

The Five Ws is a basic formula employed in various disciplines as a means of gathering essential information. Apply this method to learn what the Bible says about baptism.

WHY? We could echo the chorus sung by much of the evangelical world that says baptism is merely an outward display or testimony of a previous inward salvation experience. But that is not only foreign to Scripture, it is contrary to Bible teaching. Search as you may, but you will not find any such language in the Bible. The sole purpose or meaning of baptism is always found in the context of sinners

being saved from the effects and consequences of sin. These may be summarized as the *penalty* and *power* of sin.

The penalty is addressed by God, the Lawgiver and Judge, Who declares that our penalty has been paid in full by virtue of the atoning sacrifice of His sinless Son. The power of sin is addressed by God, the Great Physician, Whose Holy Spirit performs a heart transplant and provides continuing rehabilitation. Baptism is the occasion when God does this saving work (Col. 2:11-13).

God's remedy for our legal problem due to sin (breaking God's law) is the blood of Jesus. It covers our sin, blots it out and washes it away (Acts 22:16). God's remedy for our sickness or weakness due to sin is the gift of His Holy Spirit, Who regenerates and renews, giving power to live as saints.

At baptism God forgives us on the basis that the blood of Jesus has blotted out our sin. At baptism the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us and directs our steps along the road to recovery from and victory over sin. This is what Peter declared on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38). Just as Jesus' blood was poured out

for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28), so baptism is for the forgiveness of sins. To give to baptism a meaning other than the forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is to deny what the Bible does say in favor of something the Bible does not say.

WHO? Consistent with the meaning or purpose of baptism, sinners are its proper subjects. Sinners are those who, having understood God's will, have chosen to rebel against it.

Consistent with the prerequisites of faith and repentance, only those who are capable to respond in faith to the Lord's

commands and promises are proper subjects for baptism. To be baptized in accordance with Bible teaching, the individual must be able to understand the gospel and to commit himself in submission to the Lord. In accordance with Bible teaching and example, therefore, those who had water sprinkled on them in their infancy must express their faith in Jesus by being immersed into Him in order to receive the saving benefit of His atonement.

HOW? The Bible is clear and consistent . Baptism is immersion in water, a re-enactment of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. This is supported linguistically and historically, as well as by what baptism illustrates — burial and resurrection.

Greek scholars (even those from groups that practice sprinkling) unanimously concur that the language specifies immersion or submersion only. There is not an occurrence of the word in all of Greek literature where it is translated any other way but to immerse or submerge.

It wasn't until centuries after the church came into existence that any other practice was employed. And those methods were



considered to be substitutions. In fact, history records that the method of baptism was considered a matter of salvation; that only those who were immersed were considered to be Christians.

The biblical record of people becoming Christians testifies to the fact that everyone in the first century understood that baptism is the immersion in water of a repentant sinner. There was no debate in the early centuries regarding baptism's form or mode, for immersion was universally practiced.

To advocate any other mode or method of baptism is to advocate a salvation by faith in men and not in God, for there is no divine command or promise connected to anything other than immersion. To affirm that salvation results by saying a prayer of repentance and inviting Jesus into one's heart is to advocate salvation by human works and not by faith, for no command or promise of God is connected to

such. Immersion into Christ Jesus for the purpose of receiving God's gifts of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit, however, is an expression of faith in God, for it is a response to God's command and promise.

WHEN? As soon as one believes Jesus and is prepared to surrender to Him in complete submission and trust, baptism is appropriate. In the Bible, those who heard and believed the message were immediately immersed into Christ.

WHAT? What, then, should this mean to us in practical terms? Anyone who has not expressed faith in the blood of Jesus by repenting of sin and being baptized to receive forgiveness must do so in order to have the hope of salvation based upon the promise of God. Those who have submitted to rituals or practices other than immersion need to humbly respond in faith to God's command and promise by being immersed into Christ. We are always eager to assist people in complying with God's will.