

(A Good Foundation) 5. Baptism in Water

by Zac Poonen

Baptism is a public declaration of our faith and a step of obedience to God, symbolizing the death and burial of the old man and the new life in Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:38, Romans 6:1

Topics: "Obedience to God", "Baptism"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the significance of water baptism as a command from Jesus, highlighting that it should only be administered to those who are willing disciples, capable of repentance and understanding God's Word. He contrasts the biblical practice of adult baptism with the modern trend of infant baptism, asserting that baptism symbolizes the death of the old self and the emergence of a new life in Christ. Poonen explains that true baptism involves immersion, representing a burial, and should be performed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while also acknowledging the apostles' practice of baptizing in Jesus' name. He stresses that baptism is an act of obedience that signifies a believer's commitment to live by faith rather than reason, urging immediate action for those who have accepted Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a return to the biblical understanding of baptism as a vital step in the life of a disciple.

Transcript

One of the last things Jesus commanded His disciples before ascending up to heaven was to:

Go and make disciples;

baptize them in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and

teach them to obey everything that He had commanded. The order is important here.

Only those who were willing to become disciples were to be baptized. No one else.

When babies were brought to Jesus, He laid His hands on their heads and blessed them (See Mark 10:13-16). However, when repentant adults came to Him, He baptized them through His disciples (See John 4:1, 2).

But today what do we see in many 'churches'? Quite the opposite. Babies are baptized; and hands are laid on the heads of the adults ('confirmation')! This is the exact opposite of what Jesus did.

On the day of Pentecost, when many were convicted of their sin, Peter told them to "repent and be baptized." The record goes on to say that "those who received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:38, 41).

It is clear that only those who were capable of intelligently receiving God's Word and of repentance were baptized. And that's how it was in every single instance recorded in the 'Acts of the Apostles'.

What Baptism Means

Romans 6:1-7 clearly explains the meaning of baptism. There we are told that our old man was crucified with Christ and that in baptism we are buried with Christ into death. The old man is the mind that we had in our unconverted days that wanted to sin. That has been crucified with Christ.

We don't have to understand this first, before we live in the reality of it. We can just believe what God says. If God's Word says that our old man was crucified with Christ, then we believe it, just as surely as we believe God's Word when it says that Christ Himself was crucified on Calvary's hill. Both these truths are accepted by faith.

The old man and the flesh are not the same. The flesh is the Self-life within us, that opposes the will of God. We all have to carry this with us until our dying day. We could compare the flesh to a gang of robbers seeking to enter our house. The old man is like an unfaithful servant inside our house who constantly opened the door for the robbers to enter. It is the unfaithful servant who has now been killed. The robbers however are hale and hearty! But now we have a new servant, the new man, who seeks to keep the door shut, against these robbers.

In baptism, we testify to the death and burial of the old man (the desire to sin), and to being raised up with Christ so that we might henceforth "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

The flood in Noah's day is a type of baptism too (1 Peter 3:20, 21). The whole world was destroyed by God through that flood. Noah went through it in the ark and came out of it into a brand new world. The old world and everything in it were all buried under the flood. This is what we testify to in baptism as well - that our old relationship with the world (and that includes worldly fashions and worldly friends etc.), has all now been cut off and that we are now coming out of the water into a brand new world.

The Mode of Baptism

We now come to the question: HOW should we be baptized?

The word 'baptism' is not an English word. The New Testament was originally written in Greek; and the word 'baptism' is derived from the Greek word 'bapto', which means 'to cover wholly with a fluid' or 'to immerse'. And this is exactly what baptism meant to the early apostles - an immersion in water. Sprinkling water on someone's head is certainly not baptism.

When Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, it is written that "they both went down into the water and....came up out of the water" (Acts 8:38, 39).

At Jesus' baptism too, we read similar words - that He came up out of the water, after being baptized (Mark 1:10).

In the New Testament, baptism was always done by immersion. Since baptism is a burial, it is obvious that only immersion can typify that accurately. For, after all, we don't bury people by sprinkling sand on their

heads, but by putting them under the ground completely!

This also makes it clear that only those in whom the old man is dead qualify for baptism - those who do not want to sin any more. For after all, only dead people can be buried! It's a crime to bury a man who is not dead!

Baptism in the Three-fold Name

Jesus commanded us to baptize "in the Name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). The Name is singular because God is One. But Jesus revealed that although God is One, He exists in Three Persons, Who are distinct from each other.

It wasn't the Father who died for our sins, nor was it the Holy Spirit. It was the Son. When Jesus ascended up to heaven, He sat on the right hand of the Father, not the right hand of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, the One He sent to His disciples to be their Helper was the Holy Spirit, not the Father. All this may sound elementary. But it is essential that we don't confuse the three Persons in the Godhead and their unique ministries in our redemption.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read again and again that the apostles baptized people in the Name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38 etc.). How does this fit in with Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19?

When two apparently contradictory statements are found in the Scriptures, we'll find on a closer study that both statements are true.

In order to make plain that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not a heathen trinity, the apostles identified the Son as Jesus Christ. So they baptized people in the name of "the Father, the Son the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit." This was called baptism in the Name of Jesus Christ.

The Obedience of Faith

Baptism should be the first step of obedience in the life of a disciple, leading on to a lifetime of obedience - and this obedience must be the obedience of faith and not the obedience of reason.

If Jesus had leaned upon His own reason, He would never have gone to John the Baptist for baptism. For His reason would have given Him many arguments against being baptized - especially since He had never sinned. John himself could not understand why Jesus needed to be baptized. But Jesus laid aside the arguments of reason and simply obeyed the voice of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:15).

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding," says the Word (Proverbs 3:5). Reason is the Number One enemy of faith - because human reason cannot grasp spiritual truths.

When we get baptized, the last part of our body to go under the water is the upper part of our head. That is symbolic! The authority of our reason is the part of us that is most difficult to put to death! The children of Adam live by what their reason tells them. In baptism, we testify that we have died to that way of life (of leaning on our own reason) and now live by faith in every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4; Romans 1:17).

Baptism is slighted by some Christians as a trivial matter. Naaman initially despised Elisha's command to go and dip himself seven times in the River Jordan to be healed of his leprosy. But it was when he obeyed

that simple command that he was healed (2 Kings 5:10-14). It is in little things that God tests our obedience.

Obedience to God must never be delayed. If your old man has indeed died, then he must be buried straight-away. It's a crime not to bury a man who is dead!

"Why do you delay then? Arise and be baptized" (Acts 22:16).

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