

BAPTISM: A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

Baptism was a familiar part of the Middle Eastern world. Jewish people in Jesus' day were generally meticulous about the ritual washings commanded in the Hebrew Bible and had added other ritual washings as well. Well-to-do people in the wealthy neighborhoods of Jerusalem even had their own ritual immersion pools. The Essenes of the Qumran community (the people who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls) were among the most meticulous; besides the initial washing required to join the sect, they were always washing themselves subsequently to insure ritual purity.

Jewish people, however, practiced one particular kind of once-for-all ritual washing. This was the baptism administered to Gentiles when they wished to convert to Judaism and wash away their former impurity. Baptism was so characteristic of Jewish conversion rituals, next to the more painful accompanying practice of male circumcision, that even pagan writers like Epictetus mention it. But full immersion, coupled with circumcision (for males) and a sincere heart, meant conversion.¹

John the Baptist. When John the Baptist came on the scene, he commanded them to repent and be baptized. (It was a baptism of repentance and also of discipleship.) John demanded that Jewish people also undergo this rite. He believed the Jewish people were in as much need of conversion to God's way as Gentiles (Mt 3:9; Lk 3:8).

Jesus. Jesus recognized John's ministry and submitted to John's baptism to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15). Jesus taught baptism when he met with Nicodemus in John 3. Jesus said,

³ ... *"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."*

⁵ ... *"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. (John 3:3, 5)*

Jesus commanded baptism for those who would be his disciples:

¹⁵ *He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:15-16)*

¹⁹ *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)*

In John 17:13, Jesus told his apostles,

¹³ *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. (John 17:13)*

¹ <http://www.shakinandshinin.org/EverythingAboutBaptism-2.html>

Luke writes,

⁴⁶ *He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”* (Luke 24:48-49)

Acts chapter 2 records the coming of the Holy Spirit (clothed with power from on high) at Pentecost,

¹ *When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.* (Acts 2:1-4)

Here the Apostle Peter preaches the first gospel sermon. Peter quotes the Prophet Joel, the Psalms, and tells of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. Peter finishes his sermon with these words,

³⁶ *“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”* (Acts 2:37)

At that point, the listeners ask Peter and the other apostles,

³⁷ *... “Brothers, what shall we do?”*

³⁸ *Peter replied, “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. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*

As a result,

⁴¹ *Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

What just happened? Why did Peter command them to be baptized? Peter commanded them to be baptized because this was part of Jesus’ teaching before He ascended back into heaven.

¹⁹ *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (Matthew 28:19)*

What is the connection between baptism and salvation? We know that sin separates us from God. We know Jesus died on the cross as a sin sacrifice. We know that Jesus died, was buried, and was resurrected (1 Cor 15:1-4). This is the gospel. And we know Jesus commanded baptism (Mk 16:15-16; Mt 28:19-20). The connection between baptism and salvation is that baptism is our reenactment of Jesus' own death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:1f). See two pictorial representations... This is what Romans 6:1-5 explains,

¹ What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. (Rom 6:1-5)

That is why Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 1:8,

⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (2 Thess 1:8)

The gospel has to be obeyed! In other word, it has to be reenacted. When the people in Acts 2:37 realized that they were lost and wanted God to intervene, they asked Peter, "What shall we do"? Peter replied (Acts 2:38),

- Repent
- be Baptized
- for the forgiveness of your sins
- and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Book of Acts records many examples of this very same teaching.

1) Samaria, 8:5-13.

¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Acts 8:5-13)

2) The Eunuch, 8:35-39.

³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

3) Saul, 9:1-18, 22:1-16, 26:9-18.

¹⁶ *And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.* (Acts 22:16)

- 4) Cornelius, 10:34-48, 11:4-18, 15:7-11.

⁴⁸ *So he [Peter] ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.* (Acts 10:48)

- 5) Lydia, 16:13-15.

¹³ *On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.* ¹⁴ *One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.* ¹⁵ *When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.* (Acts 16:13-15)

- 6) Jailer, 16:30-34.

²⁹ *The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.* ³⁰ *He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*

³¹ *They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household."* ³² *Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.* ³³ *At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.* (Acts 16:30-34)

- 7) Ephesian Disciples, 19:1-7.

Conclusion

The conversion process. I firmly believe that that activity is the conversion process that involves all of the following:

- a) Hearing the Word of God;
- b) Believing, trusting, developing faith in that Word;
- c) Repenting of a previous life characterized by the sin that pervades this realm of darkness;
- d) Confession of Jesus as the Christ – God's answer to our sin problem; and
- e) Immersion in water as an act of faithful obedience to the message of the gospel.

This Conclusion Stands in Complete Harmony with Over 1,500 Years

of Consensus within Christendom. But this Conclusion Conflicts with Modern Protestantism. ✚