

## How to Become a Christian (#3) God's Pool of Promise: Baptism

Last few weeks: We've seen that becoming a Christian involves an inside job called "faith." That means we believe that Jesus was God in the flesh, that he died as a substitute for our sins, & that he rose from the dead. We don't just believe this intellectually, but we trust in these truths & let that trust change our lives in a thing called "repentance."

In repentance, we're convicted of our sin, sorry for it, we confess it (to God & others) & we are converted from it (that is, we turn away from it to the life God wants us to live.)

But the Bible clearly teaches another response, one that has sadly become confusing & divisive to many sincere Christ followers; a response that beautifully brings together my faith & repentance & joins them with God's promise of forgiveness & a new power to live for him. Today: a look at Baptism: God's pool of promise!

A few qualifiers:

- biblical baptism is immersion in water of a person old enough to have made a faith decision about Jesus Christ.
- sprinkling, pouring & infant baptism: later developments resulting from man-made decisions, not from Bible.
- baptism from BAPTIZO= to dip, plunge, immerse. Textile term for dying cloth!
- our main concern as church: What does the *Bible* say?

JAD: didn't always appreciate or even care about this! JAD & girlfriend at Four Brooks church: I had never thought twice about baptism. I just assumed the church was right. My parents had me sprinkled as a baby & I'd never explored my faith for myself, beyond memorizing catechism answers for the bishop in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. DD's challenge: "Did you know your church teaching is contrary to the Word of God?!" No, I didn't! Result: began studying for myself & it changed my life. (I'd never even *seen* an immersion baptism until I found the Christian church!)

Ask most Christ-followers what the purpose of baptism is, & you'll probably hear

something like this: It's where I show my commitment to Christ. It's where I promise to live for him. It's an outward sign of an inner grace. Usually it's either something *you* do, (or had *done* to you as a baby) or something symbolic but pretty much devoid an real meaning other than "obedience." "It's something I did to obey Jesus." All of these: something *I* do. The emphasis is on *your* actions. Baptism even called a "work" (although never called that in Bible.) Biblical view: the only work taking place at baptism is God's work, not yours!

Today: a brief overview of what the NT teaches about this subject. May be new to some of you. May be different than you've been taught. But challenge: let word of God guide you, *not* teaching of any man or human institution. You will stand before God one day & answer to him alone. He's given you his Bible & he expects you to follow it. Please study this out further or see me with questions.

## I. John's Baptism:

**Luke 3:3-4** He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him."

- Prepared way for Jesus.

**Matthew 3:11** "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

- John: person you're really looking for will baptize you with Holy Spirit! Will be a uniquely different, Divine quality to the baptism he will bring!

**Matthew 3:13-17** Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

- Jesus Himself was baptized, even though John was reluctant to perform it. (Note connection with presence of Holy Spirit; will later be similar with Christian baptism.)

**Luke 7:29-30** (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

- John's Baptism distinguished between those who followed God & those who didn't. (Note when we get to Acts, which is also written by Luke: baptism continues to be demarcation point between those who accept & those who reject Gospel.)

## II. Jesus' Own Words:

Jesus included baptism as part of becoming his follower: (Key to remember: Jesus is the one who commands baptism, not any human being or church authority.)

**John 3:3-5** In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit."

- keep this in mind: "water & spirit." See if the two are joined together in the passages we'll be looking at!

**Matthew 28:18-20** Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

- "make disciples": is the only command. Baptizing & teaching is how it's done. Baptism: a separate experience from "obey everything". Indicates baptism way more than just part of "good works/obedience" that Christians are expected to do. (More on what is special about baptism as we go along!)
- "into the name": technical business or commerce term. Used to indicate entry of a sum of money or an item of property into the account bearing the name of the owner. Baptism: unites us with Triune God in an ownership relation; we become his property in a special, intimate way!

### III. Conversions from Acts

Acts: only book that shows us *how* to become Christians! Gospels: teach us *about* Jesus, but Acts: teaches us how to *respond* to Jesus. A look at some of them:

#### Day of Pentecost/First Converts

**Acts 2:37-41** When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

- this: birthday of the church! First time gospel ever preached & responded to.
- Jn. 3 Jesus talked about being born of water & spirit. Peter here: links the two together!
- note this is a promise of God (not a work of man)
- note response: just like Luke 7: those who *accepted* message were baptized!

#### Ethiopian Eunuch

**Acts 8:34-39** The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. 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?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

- note: all Philip told him was "good news about Jesus". Must have included the response of baptism.
- down into water, up out of water, rejoicing: indicates immersion.
- immediate: stopped chariot to get it done. Baptism in NT not optional or postponed but immediate upon faith

#### Philippian Jailer

**Acts 16:29-34** The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They

replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God--he and his whole family.

- belief in the Lord Jesus: foundational (v. 31) . . .
- . . . but they spoke "word of Lord" to him & family: explained what believing is all about: (probably what we looked at last two weeks: incarnation, substitution, resurrection)
- this teaching must have included baptism: those who trusted in Christ immediately were baptized, *then* they ate. Sense of urgency.

#### Apostle Paul

**Acts 22:12-16** "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him. "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

- for 3 days Paul thought about his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road
- having come to faith, God sends a messenger, Ananias
- by Paul's own admission, his baptism was where his sins were washed away & where he called on the name of the Lord to save him

#### **IV. NT Letters**

Question: Does it make sense that God would ask us to do something but then leave us in the dark as to *why* we're supposed to do it?! Granted: most people baptized lacked full understanding of what they were doing; they believed the message & obeyed the messenger. But as the church matured & spread out, the apostles filled in some of the gaps (not just about baptism, but about all the implications of following Christ.)

#### Baptism is a Death, Burial & Resurrection

**Romans 6:1-4** What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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.

- context: some believed grace meant you could live as you pleased; God was obligated to forgive you regardless
- Paul: refers them back to their common experience in coming to Christ: their baptism. Was norm for every believer to have experienced!
- uses this as opportunity to teach them something that happened in their baptism: they were immersed into Christ & into his death
- burial imagery: beautiful! Emergence from waters of baptism was emergence into a “new life”. (Kind of like a new birth?!)
- baptism is *always* a passive work in the NT: it isn’t something you do, it’s something done to you. All you’re doing is trusting in God to do what he’s promised!

#### Baptism is where you “Put On” Christ

**Galatians 3:26-29** You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

- note: new/saved/redeemed relationship with God based on *faith!*
- but that faith resulted in a common response that Paul assumed every single one of his readers had: baptism into Christ!
- here: baptism is where we are clothed with Christ: idea of wearing him like garment: we are inside him & therefore protected from judgment! (Is why we say when God looks at me, he sees Jesus.)
- note “promise” term again: salvation nothing we earn, is something promised by God. Baptism: simply taking God at his word & expecting him to do what he’s promised there.

#### Baptism is where My Faith meets God’s Power

**Colossians 2:12** . . . having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

- similar language to Rom. 6 (burial)
- one of most succinct descriptions of what happens in baptism: my *faith* meets God’s

power & I experience a spiritual death & resurrection & rebirth!

- NT: idea of baptism saving anyone *without* faith is absent/absurd. Baptism without faith reduces baptism to nothing more than a magical, religious doodad, a work, a sham, a fire-insurance policy. People do it all the time, but it's not what God has in mind & certainly isn't what NT teaches about it.

### Baptism is the Sinner's Prayer!

**1 Peter 3:21** (NIV) . . . and this water (of Noah's flood) symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

- note: *baptism* is not here called a symbol, but rather the *floodwaters* that saved Noah symbolized the waters of baptism that now save us
- Peter immediately answers: how does baptism save us? It's not just a bath, it's a crying out to God. Note the various translations:
  - (NIV) "pledge"
  - (God's Word) "baptism is a *request* to God for a clear conscience."
  - (NLT) "an *appeal* to God from (or for) a clean conscience."
  - (NASB) "an *appeal* to God for a clean conscience."
  - (KJV) "the *answer* of a good conscience toward God."
  - (LB) "in being baptized we are turning to God and *asking* him to cleanse our hearts from sin."
- Greek word for "pledge/appeal": HEPEROTAMA (noun) Only used here in NT! But verb form: HEPEROTAO: many times in NT: "to interrogate, question, request, inquire." Some examples of its use:
  - Lk. 2:46 Young Jesus in temple "*asking* them questions."
  - Matt. 16:1 Pharisees & Sadducees "*asked* him for a sign."
  - Acts 1:6 Disciples *asked* him, "Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"
- Thayer's Greek Lexicon definition: inquiry, question, demand, earnest seeking, craving. "If this use of the word is conceded, it affords us the easiest & most congruous explanation of that vexed passage, 1 Peter 3:21: "Which (baptism) now

saves you, not because in receiving it you have put away the filth of the flesh, but because you have *earnestly sought* a conscience reconciled to God.”

- **Problem:** if it's a pledge, then it's something I do, & that comes close to making it a work. But if it's a prayer, then all I'm doing in baptism is asking God to cleanse my conscience (which can only happen when my sins have been forgiven.)

The same Peter who years earlier had ushered in the church by telling Jews who were convicted in their hearts of crucifying their messiah to “repent & be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins” is still on message: reminding that same church (which by now numbered in the thousands & had spread across the globe) that at their baptism they had cried out to God for a clean conscience.

This view, by the way: Up to Reformation: was the consistent Christian view held by the early church fathers & theologians all the way up to Martin Luther (who spearheaded revolt against Catholic church over works): Luther: “Yes it is true that our works are of no use for salvation. Baptism, however, is *not our work, but God's.*”

### Difficult Questions:

1. Are you saying someone's not a Christian if they've not been immersed as a believer?

Clear from NT that immersion was the common response of faith to the Gospel. If God chooses to deviate from that & allow exceptions, that's his prerogative. My job: to faithfully communicate what he's told me to preach:

**2 Corinthians 5:20-21** We are therefore Christ's *ambassadors*, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- ambassador's role: to only convey message of his sovereign, not of himself (ex: Condoleeza Rice, John Bolton (UN nominee)) Ludicrous to think they would express any other view/policy than George W. Bush's.

- as preacher of Gospel, I am ambassador & have no right to change message of my King, as I understand it.
- “What about the thief on the cross?” Jesus: had power to forgive anyone he wanted. He forgave lots of people besides the thief. But after his resurrection, he left us clear instructions of how we were to offer forgiveness to people, & we simply can’t change that.
- my concern: not for those who *would* be baptized if they could, or if they knew, but for those who *know* & still refuse to obey what Christ has commanded & what the NT church practiced.
- NT: no divorce between belief & baptism: Baptism was the norm for every believer. Paul himself dealt with baptismal misunderstandings. Apparently it was important enough for him to make sure people got it right. For example:

**Acts 19:1-5** While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

- Paul: obviously perceived a strong connection between believing & baptism & Holy Spirit in believer’s life!
- Note his questions: “Did your receive the Holy Spirit when you *believed* ? . . . Then what *baptism* did you receive?”
- It was important enough an issue to Paul that these misinformed/mistaken followers of Jesus were baptized/immersed again, *for the right reason!*

My attitude now:

- I refuse to condemn others who aren’t against us. We may disagree on baptism but agree on Jesus, & that’s a good start. (I refuse to argue any more, too.)

**Mark 9:38-40** "Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me,

for whoever is not against us is for us.”

- But: I would certainly challenge such believers: How can you claim Jesus as lord yet disobey him on such a basic command? Makes no sense to me.
- Or: challenge them to explain (from the Bible) what baptism *is*: again, most people’s conclusion about purpose of baptism focuses on human work & not God’s, & has little or no Biblical basis.

### Conclusion:

Remember RSVP? (From Mike Breaux)

- Realize your need.
- Say you’re sorry
- Verbalize your trust (Good Confession)
- Plunge your past!

4/6/79: JAD baptism date: not where *I* did anything, but where I obeyed Jesus & trusted *God* to do everything. My past was plunged, my sins were forgiven, the HS took up residence, my conscience was cleansed, my life was transferred into *God’s* column; I called on his name; the old Jim died & the new Jim was raised; my sins were washed away.

Because I got wet? No. Because by faith I met Jesus Christ at the place he appointed, & I trusted him to do what he promised to do.

Some of you today: need to do the same thing. I’m grateful my girlfriend cared enough to challenge me from the word of God 26 years ago. It’s with that same spirit of caring that I challenge some of you today:

The religious teachers came up to Jesus one day & wanted to know by whose authority he was doing these things (he’d just cleared out the Temple!)

**Mark 11:28-30** "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who

gave you authority to do this?" Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism--was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!"

They were smart enough to realize that no matter how they answered the question, Jesus had them trapped, so they claimed ignorance. But that's the question I leave you with today: "Jesus' baptism, was it from heaven, or from men?" If it's from men, do with it what you will, it really doesn't matter. **But if it's from heaven; if it's a God-thing: why don't you believe what he says about it? Why don't you take him at his word & let his grace change your life & alter your eternal destiny?**

And if you have done that, go ahead & look back on that event & feel good about what happened there: almost every account: "rejoicing!" Not because of anything you did, but because of what God promises *he* did!

1985: phone interview with Shirley, Long Island, church: "Do you believe in baptism?" JAD: "No, I believe in the Jesus who commanded baptism." Nothing's changed in 20 years! My faith isn't in baptism, it's in Christ. But it was *at my baptism* that Jesus took that faith & changed my life.

**Ephesians 4:3-6** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

- baptism= great equalizer! Unites us in our failure! Hair do, make-up, jewelry, fancy clothes: all gone at baptism. All come up drenched & looking so forgiven!