

# The Biblical Role of Baptism

## Romans 6:3-7

This morning we are going to complete our series on how we respond to the gospel of Christ and what we must do. We have talked of the necessity of hearing and obeying what God says. We have shown the necessity of faith in Christ and how faith is the foundation of Christianity. And we have seen the necessity of repentance. Today we will focus on what baptism into Christ means and why everyone who chooses to follow Christ should be baptized for the forgiveness of sin.

Webster's unabridged Dictionary defines baptism as "*a ceremony or sacrament of admitting a person into Christianity or a specific church by dipping him in water or sprinkling water on him, as a symbol of washing away sin.*" But today we will concentrate on what the Bible has to say and not man.

What does the N.T. teach in regard to the act of baptism? Let us start with this thought: What action does the N.T. describe? The Greek word, "baptidzo" means to dip, to plunge, or immerse. A totally different Greek word describes the action of sprinkling. Had the Holy Spirit wanted us to sprinkle in baptism he would have used the Greek word "rhantidzo" rather than "baptidzo."

Thomas J. Conant did an exhaustive survey of more than 200 examples in Greek literature and ancient translations in his book "**The Meaning And Use of Baptizein,**" concluded: "*That the word baptizein, during the whole existence of the Greek as a spoken language, had a perfectly defined and unvarying import. In its literal use it meant, as has been shown, to put entirely into or under a liquid, or other penetrable substance, generally water, so that the object was wholly covered by the inclosing element.*"

When the N.T. speaks of baptism, the event described points to an immersion in water. In Mt. 3:16 after Jesus was baptized He “**went up out of the water.**” In Jn. 3:23 John the Baptist was baptizing his followers in the Jordon River “**at Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there.**” If baptism or immersion was taking place, then of course you would need enough water to immerse and adult. In Acts 8:38-39, Philip and the Eunuch went down into the water, Philip baptized the Eunuch, and they both came up out of the water. Whatever happened in this baptism, it took place while they were down in the water. (Since they were crossing desert the Eunuch certainly had drinking water, if they were going to sprinkle they would not have needed extra water to do this.)

In Romans 6:4 the apostle Paul wrote, “***We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.***” The likeness of being buried and raised in water is striking here! It is no accident that baptism is a burial and a resurrection that leads to newness of life. If we continue to read verses 5-7 we see, “***<sup>5</sup>For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup>We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup>For one who has died has been set free from sin.***” (Just a side note, in 2 Thess. 1:6-10 Paul lets us know that we are to obey the gospel he has preached, in 1 Cor. 15 he lets us know that the gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Baptism is the way we obey the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. This is what Paul is pointing out in Romans 6.)

Baptism is that time when our old body of sin is crucified with Christ and done away with. It's buried. At that point we are no longer slaves to sin. And when we are raised up with Him, we have new life just as the Lord Jesus had new life when He was resurrected. The resurrection caused the new life for Jesus, and our resurrection with Christ in Baptism causes our newness of life. Before baptism we are dead in sin, but after baptism we are freed from sin and walk in newness of life!

Commenting of this passage William Barclay said, "*Commonly baptism was by total immersion and that practice lent itself to a symbolism to which sprinkling does not so readily lend itself. When a man descended into the water and the water closed over his head, it was like being buried. And when he emerged from the water, it was like rising from the grave. You see baptism was symbolically like dying and rising again. And the man died to one kind of life and rose to another; he died to the old life of sin and rose to the new life of grace.*"

There is a second passage that links baptism to the burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Colossians 2:12-13 says, "***<sup>12</sup>having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.<sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses...***"

Baptism is an act of faith in the powerful working of God. In baptism we demonstrate our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we are united with Him in His burial and resurrection by baptism. Before we were baptized we were dead in our sins; but in baptism God makes us alive, just as God made

Christ alive. Now in making us alive, God forgives us of all our trespasses.

I hope you noticed in this passage that it was God who was actively forgiving us and making us alive. Baptism is an act of faith on our part. The command in Acts 2:38 and 22:16 is to “***be baptized.***” Grammatically, “***be baptized***” is a command, but *it’s a passive command.* God commands us to demonstrate our faith by letting someone baptize us in the name of Jesus Christ. It means someone else is immersing us in water. Someone else is acting on us. We receive the action. That is what passive means.

Just as we receive the physical act of baptism in water, we receive God’s gracious actions on us in the forgiveness of sins and making us alive. In baptism we are born again or born from above with newness of life. It is God who is powerfully working on us. Baptism is not a work of merit to earn salvation. No, Baptism is an act of faith on our part whereby we receive God’s powerful working in our lives, just as He powerfully raised Jesus Christ from the dead. God buries our old man of sin, God raises us up, God makes us alive, God washes away our sins, and God makes us new.

When someone says, “*you don’t have to be baptized to be saved,*” they are missing the point. If the Bible says that it is at baptism when God acts on us, then baptism would have to be necessary for us to be saved.

We should respect what God is doing to us by saving us in baptism or immersion. WE have no authority to substitute sprinkling for immersing in fulfilling God’s command. If God is providing salvation to us through our baptism, then shouldn’t we be careful to abide by the Lord’s command? Shouldn’t we cooperate with

what He told us to do? Sprinkling and immersing are different actions. While many have sprinkled people and called it baptism for centuries, sprinkling for baptism has no basis in Scripture; it just is not there. Baptism by immersion is what the N.T. teaches – baptism by sprinkling is an old, human tradition, which began a number of centuries after the N.T. times.

Obedying the Lord doesn't mean doing what is conventional or doing what is popular. Obeying the Lord means honoring the Lord to the point that you are willing to do what He says. Honoring and respecting God means you won't add to or take away from God's commands. Editing the word of God to make it say what you want is simply a sin. God told King Saul, "*to obey is better than sacrifice.*" (1 Samuel 15:22)

**Why should a penitent person who believes in Jesus as Christ be baptized?** There are numerous reasons. Peter told the guilty people at Pentecost in Acts 2:38, "*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*"

According to the apostle Peter (and the other apostles) people who repent and are baptized will have their sins forgiven. Ananias told Saul of Tarsus in Acts 22:16, "*And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.*" According to Peter, Paul (who is retelling his baptism account) and Ananias; baptism is the time when God washes away our sins.

Also baptism is the time we clothe ourselves with Christ or become united with Him. In Galatians 3:26-27 Paul says, "<sup>26</sup>*for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.* <sup>27</sup>*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" Baptism is a necessary act of faith. Placing your faith in Christ

necessarily includes baptism. The faithful sons of God today are baptized into Christ and clothes with Christ.

We have already seen in Romans 6:4-7 and Colossians 2:12-13 that baptism is the time that God unites us with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. So in baptism we are crucified with Him, buried with Him, and raised with Him to walk in newness of life. Since the old man of sin is crucified with Him in baptism, God at that time frees us from sin and its guilt. Baptism is also that time when we begin sharing our new life in Christ and with Christ. From that day forward we are new people belonging to Him. His blood has cleansed and purchased us; we are not longer our own. We have been bough with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

When we are baptized, the Lord adds us as God's children to the church. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "<sup>13</sup>*For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*" Baptism unites us with Christ and with those who are in His body, the church.

To be in the church is to be in God's kingdom. Paul in Colossians 1:13-14 taught, "<sup>13</sup>*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,* <sup>14</sup>*in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" As the Bible teaches, forgiveness and membership in the church or kingdom are benefits of being baptized into Christ. This agrees with what the Lord Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:5. Jesus taught, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup>That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*" How does the Bible teach that we are born of water and

Spirit? The only biblical conclusion one can make is obedience to the Lord's command to be baptized.

In Christ we have the grace and blessing of God. Ephesians 1:3 says, ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”*** In Christ we have the promise of eternal life, in 1 Jn. 5:11 we read, ***“And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; and he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.”*** The Bible has made it so clear – the only way into Christ is through baptism when you confess Christ and repent of your sins. Baptism is certainly not the only thing necessary to faith. We have seen this last month that hearing God and obeying him is required. Believing in Jesus is required. Repenting of sin and confessing Christ as the Son of the Living God is required. There is much that makes up a truly Biblical faith, one such as Abraham the father of faith had.

So why is baptism so important? Because baptism is the culminating act in our faithful obedience. Our faith, repentance and confession lead us to baptism. In the end we are baptized because our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has commanded it. Who are we to disobey the Lord and think we can attain the promise of eternal life.

It is also important to note, that of all the examples of baptism in the book of Acts, we see they immediately wanted to and were baptized after hearing and responding to the gospel. It seems that God thinks it is urgent. What about you this morning? Do you think your salvation is important? Than why are you waiting? Come as we stand and sing our invitation song.