

Baptism With Water-Its Importance and Meaning

by John R. Rice

Baptism is an important step in publicly professing one's faith in Christ and a change of heart, and it is a command of Jesus.

Scripture: Matthew 3:13, Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:41, Acts 8:38, Acts 10:48, Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27

Topics: "Water Baptism", "Christian Ordinances"

Description

John R. Rice emphasizes the importance of focusing solely on what the Bible teaches about baptism, regardless of denominational doctrines. He highlights that baptism in the Bible always means with water unless otherwise stated, and that it was instituted by John the Baptist and practiced by Jesus and His disciples. Rice stresses that baptism is plainly commanded by Jesus, as seen in the Great Commission, and that New Testament preachers followed this command by baptizing converts promptly after their profession of faith. He also explains that baptism is a public profession of faith in Christ, symbolizing the believer's death to sin and resurrection to a new life in Christ.

Transcript

There have been too many sermons on baptism as a part of the doctrines of some denomination. There is too much talk about "Baptist doctrine" or "Methodist doctrine" or "the doctrine of our church." In this Bible study, we are interested solely in what the Bible teaches about baptism. Nothing else matters. God's people should be baptized because God commanded it, not because some church requires it. They should be baptized a certain way, because that is the way the Bible teaches, and it should have a certain meaning, the meaning which God gave to baptism. People need to remember what the Lord says about baptism, and then do what He says, because He said so.

BAPTISM IN THE BIBLE ALWAYS MEANS WITH WATER, UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED

We use the term baptism, not water baptism, since that is the way it is used in the Bible. The word baptism used in the Bible always means baptism with water, unless otherwise plainly indicated in that particular passage. There is a baptism of the Holy Ghost, but everywhere it is mentioned in the Bible it is plainly called that. The term baptism, used without a plain mention of the Holy Spirit, in the Bible, never means baptism of the Holy Spirit. But the term baptism without the mention of water, in the Bible, nearly always means baptism with water. Of the verses in the Bible which specially mention baptism, baptizing, baptized,

etc., there are sixty-nine verses which refer to baptism in water, but only eight say baptism with water. In those eight cases, the term water is used because in each case the baptism of the Holy Spirit is also mentioned in the same passage. The simple word baptism, in the Bible, refers to baptism with water, unless clearly indicated otherwise.

Remember that Christian baptism was instituted by John the Baptist, and that under his ministry and that of Jesus and His disciples, thousands of people had been baptized in the three or four years before the disciples were baptized with the Holy Ghost at Pentecost. The term baptism had a clearly recognized meaning referring to baptism in water long before that time. We may say that literal baptism is with water, but the term is used symbolically about the Holy Spirit, or about the sufferings of Christ, or the burial of Israel under the cloud, surrounded by the Red Sea.

The coming of the Holy Spirit upon a Christian is sometimes called a "baptism," sometimes a "filling," sometimes an "anointing," and sometimes "the gift of the Holy ghost." On the other hand, the ceremony of Christian baptism in water has no other name in the Bible. The primary and literal meaning of the word baptism in the Bible is water baptism. When the word baptism is used in the Bible, always take it to refer to water baptism unless that passage of the Scripture plainly shows that the Lord speaks of something else.

For instance, in Ephesians 4:5, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism," the Lord clearly refers to water baptism as He does everywhere else in the New Testament when the simple term is used without explanation or modification. It is a very foolish mistake, then, to use that verse as an excuse for leaving off water baptism when Jesus Himself submitted to it as an act of righteousness which He said is becoming for us to fulfill. Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize the converts among "all nations" and the preachers in New Testament times followed that plain command, whether with Jews or Gentiles, everywhere they went. Ephesians 4:5 simply says that there is only one Lord, one kind of faith, and one kind of water baptism. So in this study when we say baptism, we mean what the Lord meant by baptism, that is, the burial of the believer in water, as the first ceremony of his Christian life.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM

There have been two great errors in regard to baptism. Some people teach that one cannot be saved without baptism. That is a great mistake as we will show. But another very great error is to teach that baptism is a matter of no importance and that we should not insist upon any particular manner or teaching about baptism. How foolish that is, you will see.

There are only two ceremonies which Jesus ever gave for every New Testament Christian to observe: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Of these, baptism was given first and is mentioned about ten times as often in the New Testament as is the Lord's Supper. In the ministry of John the Baptist it is repeatedly mentioned that multitudes were baptized. When Jesus began His ministry, the large number baptized by His direction overshadowed even the baptizing of the converts by John the Baptist, as you see from John 3:22-26 and John 4:1-2.

It is especially mentioned of the converts at Pentecost in Acts 2:41 that:

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

Concerning Philip's great revival in Samaria, we are told in Acts 8:12:

"But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."

The book of Acts especially mentions again and again that the converts were baptized, as:

The Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:38, Paul, the apostle, Acts 9:18, Cornelius and his household, Acts 10:47-48. Lydia, the quiet convert. Acts 16:15, The Philippian jailer, Acts 16:33, and Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, Acts 18:8.

Paul even baptized again some converts who had believed on Christ and had been baptized by Apollos, simply because they had missed some of the joyful meaning and blessing of the Holy Spirit in connection with their first baptism (Acts 19:1-7). The New Testament puts baptism in the limelight everywhere people were saved.

BAPTISM PLAINLY COMMANDED

The Lord Jesus commanded baptism, and nothing is unimportant when Jesus commanded it. Jesus Himself chose to be baptized, and that publicly (Matthew 3:13-17). God the Father was pleased with it and spoke aloud from Heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Holy Spirit came in visible form like a dove to rest on Jesus, so that all could see that the filling of the Holy Spirit comes from obeying the Father, as Jesus obeyed Him then.

There are only three commands in the Great Commission, and baptism is one of them. Jesus reminded the disciples of His authority and then said in Matthew 28:19, 20:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

The apostles were to get people saved, baptize them, and teach them to observe all things Jesus commanded. The only thing that should come before baptism is salvation. Everything else should follow it. Unfortunately baptism is a matter of controversy, and so preachers do not usually give it the prominence which Jesus commanded, and which New Testament preachers gave it, but we ought to. The Bible makes baptism important.

The Great Commission, commanding baptism, applies to "all nations" (Matt. 28:19) ; to "all the world" and more than that, "to every creature," who hears the gospel and believes in Christ (Mark 16:15). Wherever men hear the gospel and believe, there they ought to be baptized, whether Jew or Gentile, black or white, old or young, in Bible times or now.

NEW TESTAMENT PREACHERS BAPTIZED AS JESUS COMMANDED

Apostles and preachers in the New Testament followed this command of Jesus. In their first great revival, at Pentecost, when men asked, "What shall we do?" Peter told them to "repent and be baptized." Peter did not mean that salvation depended on baptism, they were to repent and then be baptized to declare and confess the remission of their sins. He was simply putting stress, where Jesus placed it, on immediately following Christ in baptism after conversion. We are led to believe from Acts 2:41 that three thousand of the converts were baptized the day of Pentecost. Philip taught the eunuch to be baptized, and as soon as he was convinced that the eunuch believed with all his heart, according to Acts 8:38:

"He commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him."

Peter, with the authority of an apostle, "commanded" Cornelius and his household "to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:48). In fact, New Testament preachers took the command of Jesus about baptizing converts so literally that they almost invariably baptized the converts the same day they professed faith in Christ, often the same hour. Paul and Silas baptized the Philippian jailer and his family "the same hour of the night," even though it was past midnight when they were converted! Our modern custom of waiting until once a year, or at best until the close of a revival meeting to baptize people, is unscriptural and must displease the Saviour. People ought to be baptized as soon as possible after they are converted. Baptism is important.

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

It becomes apparent in reading the New Testament, especially the book of Acts, that baptism was a public and open profession of faith in Christ as Saviour. There is not a single Bible instance where any one was baptized without claiming to have a change of heart. Sometimes the word repentance is used, sometimes belief, etc., referring to the same penitent turning of a heart to Christ in saving faith, as coming before baptism. But in no case recorded in the Scriptures was one baptized who did not already claim salvation. John the Baptist demanded evidence of repentance before he would baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to him (Matt. 3: 7-8). Philip would not baptize the eunuch until he was convinced that he believed in Christ, even "with all thine heart," according to Acts 8:37. In the Great Commission, in Acts 2:38, and everywhere else, repentance and faith in Christ are put ahead of baptism.

BAPTISM, A PUBLIC PROFESSION OF FAITH

New Testament Christians understood that when they were baptized, they were publicly putting on Christ before the world. Paul said to the Galatians, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27). Concerning the meaning of baptism, Paul said in Romans 6:3-5:

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."

The new convert goes down into a watery grave, picturing the burial of Christ and picturing his own death to sin, the crucifixion of the natural man. When he rises, he should know that as he was "planted in the likeness" of the death of Christ, he should also be "in the likeness of His resurrection." At baptism, then, one professes that he believes in that old, old story that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again! He professes that he has had a change in his heart, that he now belongs to Christ, that he means henceforth to live for Christ.

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