

BAPTISM  
March 15, 2015  
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A few years ago, one of our elders suggested that we do a teaching on water baptism at least once a year. Since we are going to baptize several people this morning, I thought now would be a perfect time. Before I begin, I would like you to hear a personal testimony that is not untypical today, and why it is that our elder made the suggestion that we teach on baptism once a year. I'd like to invite Deb Johnson to step out of her comfort zone and tell you her story.

In July 1998 my sister Kay and her husband Rand visited me in northern California from Minnesota. One afternoon during their stay, Kay was in the house, and Rand and I were on the front porch talking. I told him that I saw something in their lives that I wanted in mine.

Rand didn't reply to my comment, but he called for Kay to join us outside. When she got to the screen door, Rand asked me to tell her what I just told him. I was confused; I wasn't sure why he wanted me to repeat myself. He said, "Deb, tell your sis what you just told me."

I told her that I saw something in them, in their lives, that I wanted. She literally fell to her knees in tears. I was perplexed.

They shared that what I saw in them was because of God. They began to share what it was like to walk with the Lord, how being a Christian gave them that something that I wanted, which began my walk with Christ. They bought me a study Bible and I was hungry for the Word.

They also told me the night before they left on their trip to California they were praying with their small group, praying that while visiting with me I would "see in Kay and Rand something that I wanted." Then I understood their reaction. I also learned that they had been praying for my salvation since about 1970.

A few months later, October 1998, Kay and Rand asked if I would like to join them at a convention in southern California. They were going to be there with their pastor and members of their church family. Following their visit in July, I had been studying the gospel, but hadn't found a church to attend. Being around a group of Christians sounded like something I would enjoy--a new experience.

On the last day of the convention, their pastor asked if I had accepted Christ as my savior and invited the Holy Spirit to come live in me. I had done both. That afternoon I was baptized in the hotel hot tub but didn't really know why. I just wanted to do what Christians do.

In May 2013, the pastor of the church I was attending gave a sermon on baptism and why Christians are baptized. After he gave that sermon, I was baptized again, this time knowing why.”

So, why did Deb rightly feel the need to be baptized again? Because she previously had not understand the purpose or significance of the ordinance of baptism. Once she did, it took on a whole different meaning, and now she was truly ready to be baptized.

I would submit to you that if you were to ask the average person on the street, “Do you know why people are commanded by Jesus to be baptized?” or “Do you know why people get baptized?” very few, if any, would be able to correctly answer the question. Yet many pastors today practice the New Testament model of immediately baptizing someone who says they want to trust Jesus Christ as their savior. However, having heard innumerable testimonies over the years such as Deb's, I have become convinced that this immediately baptizing someone may not be the best practice in our culture today.

Often times, pastors today fail to take into consideration that different than in our day, everyone who lived during the first century understood the practice and the purpose behind the social and religious practice of baptism. Baptism was a common institution which all Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and Israelis understood. In other words, baptism was not something uniquely practiced by Christians and neither has it always been a religious practice.

Today, baptism is not a commonly understood practice. This is why it is not uncommon for an individual who, after an emotional moment with the Lord and being baptized on Sunday, can go out the next day and lie, steal, gets drunk, slander others, or commit some form of sexual immorality. Simply stated, the individual has no understanding of what their baptism was all about, and hence has little or no sense of conviction about their wrongful actions.

Hence, it makes sense that only when a person understands the purpose and practice of baptism should that person be baptized. It's my opinion that often

times, pastors don't have the necessary time in those more spontaneous baptismal situations to make sure that the one wanting to be baptized fully understands what they are doing or why they are doing it. As a result, it is my conviction that as pastors, we do candidates for baptism a disfavor by not first educating them in the meaning of baptism and what a significant step baptism is before they get baptized.

Some assume that baptism began as a dubious religious rite that started with the church in the first century. As a result, baptism gets treated as though it is irrelevant, meaningless, and thus unnecessary. But the fact of the matter is that the practice of baptism can be traced back to before 400 BC, and it can be shown that the everyday practice of baptism played a very significant role in the lives of the average Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and Jews before Jesus made it a practice of those who have trusted their lives to Christ.

By the time we read about baptism in the New Testament, everyone alive at the time Asia Minor, North Africa, Egypt, and Palestine understood its significance. But that is not true of our people today.

Approximately four hundred years before Jesus was born, baptism was practiced by the Greeks as a rite of initiation. Its purpose was to identify an individual with a political cause, a philosophy, a trade union (such plumbing, carpentry, pottery making, or leather working) or a significant leader.

For instance, if you were a student and follower of a philosopher like Socrates (born in 469 BC), and you wanted to be known as his disciple, student of philosophy, or one who supported his teachings, you would be baptized with water so as to be identified with him. This was a public event and not private or secretive at all. You were making a statement about your life, your values, and with what you wished to be identified. When baptized, others in the community would hold you accountable to your commitment as a follower of Socrates. If you were to teach something counter to what Socrates believed, you would have been corrected. If you spoke against Socrates or lived your life in a manner that was not consistent with the philosophy of Socrates, you could expect someone would stop you and ask why.

If you were going to join a trade union like brick masonry, copper smithing, or carpentry, you would be baptized into that trade union. You would be saying to those around you that you took this craft seriously and were going to a school or guild to learn as an apprentice your trade under a certain mentor. This baptism told people that the apprentice was committed to and belonged to a specific mentor. In

those days, one didn't hop from one career to another. It was a serious decision to choose a career and a mentor. Baptism was a step of commitment to a person and a direction that you were expected to stay with for your whole life.

The Greek rite of baptism eventually found its way into Egypt at least as early as one hundred years before Christ's birth. The cause for these baptisms by the orthodox Jews was that too many Jews were compromising their faith by mixing it with Greek or Hellenistic values and views of life. Hence, through the rite of baptism, Jews in Egypt were calling fellow Jews to repent or to change their thinking about how they viewed the practice of their religious life and to return to the orthodox faith of Judaism. For those Jews, the practice of baptism was the manner of identification of commitment to their orthodox Jewish faith.

One hundred thirty years later, John the Baptist was baptizing in the waters of the Jordan River. John had a message from God to his fellow Jews: "The Messiah is coming and bringing His Kingdom. Before He arrives, you had better repent and change your way of thinking as it concerns your godless and rebellious sinful lifestyles, or risk bringing upon yourself the wrath of God." Because the Jews knew that many of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Kingdom had been fulfilled, and thus the Kingdom was almost upon them, thousands of Jews admitted their need to repent, to change their minds about their sin. This in turn would produce the fruit of repentance, a change in lifestyle. When those Jews were baptized by John, they were declaring publicly that they had identified with John and his message concerning the coming Kingdom of God, the Messiah, and living as God had called them to live.

As many of you know, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Why? Not to be saved, but to identify with John the Baptist's message concerning the coming Kingdom of God and the need for Israel to repent from their wicked ways.

Later, when the Apostles began baptizing the Jews and the Gentiles, they were challenging them to first change their thinking about the crucified Christ. Rather than believing that the crucified Christ was a phony, they were now publicly declaring that Jesus was indeed their Messiah, and that they were committing their lives to follow after Him. They were demonstrating that Jesus had died for their sin and had become their rescuer, their savior, and their liberator from the shame and guilt of sin. Furthermore, they were declaring that they had chosen to make Jesus the master of their lives, and that they would seek to make him known.

You see, for all of these people, this practice of baptism was extremely important. It signaled to them and to everyone who witnessed it that something very significant had changed about their lives.

Hence, the first century believers understood the purpose of Christian baptism to be an act whereby the individual chooses to make a public declaration that he or she has chosen to commit himself to Jesus Christ as Master; and as His servant, the Christian would make it a priority to fulfill their new Master's Kingdom agenda.

This commitment would also result in a change in personal identity. From the moment they committed their lives to Christ, they would no longer be the same or see themselves as being the same. They were changed persons. They were no longer free to do whatever they wished, but they were under new orders as a slave to serve their new Master. This change in identity would soon be observed by outward changes in behavior.

This was and has always been the purpose behind baptism. However, few Christians are told this before they are baptized.

At this point, let's turn our attention to three important questions about baptism. First: Is baptism important or necessary? If so, why? In a nutshell, the answer is yes, because Jesus commands all believers to be baptized. Look with me at **Matthew 28:19-20**. In this section of scripture, Jesus is speaking for the last time to His disciples. These words make up some of Christ's final instructions before He ascended into heaven, and thus make them very important. He states simply and clearly what their objective as His disciples is and what the life objective for all His future disciples is to be. Jesus says, "***Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***"

In the English, it appears that there are several commands in these two verses. But really, there is only one command in the original Greek. And that command is to "**make disciples**" of Jesus Christ. But how that command is to be carried out is very specifically detailed by three participles that I have italicized. Since these explain the three steps to fulfilling the command to every Christian to make disciples, each participle in the Greek language carries the weight of a command. They flow in a natural progression. In other words, Jesus says that we are to make disciples of Him by doing three things. First, "**by going**," or more literally "while you are going about your daily business," be focused on making disciples for Jesus

Christ. In other words, this is not something that you do once a week or during an evangelism campaign, but it is to be a part of the Christian's everyday life. This is not the job of the paid professional, but of every follower of Christ.

Secondly, we don't just talk about Jesus, but we talk about Jesus with the view to challenge people to trust Him as their Lord and Savior, and to be identified with Him through baptism. In other words, to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, we are commanded to be baptized.

Thirdly, if we are going to make disciples of Jesus Christ, we are to teach these believers. Notice, this teaching has a purpose. It is not just teaching so as to fill up a person's mind with theological information. It is to teach them to observe or obey all that our master Jesus says we are to obey. To put it another way, the goal of teaching from God's Word is to affect the way we live for Christ in our world. Following Christ should make an observable difference to those who live around us.

As I understand this passage, if one attempts to be a follower or disciple of Christ without being baptized and understands the command, that person is not just being disobedient to Jesus, but is dishonoring Jesus.

Although one does not have to be baptized to be saved, just like one doesn't have to take communion to be saved, both the taking of communion on a regular basis and baptism are commanded in the Scriptures. So what good reason does a true follower of Jesus Christ have for disobeying their savior's command to be baptized and to publicly declare their commitment to Christ? The honest answer is that there is none!

Or, simply put, if one wants to be obedient to Jesus Christ, one must be baptized.

Here is a second question: Does baptism lead to the forgiveness of sins? No! Some will tell you that baptism is necessary because it leads to the forgiveness of sins, and they point to **Acts 2:38** to support this view. It reads, "**And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.'**"

The term "**repent**" means to "turn away from something to something." In the case of Peter's Jewish audience, he is calling them to repent or turn away from or to change their previously held ideas about Jesus, whom they had just executed, believing that He was a false Messiah. In turn, Peter is challenging them to put

their trust Jesus as their Messiah, as their Lord and Savior, which will result in the forgiveness of their sins.

There are two very important three letter words in this verse that must be correctly understood as they relate to repentance, baptism and forgiveness of sins. The first word is “**and.**” “**And**” implies a process: First you do this, and then you do that. It is repent, and then be baptized. In other words, baptism is a response to repentance--an outward expression of inward faith or trust in Christ’s death being sufficient to forgive you of your sins.

The second, and for our purposes, probably the most important word to correctly understanding this verse is the word “**for.**” According to A. T. Robertson, a well-known Greek scholar, this Greek preposition translated “**for**” has two meanings. The first is “in order that.” If this were the intended meaning of this word in this verse, then it would indeed teach that the ritual of water of baptism forgives sin. But if that were true, this lone verse would then contradict every other verse in scripture that denies that any action on our part can forgive sin.

So here is a clue to correctly interpreting and understanding the Bible: Whenever you find one verse which appears to fly in the face of what the rest of scripture says, you had better examine that verse closely. Because when you do, as I have, you will typically discover that under closer examination, that first apparent meaning is wrong.

According to Robertson, the alternate meaning of the word translated “**for**” can mean “because of” or “on the basis of.” For instance, **Luke 11:32** reads, “**The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah [or “because of” or “on the basis of” the preaching of Jonah]; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.**” The Greek preposition “**at**” used in the phrase “**at the preaching of Jonah**” is the same word we translated “**for**” in **Acts 2:38**. The people of Jonah’s day, you see, did not repent “for: his preaching, but “because of” or “on the basis of” Jonah’s preaching.

Likewise, in **Acts 2:38**, Peter doesn’t mean “be baptized so that you can receive forgiveness of sins.” He is actually saying, “Be baptized because you have been forgiven of your sins.” In other words, the public profession of your faith through baptism, that you have put your trust in Jesus Christ to be your Savior, is the next obvious step of one who has already believed and been forgiven, and thus is already saved.

The third question we want to address is, “Does baptism save you? Or, is baptism necessary for salvation?” There are some today who teach that if you are going to be saved, you must be baptized. What’s the Biblical basis for their teaching? There is one key passage that those who hold the view that baptism is necessary to save, and that is **1 Peter 3:21**. But on a close examination of this passage, one will see that this is not taught here.

In order to grasp the intent of this verse, one must understand the context in which it is found. Peter is writing to Christians who are being persecuted for their faith. Many are afraid that they might even be put to death because of their commitment to Christ. Therefore, many do not want to make the public declaration through baptism that they have chosen to follow Christ. Look at **I Peter 3:13-17**. It reads:

**And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.**

Peter is challenging his readers to take courage, to make a complete break from their old lives, and to take a stand for Christ, even if it means suffering to the point of death. Then, in **verses 18-20**, Peter gives them the example to follow--Jesus, who obviously suffered to the point of death. He writes:

**For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but**

**made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.**

In other words, Christ suffered to the point of death to provide a way for us to be saved, through paying the penalty for our sins and making it possible to have a relationship with the Father. And now, as in the days before the flood when Noah and his family suffered persecution yet were required to trust God by continuing to build the ark and then get on board, we are required to trust in God's promise of deliverance, not through an ark, but through a Savior, as Peter states in **verses 18-20**.

With that in mind, Peter compares in **verse 21** our putting trust in Christ with Noah's putting trust in the ark. He writes, "**And corresponding to that,**" and the word "**that**" refers to the ark, not the water, as some would have us believe. "**And corresponding to that, [the ark], baptism now saves you.**" What kind of baptism? Water baptism or spiritual baptism in Christ? Peter answers the question as to what kind of baptism he has in mind in the next few words. He says, "**Not the removal of dirt from the flesh.**" What kind of baptism would remove dirt from the flesh? Water baptism. In other words, Peter is making it perfectly clear that he is not talking about water baptism here, which may remove at most some dirt from your skin. That obviously doesn't save you.

So this baptism must refer to the only other kind of baptism that the Bible speaks of, spiritual baptism. Peter is saying that what saves you is similar to that which saved Noah and his family. By faith they were saved by entering the ark, and so also we are saved by putting our faith in Christ.

Hence, in the overall context of **1 Peter 3**, Peter is saying to his readers who were thinking about avoiding the pressures of living for Christ by returning to their old lives, to trust like Noah in Christ, even though it may mean suffering for your faith. Don't fall back to your old life in order to be accepted by others and to remain physically safe. That's why Peter adds at the end that being put into Christ is "**an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus**

**Christ.”** Our faith rests in the Christ who proved that He could deliver us, even if we die, because He resurrected Himself. When we remain in Christ, our conscience is good.

So, the baptism mentioned here in **I Peter** which is said to save us has nothing to do with water baptism. It is spiritual baptism, the basic putting of one's trust in the promise of Jesus Christ, and as a result, being spiritually baptized or placed into Christ.

Furthermore, as it concerns how one is saved, **Romans 10:9** clearly teaches us that faith alone in Jesus Christ is the requirement for salvation. It reads, **“That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.”** There is no mention of baptism anywhere in that verse or the surrounding verses. As we have seen before, water baptism is a public confession of that faith.

So, the short answer to the question, “Does baptism save you?” or “Is it necessary to be baptized to be saved?” is no. Faith in Christ alone, plus nothing else, saves.

Hence, each of the individuals that we will be baptizing this morning have been interviewed as to their commitment to Christ and have had explained to them the purpose of baptism. Of their own choosing, they are making a public declaration, as Jesus asked them to, declaring Him to be their savior and Lord.