

Water Baptism

Introduction

As I was searching the Scriptures for another reason, I noticed that in the early Church, the new converts to Christ were baptized immediately upon conversion. This is something of a rarity today. Perhaps this is because not that many are being converted, at least here in America. I think more of a reason is that we do not stress the obedience to water baptism as the early church did. One of the things that has flown in the face of the modern practice of baptism is the many false teachings on the subject. Because so many cults and religious systems put baptism as a means to be saved, it is harder to bring up the subject to people without all the disclaimers. A prime example is in *Acts chapter 2 when Peter says, "repent and be baptized"*, that passage is usually not read "as is" to an audience in an evangelism setting. The common practice today is for people who have been saved for a number of years is to schedule a baptism service at a church. There is nothing wrong with that and it is great they are being baptized. I say wonderful! Some churches even have baptism classes. The precedence in the early church however shows converts being baptized pretty much right away.

This paper may not be exhaustive on the subject; however I will cover some things that stand out to me in the Scriptures as to the topic of water baptism. I know there is some disagreement about the method of water baptism. Let's just say that I believe that the Bible teaches immersion (or submersion). I also believe that baptism is not for babies or young children. I also believe that the act of baptism does not save anyone, nor do you need to be baptized to enter heaven. Maybe I will start with the occasions of baptism in the New Testament. Although baptism was an antitype in the Old Testament and the Jewish people were familiar with baptizing before John the Baptist, I will limit my discourses within the New Testament.

Occasions of Baptism

The Crowds (or Multitudes) Were Baptized

The crowds were baptized by John the Baptist. Specifically the common people, tax collectors, and soldiers were the ones baptized. (**Matt 3:1-12, Mark 1:1-8, Luke 3:1-20**)

Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.

Matt. 21:31-32

The Pharisees and Sadducees Reject John's Baptism

But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

Luke 7:30 Note: It is the will of God to be baptized.

Jesus is Baptized

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. **Matt. 3:13.** (See also **Mark 1:9-11** and **Luke 3:21-22**)

Jesus Disciples Baptize New Disciples

Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), **John 4:1, 2,** (entire passage; **John 4:1-4**)

Large Crowd at Pentecost

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. **Acts 2:41**

Men & Women of Samaria

But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. **Acts 8:12**

Simon the Sorcerer

Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done. Acts 8:13

Ethiopian Eunuch

So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Acts 8:38

Apostle Paul

Immediately there fell from his (Saul's) eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. Acts 9:18

Gentile Converts

And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days. Acts 10:48

Lydia of Philippi

And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us. Acts 16:15

Philippian Jailer and His Family

And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Acts 16:33

Crispus and Corinthians

Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized. Acts 18:8

John the Baptist's Disciples in Ephesus

When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Acts 19:5

Gaius & Stephanas

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, Yes; I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 1 Cor. 1:14-16

The Great Commission

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Matt. 28:19

Immediate Baptism

In all of the examples above, the people were baptized immediately either after repentance, in the case of John the Baptist's ministry or after believing upon hearing the Gospel in the case of the other preachers. It is possible today we associate baptism more with discipleship than we do conversion. If so, this may explain the careful teachings about baptism and an elapsed period of time before people are baptized in our American churches today.

Does Baptism Save?

Does the literal physical act of baptism save us? I would answer this no. No external act is necessary for salvation. Salvation is by divine grace through faith alone (**Romans 3:22-30 Romans 4:5 Galatians 2:16 Ephesians 2:8-9 Philipians 3:9 etc.**).

The penitent woman (**Luke 7:37-50**), the paralytic man (**Matthew 9:2**), the publican (**Luke 18:13-14**), and the thief on the cross (**Luke 23:39-43**) all experienced forgiveness of sins apart from baptism. Note the thief on the

cross who never came down and was baptized before he died, yet he was to be in paradise according to Jesus Christ's own words. Footnote: The above two paragraphs taken from gracetoyou.org

Secondly, Paul states this; *For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. 1 Cor. 1:17* – whole passage; **1 Cor. 1:10-17** Here you have the arguing amongst the Corinthian believers as to who they followed bragging on behalf of one leader over the other. In the Apostle Paul's correction he brings up the fact that he has only baptized a few people. Perhaps one of the points of contention was who they were baptized by. If you actually had to go through the act of baptism to be saved certainly Paul would have mentioned it here. Instead he says he was not sent to baptize. From other New Testament Scripture you would definitely ascertain that Paul was representing the true Gospel and the whole counsel of God. (**Rom 2:16, Rom 16:25, 1 Tim. 1:11, 2 Tim. 2:8, Acts 20:26-27**)

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. Mark 16:16 In the second part of this verse it states that he who does not believe will be condemned, not he who is not baptized will be condemned.

There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 1 Peter 3:21

What Purpose Does Baptism Serve?

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 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. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection... Romans 6:1-5 Baptism is a symbolic act of obedience showing that we have been converted into the faith and believe Jesus Christ is Lord. Going down in the water is the death and burial of the old sinful man and coming up out of the water symbolizes the resurrection of the new man in Christ. Being baptized identifies us with Jesus Christ as His follower. Baptism is a (not the only) evidence of someone's salvation. *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. Col. 2:12 and For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Gal. 3:27*

Baptism is also a way for us to practically put our faith into action and demonstrate to the world that we've died to our old selves and desires, and have received a new resurrection life in Christ. It keeps us accountable and mindful that the world is watching us and expects to see some sort of change in our lives. In many foreign countries people who are baptized into Jesus Christ are severely ostracized by family members and their culture. Some are even killed.

Baptism for the Dead

Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? 1 Cor. 15:29 (full context: **1 Cor. 15:12-32**) I have heard many commentaries on this passage all having to do with a pagan practice of baptizing the dead in their rituals. Some relate it to the Catholics or Mormons in their practices of proxy. I believe what Paul is trying to point out here is his rebuttal to the dead do not rise, arguing like an attorney. In verse 12 Paul addresses the idea of someone saying there is no resurrection. Paul goes on a lengthy discourse refuting this notion. All he is saying here is that if there is no resurrection then why are we (Christians) baptized for the dead (meaning Jesus). If there is no resurrection then Christ is still dead and not alive, why would we be baptized for that? That is Paul's argument here. I don't think it has anything to do with some crass ritual in that culture.