

Did Your Baptism Benefit You?

With the exception of the so-called “Christian Scientists” and the Quakers, virtually every religious denomination requires something they call “baptism” in order for a person to become a member thereof. I say “something they call baptism” because the noun “baptism” (Gk, *baptismo*) is defined as “the process of immersion, submersion, and emergence” (**Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words**, by W.E. Vine). The verb “baptize” (Gk. *baptizo*), even before being given its religious connotation by New Testament writers, “was used among the Greeks to signify the dying of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another, etc.” (*Ibid.*) Hence, baptism, by definition, denotes “immersion, submersion, and emergence.” That being the case, it should be evident that sprinkling and pouring do not constitute Bible baptism. Regardless of what it may have been called, a person who has merely had some water sprinkled or poured on him has not been baptized! Calling sprinkling “baptism” no more makes sprinkling baptism than calling a cow a “pig” makes the cow a pig!

However it is possible for a sincere person to be baptized (immersed) and still be no better off in the sight of God. While I strongly affirm the necessity of baptism in order for an accountable persons to be saved, I deny that baptism alone will save anyone. This fact is substantiated simply by reading Acts 19:1-5 which cites the example of some twelve men, who had formerly received “*John’s baptism*,” having to be baptized again — this time “*in the name of the Lord Jesus*.” The baptism they had received (evidently after “*John’s baptism*” had gone out of effect) had not benefited them. Yes, even in the first century some people had to be baptized again for the simple reason that their former baptism did not accomplish its objective.

Baptism is Invalid When:

1. It involves the wrong subject. Every biblical example of a person being baptized was one which involved a responsible individual. There is not one case of infant baptism recorded in all the Bible! Bible baptism is “*for the remission of sins*,” Acts 2:38, but infants are not sinners (Matt. 18:3; 19:14). Bible baptism is preceded by faith (Mark 16:16, repentance (Acts 2:38), and confession (Acts 8:37-38), but infants are capable of doing neither.

2. It is carried out by the wrong authority. Now-a-days we hear preachers affirm that “there are “two ordinances of the church — baptism and the Lord’s Supper.” An ordinance is “an authoritarian rule; an order, decree, or law...” (**Funk and Wagnalls New Practical Dictionary**). However, the church has no authority to issue any rule, order, decree, or law. Jesus Christ has “*all authority*” (Mat. 28:18), which leaves no authority for the church, the Pope, or any man-originated ecclesiastical body. Hence, if one is baptized simply because some church or denominational body has so decreed, then from the standpoint of the hereafter, his baptism availed him nothing!

3. It is designed to put one into the wrong church. The Lord’s church “*is his body*” (Eph. 1:23), and the Bible teaches that we are “*baptized into one body*” (I Cor. 12:13). However, the “*one body*,” or church, is as different from a human denomination as Benedict Arnold was from George Washington. Surely any church which wears the wrong name, was founded by the wrong person, which began at the wrong time, has a different creed, is organized differently, and has a different program of work from the church described in the Bible, cannot be the church described in the Bible! What spiritual benefit can be obtained by being baptized into that which our “*heavenly Father has not planted*,” and which in that last day will be “*uprooted*,” Matt. 15:13?

4. It is preceded by the wrong confession. Multitudes have made the confession, “I believe that God for Christ’s sake has pardoned me of my sins,” and then upon that confession were baptized. In the first place, in the Bible (which is the only creed book our Lord allows us to follow) one never reads of a person making such a confession. We do, however, read of the Eunuch confessing “*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God,*” and then being immediately baptized (Acts 8:37-38). In the second place, if baptism is “*for the remission of sins,*” Acts 2:38), then a person who, **before** being baptized, confesses, saying “I believe that God for Christ sake has pardoned me of my sins,” is confessing a lie. Notwithstanding how sincere a person may be when he makes that confession, we ask, can true baptism be based upon a confession which is untrue?

5. It is entered into with the wrong understanding of its very purpose. Multitudes have been baptized with the belief that “baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace” — the “inward grace” signifying the fact that they were **already** saved (at the point of faith), and thus their baptism served as a public attestation of a salvation experienced before baptism. The only thing wrong with this understanding is the fact that it is false; it is a baptism based upon a misunderstanding of the very **purpose** of baptism. Please answer the following questions: If “*He that believes and is baptized shall be saved*” (Mark 16:16), then what is the state of the believer who has not been baptized? If baptism is “*for the remission of sins*” (Acts 2:38), then have the sins of one who has not yet been baptized been remitted? If one is “*baptized into Christ*” (Gal. 3:27), then is he “*in Christ*” **before** he is baptized? If “*salvation...is in Christ*” (2 Tim. 2:10), then is one who is out of Christ saved?

6. It is entered into after having gotten permission from the wrong source. Legion are the ones who have “gone forward,” claiming to have “accepted Jesus as my personal Savior,” stated their “experience of grace,” but whose candidacy for baptism was still based upon the vote of the members of that denomination! On the one hand, the Bible is completely silent about such a practice. And on the other hand, what human being has the right to vote on whether you can do what **the Lord** has commanded (cf. Matt. 28:18-19; Mark 16:16; Acts 10:48)?

7. It is entered into with the wrong understanding concerning who is really doing the work accomplished in baptism. For years, false teachers have denied the necessity of baptism, contending that baptism is a work, that we are saved “*by grace through faith,*” and that salvation is “*not of works*” (cf. Eph. 2:8-9). It is true that we can not be saved apart from the grace of God. In like manner, no person could ever do enough work to earn salvation! But that misses the point of the whole discussion. God is the One against Whom we have sinned (Gen. 39:9); hence, He is the One who pardons our iniquities (Isa. 55:6-7). Hence, the pardon He provides is based upon our compliance with **His** conditions. One condition He has stipulated for this the Gospel Age is baptism (Mark 16:16). When all is said and done, the person being baptized is not performing a work. But if the one being baptized has been properly taught, he, in the process of being baptized, is exercising his “*faith in the working of God,*” for it is God Who then forgives the person of “*all transgressions*” (Col. 2:12-13), and it is God who then adopts this person into His family (Gal. 3:26-4:6).

Conclusion:

If obedience is “*from the heart*” (Rom. 6:17-18), and **if** the “*heart*” includes the mind, the will and the intellect (Matt. 13:15; Rom. 10:10; 2 Cor 9:7), **then** it is impossible for one to be taught wrong and baptized right! When all is said and done, a person who is scripturally baptized is a correctly taught (Matt. 28:19), penitent (Acts 2:38) believer (Mark 16:16), who has confessed his faith in Jesus as “*the Son of God*” (Acts 8:37), who came “*unto*” the water, went “*down into*”

the water, and came “*up out of the water*” (Acts 8:35-38) wherein he was “*buried with Christ,*” and from which he was raised “*to walk in newness of life*” (Rom. 6:3-4). Through this process, he entered “*into Christ*” (Gal. 3:27), into His “*one body*” (I Cor. 12:13), or church to which he was “*added*” (Acts 2:47) upon his obedience to the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sadly, many people predicate the purpose of their past tense baptism upon their present tense information, and thereby assume that all is well with their souls. When God has given a command, and has stated the reason (or reasons) for obeying that command, then the validity of his obedience to that command demands that he obey that command for the reason (or reasons) set forth in the sacred scriptures. After all, **if** all acceptable obedience is to be “*from the heart,*” Rom. 6:17-18, and **if** the “*heart*” includes the mind, the will, and the intellect, **then** one’s obedience has to be for the reason, or reasons, set forth in the Bible. After all, that is why correct teaching must precede correct obedience.

—Bobby Witherington