

GREAT BIBLE DOCTRINES - LESSON 12 THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM

Introduction: The doctrine of baptism was distorted in the medieval church, and has been neglected since the Reformation. But it was among the important doctrines of the New Testament church. Christian baptism was preceded by the baptism of John the Baptist - Matthew 3:1-6,11; John 3:23; Acts 18:24-26 - and by a similar baptism performed by Jesus' disciples upon those who came to follow Jesus during His ministry - John 3:22,26; 4:1,2.

1. The importance of baptism.

- A. It is named as one of seven unifying doctrines in the church - Ephesians 4:1-6.
- B. It is named as one of six beginning principles of the gospel of Christ - Hebrews 6:1, 2.
- C. It is prominent in both accounts of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16) and thus is no minor detail of the gospel.
- D. All who were converted to Christ in the New Testament were baptized - Acts 2:38,39; 8:5,12,26,39; 9:17,18; 10:1-5,44-48; 16:14,15,27-33; 18:8; 19:1-5.
- E. Jesus, our example, was baptized - Matthew 3:13-17.
- F. Baptism is universally recognized as the Christian rite of initiation.
- G. We must be baptized:
 - 1) To be forgiven of our sins - Acts 2:38; 22:16; Compare Titus 3:5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.
 - 2) To receive the Holy Spirit - Acts 2:38; 5:32.
 - 3) To be born again and enter God's kingdom - John 3:5.
 - 4) To be saved - Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21.
 - 5) To leave the old life and begin the new - Romans 6:1-4.
 - 6) To be in Christ - Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27.

2. The wisdom of God is seen in the command of baptism.

- A. Baptism is a test of our humility - will we accept His Lordship and submit to a command that would seem to have no value from a human viewpoint?
- B. Baptism is a test of our faith -- do we believe the promise of salvation enough to fulfill the conditions? God has often tested faith by commands.
 - 1) Noah was told to build an ark - Genesis 6; Hebrews 11:7.
 - 2) Abraham was told to go out to another country and later to offer Isaac - Genesis 22:2; Hebrews 11:8-10, 17-19.
 - 3) Naaman was told to dip in Jordan - 2 Kings 5.

- C. Baptism gives us a definite, objective point in time at which we pass from darkness to light, from death to life, from sin to salvation and are born children of God. It is comparable to the signing of a sales contract or the vows in a wedding ceremony. We are not left to some subjective, uncertain emotional experience to know when we are saved. We can know that when we expressed our faith by being baptized, our faith met God's grace.

3. The commitment made at baptism:

- A. Acceptance of Christ as Lord of our whole life - body, soul, spirit, time, money, strength, work, business, studies, dress, habits, speech, friendships, entertainments, marriage and family life, dating, etc. - Luke 6:46
- B. Willingness to honor God and Christ in worship and prayer - John 4:24
- C. Willingness to study and grow in His will - 2 Peter 3:18
- D. Willingness to keep our life clean and fit for His use - 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; 7:1; 2 Timothy 2:19-22
- E. A person should not be baptized as a mere ceremony, or just to please someone, or just as "insurance" in case the gospel is true.

4. Other scriptural teachings about baptism:

- A. Baptism as presented in scripture is done by immersion of the whole body in water.
 - 1) This is the form seen in New Testament examples - Mark 1:9,10; John 3:23; Acts 8:36-39; Romans 6:3,4; Colossians 2:12.
 - 2) The Greek word for baptism (baptizo) means to immerse (dip or plunge).
 - 3) Sprinkling or pouring was introduced gradually, well after the time of the apostles, in some cases of "clinical baptism" where a person was too sick for immersion. The baptism of Novatian, about 250 A.D., is the first instance recorded in history and some objected to him as a church officer because he had not been immersed. As infant baptism became widespread around 400 A.D., baptism by sprinkling also became more widespread.
- B. Baptism is for penitent believers.
 - 1) Scriptural evidence: Mark 16:15, 16; Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21; Jeremiah 31:31-34
 - 2) Infant baptism arose well after the time of the apostles along with the development of the doctrine that babies are born with the guilt of their parents' sins or Adam's sin. But this doctrine differs from scripture because:
 - a. A child has no guilt from its parents' sins - Ezekiel 18:20.
 - b. Jesus did not baptize little children as He did adults, but simply blessed them and pronounced them already worthy of the kingdom - Matthew 19:13-15.

- C. Baptism is for the purpose of receiving forgiveness of sins, and the scriptures present it as necessary for salvation.
- 1) Scriptural evidence: Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21; John 3:5
 - 2) Now many teach that baptism is not essential, but is just a desirable symbol of a salvation that has already occurred because of belief in the heart. Instead of Jesus' statement, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16), many now say, "He who believes shall be saved, and may be baptized."
 - 3) In Bible times no one would have ever thought to question the essentiality of baptism. But during the Reformation there was a strong reaction to the Roman Catholic errors of "baptismal regeneration," and "works salvation" where baptism was little more than a magical rite which saved without personal faith on the part of the recipient. Strong reaction to one religious error often carries people into an opposite error of extremism. In this way baptism, intended by Christ as an act of faith, began to be regarded as a legalistic act of "salvation by works" if anyone required it for salvation.

The scriptures do require baptism for salvation. It is seen not as a "work" to earn salvation, but an expression of faith in the free grace of God, just like Noah's building of the ark or Naaman's dipping in Jordan. Noah was saved "by grace" (Genesis 6:8) "through faith" (Hebrews 11:7) just as we are (Ephesians 2:8, 9). The fact that his salvation was conditional on the required act of building an ark did not negate the fact that his salvation was by grace through faith. Naaman the leper was cleansed by the grace and mercy of God, yet God required him to express his faith by dipping in the Jordan River seven times - 2 Kings 5. Baptism simply accepts in faith what God's grace provides. It is essential because it is God's prescribed test of faith (James 2:14-26; Galatians 5:6).

5. What about re-baptism?

- A. It is scriptural and was important enough for Paul to command it where needed - Acts 19:1-5.
- B. Who should be re-baptized?
 - 1) Those who were baptized as infants or before they were old enough for personal faith and repentance (Biblical baptism is an act of personal faith).
 - 2) Those who were baptized by sprinkling or pouring (they should want to complete their obedience to Christ as Lord).
 - 3) Even those who were immersed at a responsible age may need rebaptism if their understanding or intention was not right (as with those in Acts 19). Only the person himself can judge what his understanding and intentions were, but he may need scriptural counseling before he decides.
- C. The validity of a baptism does not depend on the faith or character of the administrator, but only on the faith and intention of the recipient.

Conclusion: The attitude shown toward the Lord in baptism affects the whole Christian life, because the

same attitude is likely to continue toward all Christ's commands. It is important here at the beginning to lay a good foundation of humble, trusting obedience. It is here at baptism that we leave the old life behind and begin the new. We have forgiveness, peace with God, a new start, access to all God's blessings, and hope of eternal life. Baptism begins our walk of faith.

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Addendum on next page: Bible Baptism

Notes on Bible Baptism

Baptism is a controversial subject and people are confused by so many different teachings on it. It helps to get back behind all the accumulated ideas of tradition and see what baptism was in the early church under the teaching of Christ and his apostles.

How was baptism performed?

1. They "went down into the water" - Acts 8:38.
2. The Greek word translated "baptism" in our English Bibles means to "dip, plunge or immerse."
3. Jesus at his baptism "came up out of the water" - Mark 1:10.
4. John's baptism required "much water" - John 3:23.
5. Baptism is described as a "burial" - Romans 6:3, 4; Colossians 2:12.
6. Baptism by sprinkling or pouring of water on the head does not appear in the time of the apostles and came later in church history. It was used at first only for very sick people. Novatian, 250 A.D., is the first recorded person to have been baptized by sprinkling or pouring.

Who was baptized, infants or believers?

1. "Repent and be baptized" - Acts 2:38.
2. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" - Mark 16:16.
3. The Corinthians "believed and were baptized" - Acts 18:8.
4. "Baptized, both men and women" - Acts 8:12.
5. According to scripture, young children have no guilt of sin. "The kingdom belongs to such as these" - Matthew 19:14. "The son will not share the guilt of the father" - Ezekiel 18:20.
6. Infant baptism is not mentioned in scripture. It became popular in the church only after the rise of the human doctrine of inherited guilt in the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D.

Why were people baptized?

1. "Be baptized so that your sins may be forgiven" (some translations: "for the forgiveness of sins") - Acts 2:38.
2. "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved" - Mark 16:16.
3. "Be baptized and wash your sins away" - Acts 22:16.
4. "Baptism that now saves you also" - 1 Peter 3:21.
5. "Baptized into Christ Jesus" - Romans 6:3.
6. "You who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ" - Galatians 3:27.
7. The modern idea that sins are forgiven through belief before baptism arose in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th and 17th Centuries when reformers over-reacted to medieval Roman Catholic error of "baptismal regeneration" and salvation by works. Nothing we do can earn salvation. But the New Testament scriptures present baptism as an expression of faith prescribed by Jesus for those who trust and want to accept his promise of salvation.

Were people ever re-baptized?

Acts 19:1-5 tells of some persons who had been baptized but not with a valid understanding of Jesus' teaching. The apostle Paul commanded them to be baptized again.

Because of the development of human traditions over the centuries, not all modern teaching about baptism agrees with what the early church practiced under Christ and his apostles. A person whose previous baptism differs from that seen in the Bible can show submission to the Lordship of Jesus by being re-baptized.