he wrote, "Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The purpose of baptism is not to take a bath and make the body clean.² Rather, baptism should be a heart response to God: God says, "Get up and be baptized," and my heart says "Yes!" As noted in the previous lesson, baptism expresses my faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

The words "baptism now saves you" are very strong. By now, you should understand that this does not mean that there is merit in the act of baptism alone. We cannot save ourselves; we can be saved only by the grace of God. This passage declares, however, that as people were saved in the ark when they did what God told them to, so people today are saved from their sins when they do what God commands—when they are baptized. "Baptism saves" in the sense that God included baptism in His plan for our salvation.

Other verses could be added to our list, some of which refer to baptism without using the word (such as John 3:3, 5; Titus 3:5). I hope, however, that the passages cited have been sufficient to answer the question of “Why?” in your mind.

BAPTISM: THE “HOW?”

Let us turn now to the question “How should one be baptized?” In the previous lesson, we noted that Greek lexicons define “baptism” as “immersion.” However, I would not want to leave the impression that it is necessary to know Greek or have a Greek lexicon to understand the action of baptism. The action of baptism is clear in the Scriptures.

Baptism by John (John 3; Matthew 3)

John 3:23 says that John the Baptist “was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there.” Sprinkling or pouring water on the head takes only a little water, but John’s baptism required “much water.”

John’s baptism took “much water” because it was an immersion in water. After John baptized Jesus, the Lord “came up immediately from the water” (Matthew 3:16). The action of going into the water (implied) and coming up out of the water (stated) is consistent with the action of immersion, and inconsistent with the actions of sprinkling or pouring.

Baptism of a Nobleman (Acts 8)

The conversion of the Ethiopian official was introduced in our third lesson. We saw that the official confessed his faith in Jesus. Next, we read,

... he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:38, 39).

Notice that Philip and the Ethiopian “went down into the water” and “came up out of the water.” That which keeps those who sprinkle out of the water today would have kept Philip out of the water *if* all he was going to do was sprinkle the official. Again, the action is consistent with immersion and inconsistent with sprinkling or pouring.

Baptism as a Burial (Romans 6; Colossians 3)

In Paul’s writings, he characterized baptism as a “burial.” He wrote to Christians in Rome, “Therefore we have been *buried* with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4; emphasis mine). He told the Christians in Colossae that they had “been *buried* with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12; emphasis mine). You have probably witnessed a burial after a funeral. Ask yourself, “Which best portrays the concept of a burial: sprinkling, pouring, or immersion?”

Search the New Testament completely: You will find no example of anyone being “baptized” by having water sprinkled or poured on his head.

Most historians agree that only immersion was practiced in the first-century church. Sprinkling (for baptism) was not introduced until many years later.³ Jesus once asked, “Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men?” (Mark 11:30). John’s baptism was from heaven. If we asked the same question regarding the practices of sprinkling and pouring, the answer would be “from men.”

BAPTISM: THE “WHO?”

The third question regarding baptism is “Who should be baptized?” Some religious groups “baptize” babies, but we determined in an earlier lesson that babies do not need baptism because they are born pure and holy. Who, then, should be baptized? We could answer, “Every responsible individual.” Peter commanded, “*Each of you* be baptized” (Acts 2:38),⁴ but some qualification is needed. Baptism is not just a rite or a ritual. It is for those who have prepared their hearts and lives. Thus Peter said that his listeners needed to repent before they were baptized (Acts 2:38).

Passages we have already studied answer the question of who should be baptized. You will want to reread these passages. Who should be baptized?

- One who has been *taught* (Matthew 28:18, 19; Mark 16:15, 16).

- One who *believes* in Jesus (Mark 16:15, 16).
- One who has *repented* of his sins (Acts 2:36–38).
- One who has *confessed* his faith in Jesus (Acts 8:36–39; Romans 10:9, 10).

Babies do not fit this profile.

When is a person old enough to be baptized? When does a person *need* to be baptized? The Bible does not give an exact age, but the person who is baptized needs to be old enough to understand:

- that he is a sinner in need of salvation.⁵
- that Jesus died to save him.
- that being baptized is part of God’s plan for his salvation.
- that he is making a personal commitment of his life to the Lord.

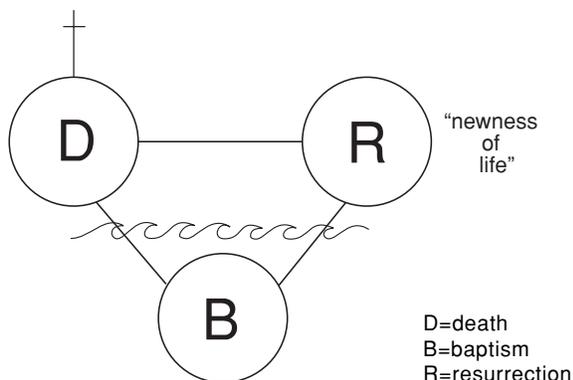
BAPTISM:

“WHO?”; “HOW?”; AND “WHY?”

A passage that illustrates the “Who?” and the “How?” and the “Why?” of baptism is Romans 6:3–6:

... do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.

The teaching of these verses on baptism might be diagrammed like this:



Note the relationship of baptism to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.⁶

Jesus *died* on the cross (Luke 23:33–46; Philip- pians 2:8). The one who is spiritually dead *in sin* (Ephesians 2:1, 5) can die *to sin* (Romans 6:11) through faith, repentance, and confession.

Jesus was *buried* in a tomb (John 19:40–42; 1 Corinthians 15:4). Even so, the obedient be- liever is buried in the watery grave of baptism.

Jesus was *raised* from the dead (Matthew 28:1–8; Romans 1:4). In a similar way, the Chris- tian is raised from the water to “newness of life.”

Sometimes people ask me what is wrong with one denominational baptism or another. As a rule, that which denominations call “bap- tism” falls short regarding one or more of the three characteristics we have studied. More tragically, these “baptisms” often destroy the relationship of baptism to Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection:

- Some “baptize” babies—but a baby is not *dead* in sin.
- Some sprinkle water and call it “bap- tism”—but sprinkling is not a *burial*.
- Some immerse, but insist that the one who is immersed had new life in Jesus *before* he was baptized, not *after*. Thus the imagery of being *raised to newness* of life is destroyed. (According to their doctrine, they bury “live” people, not dead.)

What should a person do if he discovers that his baptism is different from that practiced in New Testament times? Acts 19 provides an answer for that question. When Paul came to Ephesus, he found twelve men who he thought were Christians. He soon discovered that they had been baptized with John the Baptist’s bap- tism. John’s baptism was a preparatory bap- tism, appropriate for its day, but it had been replaced by Jesus’ baptism.⁷ The twelve men had been baptized with John’s baptism after it was no longer valid.⁸ The “How?” and “Who?” of their baptism was right, but the “Why?” was wrong.⁹ After Paul taught them further, “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5).

CONCLUSION

At this point, you may want to compare your own baptism with the baptism of the New Testament. Remember the form that I asked you to fill out at the beginning of this study? Look at your answers. Was some water sprinkled on you, or were you immersed? Were you just a baby when someone had you “baptized” (or “christened”)? Is it possible that you were so young that you did not understand what you were doing? If you were old enough to make a personal commitment and were immersed, is there any indication that you were taught that baptism was a non-essential rite? For instance, were you taught that you were saved before you were baptized?

I do not ask these questions to embarrass you or to make you feel bad. Rather, I ask them because nothing is more important than being saved eternally. No one wants to gamble on the salvation of his soul.

If you find that you have not been baptized according to the New Testament pattern, then be like the honest disciples in Acts 19: Be im-

mersed (or re-immersed), this time doing it exactly as the Bible teaches. ❖

¹All spiritual blessings are “in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). Two passages tell us how to get “into Christ,” where those blessings are found: Galatians 3:27 and Romans 6:3 tell us that one is *baptized* into Christ.

²On the contrary, occasionally I have had to baptize people in a dirty pool, because that was the only available place to immerse.

³Sprinkling was not officially accepted as a substitute for immersion until the 1600s. The authority for sprinkling is the Catholic Church.

⁴Emphasis mine.

⁵See the notes on “the age of accountability” in the lesson “Somebody Loves You.”

⁶The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is the heart of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1–4).

⁷By “Jesus’ baptism,” I mean the baptism that Jesus commanded in His Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15, 16).

⁸They had probably been taught and baptized by Apollos, who was “acquainted only with the baptism of John” (Acts 18:25) until he was taught “the way of God more accurately” by Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:26).

⁹One thing wrong with the purpose of their baptism is that John’s baptism did not include the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit as Jesus’ baptism did (Acts 2:38).

©Copyright, 1999, 2002 by Truth for Today
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED