

“Ready to Give a Defense”

Answering Our Friends’ Religious Questions

Lesson Five - Baptism

Introduction. While most of the religious world teaches some type of baptism, there is great confusion and diversity regarding the proper method of baptism, who constitutes a suitable candidate for baptism and the purpose and significance of baptism. In this lesson we will seek to “wade through” this confusion and consider the simple New Testament teaching on baptism.

I. What is Baptism?

A. The meaning of the word.

1. The word translated “baptize” in the New Testament is the Greek word *baptizo* (βαπτίζω) meaning: “properly, *to dip repeatedly, to immerge, submerge*” (*Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 94).
2. The noun, *baptisma* (βάπτισμα) translated “baptism” means: “*immersion, submersion*” (ibid.). Our English word is not a translation, but a *transliteration* of the Greek word. That is, it has been brought into English without being translated. The meaning of the word refers to immersion.

B. The use of the word in the Greek Old Testament. The translation of the Old Testament, done before the time of Christ, and popular in New Testament times illustrates the use of the word.

1. Naaman is described as having “dipped” (*baptizo*) seven times in the Jordan river (II Kings 5:14). This makes it clear that the word was used to describe a complete submersion.

C. The use of the word in the New Testament.

1. When Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch both are described as going “down into” and coming “up out of” the water (Acts 8:38, 39). This would only be necessary if the eunuch’s baptism was a complete immersion in water.
2. Paul likens baptism to a burial (Romans 6:1-6). Sprinkling and pouring do not figure the likeness of burial. There is no example in Scripture of sprinkling or pouring being substituted for or described as baptism.

II. Who Needs to Be Baptized?

A. New Testament candidates for baptism.

1. Simon the sorcerer was mature (Acts 8:9, 13).
2. The Ethiopian eunuch was mature (Acts 8:36).
3. Saul was mature (Acts 9:17-18). There is no example of a newborn infant being baptized in the New Testament. All candidates are mature and accountable for the actions and choices.

B. Prerequisites for baptism.

1. One must believe in Jesus in order to be a candidate for baptism (Mark 16:15, 16). A newborn infant is not capable of either belief or disbelief so it is not a suitable candidate for baptism.
2. One must repent of their sins in order to be a candidate for baptism (Acts 2:36-38). A newborn infant is neither guilty of sin nor capable of repentance so it is not a suitable candidate for baptism.

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III. What is The Purpose & Significance of Baptism?

- A. John's Baptism. Even before Jesus began to teach baptism, John the Baptist was teaching a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4).
 - 1. In Ephesus, Paul encountered some who had received John's baptism but not Christ's (Acts 19:1-7). They were taught the distinction between the two and instructed to be baptized into Christ. This account teaches us that baptism must be carried out for the proper purpose in order for it to be acceptable to the Lord.
- B. Baptism and salvation.
 - 1. Baptism is necessary for salvation (I Peter 3:18-22). It is "an appeal to God for a good conscience" (NASB).
 - 2. In baptism one "puts on" Christ (Galatians 3:26-27). The Bible does not describe someone as having "put on Christ" or being "in Christ" prior to or without baptism.
 - 3. In baptism one can "wash away" their sins (Acts 22:14-16). Paul was not forgiven of his sins prior to his baptism, but needed to be baptized in order to receive forgiveness of sins.

Conclusion. It is clear from Scripture that baptism is an act of immersion or submersion in water. It is carried out on those who are mature, accountable and who have first come to believe in Jesus and repent of their sins. Baptism is necessary for salvation and the means by which one "puts on" Christ and washes away their sins through the blood of Christ.