

There Is One Baptism

Introduction. We have stood almost alone in the religious world on the subject of water baptism. We have insisted that immersion to a penitent believer is essential to salvation from past sins. Whereas we have emphasized baptism as a condition of salvation, protestant denominationalism has promoted the theory that baptism is simply a "sign" or "symbol" of the salvation which one has previously received through faith alone.

We are told to "keep the unity" that the Holy Spirit prescribes (Ephesians 4:3-6). Accordingly, we are obliged to defend His miraculously inspired teachings. We steadfastly hold to the principle that when people go back to the biblical pattern and reproduce scriptural teaching and practice today, one of the characteristics of biblical teaching will be baptism for the remission of sins (Hebrews 8:5). If we can "speak where the Bible speaks" and put aside denominational teaching, we can get a clear view of baptism.

I. ***How Paul Determined If A Baptism Was Acceptable***

A. Several examples of unacceptable baptism are mentioned in the New Testament, and those who had submitted to such were instructed to be baptized again with the "one baptism" of the Holy Spirit's instruction. Consider the following two examples:

1. Paul in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14-43).

a) In the Jewish synagogue of this city, Paul preached to Jews and "religious proselytes" (Acts 13:43). Of course, a proselyte was a Gentile that had converted to Judaism.

b) "Religious proselytes" indicates that these proselytes were Gentiles that had converted to Judaism and had been deeply committed to their new religion. As a result, they had already been "baptized" once.

c) Still Paul implicitly proved their previous "baptism" to be unacceptable by preaching about "the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:38), something that only comes from believing and being baptized for that purpose (Acts 2:38; 10:43, 48).

d) That means that Paul preached about "one baptism" to those who had already received some other kind of baptism. How did he prove their previous baptism to be unacceptable?

(1) By preaching about the remission of sins, he applied the events of Pentecost, when baptism for the remission of sins was made essential to salvation, to his students (Acts 13:43). This was a necessary inference.

(2) By preaching about the remission of sins, he pointed to God approving baptism for that purpose in that he raised Jesus

from the dead to make such possible (Acts 13:30-38). This was an example.

- (3) By preaching about the remission of sins, he turned to the commands of God in that it was the revelation of the Holy Spirit that commanded baptism for this purpose (Acts 13:38; cf. 2:4, 38-40). This was a command.
2. Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7).
 - a) In Ephesus, Paul encountered twelve who had received the baptism of John, a baptism that prepared one for Christ (Matthew 3:1-3) in contrast to the "one baptism" that places one into Christ (Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5; Galatians 3:27).
 - b) To these he asked, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" When one is baptized for the remission of sins, he receives the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-40; 5:32). How did he prove their previous baptism to be unacceptable?
 - (1) He logically applied the promise of Pentecost to these twelve (Acts 19:2-3). This was a necessary inference.
 - (2) He implicitly relied on what God had done in the past in keeping with this promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2-3; cf. 5:32). This was an example.
 - (3) He commanded these twelve to be baptized like those of Pentecost, that is, in order to call on the name of the Lord and be saved (Acts 19:4-5; cf. 2:21, 38-40). This was a command.
 3. Therefore, in determining the baptism we should believe in, receive and require, we should reason from the scriptures to our lives (necessary inference), look for examples of baptism that met with God's approval and accept only the baptism God commands.

II. ***The Specific Baptism The Bible Authorizes For Us***

- A. There are some who believe that baptism is a "mental" act. Since turning to God is primarily accomplished within the heart, they then reason that baptism is primarily accomplished within the heart. One would then be baptized in water to signify this "mental" act. For example, L. Steven Cheairs makes the following statements:
 1. "As I will soon show, as with John's baptism a physical water dipping followed to symbolize the spiritual baptism that had already taken place. John's water baptism was a symbolic act to demonstrate a mental immersion, while the baptism seen here is a symbolic act to proclaim a spiritual immersion ... To put it into simple every day English, John came to the wilderness and he preached a message of immersing one's self in a state of repentance, this would result in the forgiveness of sin, when the

- One who was to come after him had come. As a physically outward act, for a people who were not able to perceive much on the spiritual level, John immersed or dipped them into water, as a symbolic gesture of the mental dipping.”
2. “These three verses [Matthew 3:7-8, 11] clearly show that John required a person first be immersed into repentance before being immersed in water.
 3. “It is not given as a commandment that every follower must be baptized, only that it is a fitting conclusion to becoming a child of God.”
- B. We are to give our allegiance, preach and defend only “one baptism” authorized in scripture, and it is our studied conclusion that this “one” is an immersion in water.
1. It is generally agreed that whatever the “one baptism” is (Ephesians 4:5) -- in those passages that associate the rite with salvation -- it is the same type of “baptism” in all the verses. In other words, the “baptism” of Matthew 28:19 is of the same kind as that in Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3-4; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12; and 1 Peter 3:21.
 - a) The baptism mentioned in Matthew 28:19 had human administrators. Christ commissioned the apostles to go and make disciples, baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
 - b) Inasmuch as an apostle could not baptize “in the Spirit” (only Christ could do that; cf. Matthew 3:11), one is forced to conclude that the baptism of Matthew 28:19 is water baptism, not Spirit baptism.
 2. Consider the word translated “baptize.”
 - a) The noun *baptisma*, like its kindred verb, *baptizo*, signifies a dipping, a submersion, an immersion. The action is not the equivalent of either “pouring” or “sprinkling” water. This fact is forcefully demonstrated by a passage in the Greek version of the Old Testament. In the ceremony involving the cleansing of a leper, the Hebrew priest was to “pour” (*cheo*) oil into the palm of his left hand. He then was to “dip” (*baptizo*) his finger into the oil, and finally, “sprinkle” (*rhantizo*) the oil before the Lord (Leviticus 14:15-16). These verbs express different actions; they are not interchangeable.
 - b) In classical Greek, *baptizo* could be used in a variety of ways, e.g., of a “sinking” ship, or of one who was “over his head” in debt. In a few New Testament passages, where no theological bias was involved, the translators bring the Greek across into pure English as “dip” (cf. John 13:26; Luke 16:24; Revelation

19:13), which is a very telling procedure.

3. Consider the way "baptize" is used in the New Testament.
 - a) According to several scriptures, baptism is an act which requires:
 - (1) "Much water" (John 3:23).
 - (2) "A going to the water" (Acts 8:36).
 - (3) "A going down into the water" (Acts 8:38).
 - (4) "A coming up out of the water" (Matthew 3:16).
 - b) Furthermore, the crossing of the Red Sea illustrates this same conclusion.
 - (1) When Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, they were "under the cloud ... in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Corinthians 10:1-12).
 - (2) The cloud was to their right, to their left, behind them, before them, above them and below them every time they took a step through the sea.
 - (3) They were completely engulfed, but the word used to describe this event is the word "baptized" (1 Corinthians 10:2).
 - c) The term "baptize," and its cognate "baptism," occur together about 100 times in the New Testament. A consideration of these passages will reveal that the word may, on occasion, take on a figurative application (cf. Matthew 3:11; Luke 12:50; Acts 1:5). Unless, though, there is clear contextual evidence that a symbolic sense has been employed, the conclusion must be that the common usage (an immersion in water) is in view.
 - d) In view of this principle, there is no reason to conclude the baptism mentioned in Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, 22:16, Romans 6:3-4, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 3:27, Colossians 2:12, and 1 Peter 3:21 is anything other than water baptism -- an act of obedience, predicated upon faith and repentance, which secures forgiveness of sins and brings one into union with Jesus Christ.
 - e) The connection between "water" and "salvation" is simply too obvious to miss, unless one's mind is clouded with a misguided presupposition.
 - (1) Jesus stated that it is through the birth of "water" that one enters His kingdom (John 3:3-5).
 - (2) Both Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12 make it clear that the baptism of these passages involves both an immersion in "something," and a "being raised" from the same substance. This makes perfectly good sense if water baptism is in view.
 - (3) In Ephesians 5:26, Paul speaks of the state of being cleansed (the equivalent of being "saved") by means of "the washing

of water by the word." In Titus 3:5, Paul describes baptism as a "washing of regeneration."

- (4) Peter alludes to those souls who were "saved by water," adding, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us" (1 Peter 3:20-21).
- (5) The obvious references to "water" baptism in Acts 8:36 and 10:47 is conclusive evidence that baptism is not "mental."

Conclusion. In the light of this overwhelming evidence, who among us can deny that baptism is essential for our salvation? An immersion in water that is grounded in penitent faith, and with a view to receiving pardon and entering a relationship with Jesus Christ, is a crucial component in the wonderful plan of God for human redemption. Baptism is a condition of salvation, a change of relationship and a time for purification. If you have believed and decided that you are going to live your life for Christ by repenting of your sins, then come forward and confess His name before all of us and be baptized for the remission of your sins. Would you reject such a gift of grace?