

# IS WATER BAPTISM REALLY NECESSARY?

(A sermon prepared by James P. Allen)

There are many things that divide churches and create new denominations, but one of the major issues that many church will find debatable is concerning water baptism. Most newcomers to any church want to know immediately how that church baptizes? Do they pour, sprinkle or submerge?"

I am not a person to argue with anyone concerning theology. While attending Bible College and seminary I did develop a particular fancy in discussing theology with other students who wanted to consider various points of view, but I never delighted in arguing Bible theology.

I was not raised in a Bible believing church. The church I was born into had actually more of the doctrines of man than the doctrines of God. Since my deliverance I have not been one to accept without question any doctrine of any church including the Assemblies of God. I know now that I am personally responsible for the way I interpret the Word of God, so I will never simply place that burden of understanding upon my church and it's leadership.

With this being a new church, I am aware that we come from many different backgrounds and have many different opinions. I believe you are here because you want to know the Lord Jesus in a more intimate way and you need Him to be move involved in your lives. I pray that each of us understand how important it is to walk in obedience with Him. Without obedience we should not expect His involvement should we? None of us would probably live in a relative's home that would stand against us and ignore us constantly. Neither should any of us expect Jesus to live in us and help us when we are ignoring Him.

Wouldn't it be a shame to miss out on Heaven because we ignored something as simple as water baptism? I should say in the beginning that what I will show you from the Word of God may place some of you on the defensive. This is not my purpose. I have had to wrestle with the Lord over this very subject, so I know what some of you friends will be going though. Please understand this. I am sure that there are better preachers in this country and I am sure that there are better pastors, but there is also something I am even more sure of and that is concerning my love for each of you. There is no pastor in the world that loves you more than me, this I am absolutely sure of. As I share about water baptism this morning, I do so out of love for you.

Let's begin our study by attempting to clear our minds of all things we have been taught concerning water baptism and let's allow the Word of God to tell us what the Lord wants. I have run into some people who have made such statements as, "*don't confuse me with the facts, I know what I believe!*" I hope none of you is like that. God does care what you believe and He will give us the facts that should direct us not our human desires.

Let's address three questions this morning:

1. Why should we be baptized?
2. What is the proper way to baptize?
3. Can we baptize infants?

## I. Why should we be baptized?

**A. It is a command of the Lord.** Jesus said in **Matthew 28:19** "**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..." Mark 16:15 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."**

This should be enough to answer our first question. All we should have to know is that it is Jesus' will for the church to experience water baptism.

Water baptism was not a new practice to the Jews. The Jews practiced water baptism for many years when Gentile believers were converted to Judaism. The Jews had always had a ceremonial cleanings of their vessels and their hands in case they had touched something that a Gentile had touched. They felt the Gentiles were ceremonially impure, so anything they may have touched also became unclean, thus the need to baptize them in water.

John the Baptist had introduced the coming of the Lord and he was preaching for the people to repent and to be cleansed of the Lord by water baptism. Although Jesus had never sinned, He submitted Himself to be baptized of John and following this baptism the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus as a dove and His public ministry began. Jesus had set the example, humbling Himself, for each of us to be baptized.

Many question the need for water baptism when they know the thief on the cross accepted Jesus as the Messiah and Jesus replied in **Luke 23:43 "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."** There is no question that this repentant thief made it into Heaven, but we are amiss to simply assume that this thief had not been baptized. Mark 1:4,5 tells us, **"And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River."** Who are we to say that this thief was not one of the masses who were baptized three years earlier? Even if he had been baptized earlier, it made no difference to the people who died before the crucifixion of Jesus, because they were still living under the old covenant and water baptism as introduced by Jesus was a part of the new covenant.

## **B. We should be baptized because we need the promise of the Spirit.**

The day the baptism of the Holy Spirit first descended upon the church, the people witnessing this wonderful event wanted more of the Lord. They wanted what the disciples had found as they saw the Spirit of the Lord upon them and each of them speaking in tongues and praising God. They interrupted Peter's sermon in Acts 2:37. Look to this passage with me:

**Acts 2:37 "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 2:38 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."**

My father wants a memorial epithet placed in his obituary saying, **"I did it my way!"** I believe this is one of the saddest expressions concerning a life's legacy that I have ever heard. Although our personalities should place a signature upon everything we do, we cannot allow our way of doing things to conflict with the way God wants things done. God has a plan for our lives and the only way we can please Him and walk in fellowship with Him is to follow His way.

We have all heard of people becoming saved and even baptized in the Holy Spirit in the same

moment. God has never locked Himself in a box, but His directive to us is to be baptized in water after our conversion. Peter said that the prerequisite to receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit is to "repent and be baptized" in water. We will understand why water baptism is so important as we study the symbolism behind water baptism later.

## II. What is the proper way to baptize?

Let's consider the translation of the word baptize. Actually the word we use in the English for baptism is a transliteration of the Greek word which is either "baptizo" or "Baptisma." Each of the Greek lexicons define the word baptize as meaning to "immerse, to plunge, to dip." One of the most reliable Bible dictionaries is Vines Dictionary of the Bible and the translation as found in Vines is "baptism, consisting of the processes of immersion, submersion and emergence."

It was not until 200 AD sprinkling or pouring was introduced to the church. This came as the development of the doctrine of original sin was developed. The church realized that we are all born into a state of sin, therefore they felt the need for baptizing their infants so they could go to Heaven. They had no understanding of the age of innocence that children are in before they understand enough to accept or reject Jesus. Rather than place a little baby under the water they just started sprinkling or pouring water on their head out of convenience. Let me just say at this point that no place in the Bible is the word baptize ever translated sprinkle nor will we ever find one instance where sprinkling or pouring water was ever used or accepted by the early Church.

The Jews and the early Christian Church were absolutely cultures steeped in symbolism. All the sacrificial rites given to the Jews were pointing toward Jesus, the sacrificial lamb. Every part of the tabernacle and temple were constructed pointing to the attributes of the coming Messiah. It should not be unusual to discover that the New Covenant also has much symbolism. The Church was given two symbolic ordinances to follow. One is the ordinance of Holy Communion with the bread and the cup representing the body and blood of Christ shed for us. Now let's look to the symbolism behind water baptism.

**Romans 6:1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?**

**Rom 6:2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?**

**Rom 6:3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?**

**Rom 6:4 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.**

**Rom 6:5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.**

**Rom 6:6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--**

**Rom 6:7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.**

**Rom 6:8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.**

**Rom 6:9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.**

**Rom 6:10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.**

**Rom 6:11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

**Rom 6:12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.**

**Rom 6:13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness,**

**but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.**

**Rom 6:14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.**

**Rom 6:15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?**

**By no means!**

**Rom 6:16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--**

I hope you understand that this is too large portion of Scripture to try and teach you about in the brief time you are used to being taught in a sermon. There is no way I can fully explain the depth of these verses. I will, however, attempt to encapsulate the symbolism behind baptism.

This entire passage speaks of the freedom we have been given with the death of self. That is the freedom we experience when we commit our lives to the Lord and quit living for our own selfish desires. Verse 4 speaks of burial with Christ. The symbolism we see here is twofold in that we see the reference to Christ's death and our death. This passage says, **"we were therefore buried with him through baptism into death."** Just as Jesus lived His entire life selflessly and later submitted himself to the cross for us, we are to die to ourselves. When we realize that living for ourselves is only making us miserable and is in rebellion to God, then we should make a commitment to Jesus to follow Him and serve Him. This is exactly what Jesus said in **Matthew 16:24 "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."** Christians dies to themselves before the can experience the joy of eternal life. The water is symbolic of the ground level and being lowered under the water is in reference to being placed in the grave.

Another symbolism not mentioned in this passage is in reference to the cleansing agent of water as spoken of earlier. Water does not actually wash away sin: the blood of Christ is the literal agent of this cleansing. The water only illustrates what has already been done by the blood sacrifice of Jesus.

One final reference to this passage speaks of the resurrection. If you will notice carefully in our water baptisms we do not leave the people under the water in death, but we lift them from this watery grave in reference to the resurrection power of Jesus to give us new life. **"In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11).**

This is in total contrast to what the explorer Cortez did to the Myian Indians when he first came to this continent. He had a zealous desire to help these Indians reach Heaven. The problem he noticed was that they would not leave their form of idol worship. His response was then to baptism them before he executed them, so they could go to Heaven.

### **III. Can we baptize infants?**

Now let's address the third question. Can we baptize infants? The answer is "YES" if:

1. If infants are capable of repentance. Since the Bible says we should "repent and be baptized", this eliminates this possibility.
2. If infants can believe in Jesus as the Son of God. Since the Bible says, "Whosoever believes and is baptized will be saved..." is a requirement before baptism has any meaning then this possibility is eliminated as well.

3. If the word baptized meant to "sprinkle" or "pour", but since it means to "immerse," we cannot consider at all the possibility of infant baptism.

Our conclusion about infant baptism is that what every you may call it, we cannot call it baptism, nor can we say that this is substituted for water baptism. We must be baptized after each individual has made repentance and the mode for baptism is obviously emmersion.

## **CONCLUSION**

Have I proclaimed a personal doctrine? Lord help me if I ever do so. All I have shown you today is from the Holy Bible. Now that the truth has been presented, it is your choice to make. Will you walk with the Lord and be obedient to Him. If so, you and I must experience water baptism after we have given our lives to the Lord. Doing so helps us be obedient to Him and declares our love for Him.

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