



Bible Baptism

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One of the strongest, most positive statements ever made by Jesus is found in John 3:5, "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." I dare make the assertion today that this little word "except" is going to keep many people on the outside of the kingdom of heaven. Here we have presented two essential steps to gaining admission to heaven. A man must be born of water and then born of the Spirit.

Now first of all, what does it mean to be born of the Spirit? The third verse clarifies the meaning for us very well. "Jesus answered and said ... Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." So being born of the Spirit means that spiritual change by which a man is converted-dying to sin, walking in newness of life, all those things that are involved in being born of the Spirit. Born of the water signifies that outward sign of baptism which is a symbol of that inward spiritual change. Jesus made it even more emphatic in Mark 16:16. He said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Now on the basis of these statements, I do not hesitate to say that any man who has the opportunity to be baptized and refuses to be cannot possibly enter the kingdom of heaven.

Some may say that the thief on the cross proves the opposite because he was never baptized and Jesus told him that he would be saved. Well, the fact is, of course, that the thief did nothing except to repent and receive Christ as his Lord and Saviour. But that was because he did not have an opportunity to do anything else. If he could have come down from the cross, he would have been required to do many things in order to remain in the state of grace. He would have stopped stealing, for example. He would have made wrongs right, and he would have surely been baptized. God doesn't require the impossible of anybody, but if we spurn the opportunity to obey the commands of Christ and refuse to obey, we surely cannot be saved. The Bible gives us only one example of an exception to this rule about baptism in order that none of us would be presumptuous in refusing to obey the commandment of Christ to be baptized.

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Now let's ask this question: What is the meaning of baptism, anyway? Friends, it's a symbolic ordinance and it represents something very, very significant for the Christian. And it's in the significance of the act that we find the answer to many, many questions. Notice this verse in Romans 6:3, 4: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Now let's ask, Why is baptism a symbol of death and burial? Who has died and who needs burying? The answer is in verse 6. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Who is this old man and this body of sin to whom Paul is referring? Well, of course, it's that old carnal nature of man. The conversion takes place in an individual and he is born of the Spirit of God. Immediately a tremendous inward spiritual change takes place. Jesus said it was being born again. The old habits die, the sinful nature that loved to do evil things is now crucified, and a new creature emerges. The old man of sin no longer has control because he is dead and there is a new life in Christ Jesus. Now that the old man is dead, he must be buried. Baptism is that burial of the old life of sin, a symbolic act of placing that old carnal nature in a watery grave and rising to live a new life in Christ Jesus.

Now we inquire, How does baptism fulfill that symbol of death and burial and the resurrection? My friends, nothing could meet the type more perfectly than the Bible picture of baptism. The eyes are closed, the hands folded, the breath suspended and the candidate is lowered gently beneath the water. There's one point which all must understand on this subject. The act of being baptized does not work an immediate and miraculous change in an individual. A man could be baptized 50 times and be just as sinful as before unless his heart had been changed. It's only when the inward spiritual new birth has taken place that the outward symbol of baptism has any real meaning. If there has been no death to the old sinful nature, that act of burying the old man in that water would become absolutely without any validity. It's just a dead ceremony, a form which signifies nothing.

Friends, too many people have been buried alive. I mean by that that the motions of sin were still strongly influencing their lives. They were never converted. Religious leaders are going to have to give an answer in the judgment for the crime of burying people in baptism before the death has taken place of the old man of sin. "Well," somebody asks, "how does the sprinkling of water that is practiced by many churches, fit into the meaning of baptism?" The answer is simply that it doesn't fit, friends. The Bible presents only one kind of baptism. And surely that's the one we are interested in today. We can always find the right way by inquiring, "What did Jesus do about it, what did He say?" If we follow His example, we can never be wrong. So now we turn to Mark 1:9, 10: "And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him." Notice that Jesus was not baptized by or near the River Jordan but in the Jordan. The text says that he was "coming up out of the water." He set a perfect example of baptism by fulfilling the spiritual symbol of death, burial and resurrection. He was immersed in the water.

The practice of the disciples was also in perfect harmony with the example Jesus gave. In Acts 8, the story is told of Philip's contact with that Ethiopian eunuch as he rode along in his chariot. After the Bible study, the eunuch asked for baptism. Philip examined the candidate and agreed to accept him. Now read verses 38 and 39. "And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing." Now here the words are so explicit that there can be no question whatsoever. Notice this expression, "they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch." Notice also the words,

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"come up out of the water." In order to perform the ceremony so that it would have meaning, they both got down into the water so the candidate could be immersed.

This agrees perfectly with the method that John the Baptist used in performing baptism. We read it in John 3:23, "And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized." Please notice that John could not carry on his ministry except in certain places where there was much water for baptizing the people. If he had followed some modern customs of just sprinkling a little water, he could have carried a bottle around with him and baptized people anywhere. But he preached and met the people only at certain spots where there was plenty of water. At Ænon they could go down into the water and be immersed.

Perhaps the most incontestable proof of all lies in the original Greek word for baptize, the word which Jesus and all the Bible writers use was "babtizo." Now, friends, this word just has one meaning. The Greek Lexicon of Lidell and Scott gives this meaning: "To dip under water." Other Lexicons say: "To submerge, a rite of sacred immersion commanded by Christ." But never has the word been used in any other sense than this. There's no possibility of the meaning: "To sprinkle with water."

Now I want to quote something from Dr. Conant in the book, Systematic Theology, by Strong. And this is what he says concerning this Greek word "babtizo." "Examples have been drawn from writers in almost every department of literature and science. There is no instance in which it signifies to make a partial application of water by a fusion or sprinkling or to cleanse to purify apart from the literal act of immersion as the means of cleansing and purifying." Now there it is. How clear the subject becomes and how completely the act of baptism harmonizes with the spiritual change it typifies. We really can't call sprinkling baptism at all. We may call it sprinkling, pouring, or anything else, but surely, truthfully, it could not be called baptism.

Now we are ready to determine who is ready for baptism. What are the prerequisites for the candidates who go into the water to be baptized? Briefly, let us consider three preliminary steps which all must take before their baptism becomes meaningful. In Matthew 28:19, 20 Jesus said: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Now here the work of teaching was to precede baptism. People must learn the significance of this step so that it doesn't degenerate into some magical form or ceremony. Many times a minister must deny baptism to people because they have not received instruction about the spiritual meaning of the step they want to take.

The second prerequisite is found in Mark 16:16: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Jesus makes it very clear in this verse that a person must believe before he can be baptized. Perhaps you are wondering about the infant baptism so widely practiced by some Christian churches. Let me ask you folks, can a little infant be taught? Can it believe? Is it in any sense of the word an eligible candidate for baptism?

Before answering that question, let's look at another third preparatory step found in Acts 2:38. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." So until a person is taught, believes, and repents, he has no grounds whatever to be baptized. Unless the old nature is dead, there can be no burial in the water. Unless that new birth has taken place through repentance and personal acceptance of Jesus into the heart, the act of baptism is nothing but a dead form. So what about babies? Well, friends, they can't take a single one of those prerequisite steps. Not only that, but they don't even have any sins to repent of. They are innocent. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." James 4:17. Only after coming to the age of accountability will the children be considered as guilty

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of transgression. And so that eliminates the babies altogether. Only adults and older children who are buried in that water can meet the true type and explanation of Bible baptism.