

Baptism – part 2

Reading: 1 Peter 3:21 “...an antitype which now saves us – baptism....”

Introduction:

In part 1 of this topic, we looked briefly at the different types of baptisms that are mentioned in the New Testament, and examined in more detail the one that now applies to the plan of salvation under the New Covenant – *i.e.* the baptism of the great commission (**Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16**). We saw that;

- baptism involves a burial. The believing, penitent sinner “dies” and is “buried” through baptism, and is then raised out of the waters of baptism to “...walk in newness of life...” (**Roman 6:4; Colossians 2:11-12**);
- baptism has a specific purpose – along with belief and repentance, it is *for* the remission (or “forgiveness”) of sins (**Acts 2:38**);
- baptism is universal in scope – it applies to everybody. The gospel, which includes the need for baptism, is to be preached to everybody in all nations (**Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8**), and;
- baptism places people “*in Christ*”. Through baptism, the believer has “*put on Christ*” (**Galatians 3:27**); the Lord adds them to the church (**Acts 2:47b**) which is His (*i.e.* Christ’s) body (**Ephesians 1:22-23**). And it is “*in Christ*” where all of the spiritual blessings are to be found (**Ephesians 1:3**).

Does that mean then, because the gospel is for everybody, that we should rush out and automatically baptise everyone straight away without any pre-conditions being met? Are there any requirements placed on the sinner before they are immersed in the waters of baptism?

As we shall see later in this lesson, the recipient of baptism needs to have some level of understanding about the context and purpose of what they are about to do¹. Being baptised is not an act of “blind obedience” where the recipient has no idea of what it is for or what it is meant to achieve. As we saw in the previous lesson, among other things, it has a specific purpose, and is meant to achieve specific results.

The first part of this lesson will look at the biblical principles of doing the right things, with the right motives, and in the right context. Then, we will apply these principles to the act of baptism, including a look at what the Bible says about any pre-conditions that may be required before the sinner is baptised.

LESSON

1) Some background principles – right action, right purpose, right context

a) Right action, but wrong motive

It is possible for people to do the right thing, but with the wrong motives. The result is that, while some good may be done to the recipient of those deeds, there is no spiritual benefit for the one doing it. For example, in **Matthew 6:1-4**, Jesus spoke about the hypocrites doing charitable deeds.

¹ In a similar way, those partaking of the Lord’s Supper are required to have a level of understanding of what they are doing – **1 Corinthians 11:23-29**.

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Now doing charitable deeds is a good thing. This is one of the lessons that we can learn from the parable of “The Good Samaritan” (**Luke 10:25-37**). On another occasion, Jesus told a rich young ruler that if he wanted to inherit eternal life, then “...sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven...” (**Luke 18:18-23**). And the apostle Paul also encouraged brethren to be ready and willing to share and help those in need (**Romans 12:13; 2 Corinthians 8:13-14; 1 Timothy 6:17-19**).

But notice what Jesus said in **Matthew 6:1-4** about the hypocrite’s motivation for doing good deeds – “...to be seen by them (i.e. men)...” (vs.1, 2). In other words, while the deeds (in and of themselves) may well be good things to do and can benefit others, the hypocrites are not doing them out of a sense of compassion or concern for others. Rather, they do it for their own worldly benefit - to be praised by men. They do it to boost their own pride and ego, rather than do it out of humble service to God (**1 Peter 5:5-7**). The end result is that, while their physical actions may have been good and right, they receive no reward or benefit from God (vs.1).

Point: Therefore, doing the right actions, but with the wrong motives, or for the wrong reasons, may be of no spiritual benefit for the “doer”².

b) Right motive, but wrong action

Converse to the above, it is possible for some to have the right motivation (or reasons) for doing something, but their actions may actually be wrong. An example of this is Saul (later named Paul – **Acts 13:9**) before he became a Christian. Paul had a zeal for God (**Acts 22:3**) – he wanted to serve and please God to the best of his ability. He described himself as “...a “Hebrew of Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee;concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless...” (**Philippians 3:5-6**).

But in the early days of the church, he did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. Therefore, he believed that those who followed Jesus were in error, religiously. He consented to the stoning of Stephen (**Acts 7:58 – 8:1a**), because under the law, stoning was the penalty for those who blasphemed (**Leviticus 24:16**)³. In his zeal to do what he believed was right, Paul persecuted those who followed Jesus, even going into people’s homes to drag them off to prison (**Acts 8:3; 9:1-2, 21; 26:10-11**).

Paul’s motivation was that he wanted to do what he believed was right. He strived to live “...in all good conscience...” (**Acts 23:1**). But through his actions of persecuting the church, he was actually persecuting God (**Acts 22:7-8**). Paul later confessed that it was actually he himself who was “...a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man, the chief of sinners...” (**1 Timothy 1:13-15**).

Point: Therefore, people can be sincere and have the right motives for doing (or not doing) something, but that alone doesn’t guarantee that their actions (or inaction) are right – consider **Matthew 7:21-23; Romans 10:1-3**.

² For other examples of doing what can appear to be good, but with the wrong motives and attitudes, see **Matthew 6:5; John 12:4-6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3**.

³ In **Matthew 26:63-65**, the High Priest accused Jesus of blasphemy when Jesus confirmed that He (Jesus) was the Son of God. If Jesus was a blasphemer, then those who followed Him and considered Him to be the Christ, would also be seen as blasphemers.

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c) Actions are to be performed in the right context

We sometimes say that “*there is a time and a place for everything*”. Even the scriptures support that idea to some extent – see **Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**. What we mean by that saying is that some action or actions are OK in some contexts, but not in others. Consider the actions of some at the Corinthian church with regard to the way in which they were using the Lord’s Supper as a means to feed themselves – **1 Corinthians 11:20-22**.

Now there is nothing wrong with eating and drinking. Our physical bodies need food and drink in order to survive. God, Himself, acknowledges that we need these things (**Genesis 9:3; Matthew 6:31-32**). And we see examples in the scriptures of brethren sharing meals together (**Acts 2:46; 16:34**).

But the Lord’s Supper is the wrong place (or context) for having a normal meal. There are other places to do that, *e.g.* at home (**1 Corinthians 11:22**). The context of the Lord’s Supper is a memorial meal to remember the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It is not the time nor the place to have a meal that is designed to fill our bellies.

Point: It is possible to conduct an action, which in and of itself may be right, but the time, place or context in which the act is performed may be wrong.

d) The above principles applied to baptism

Baptism is a right and proper action, but when done, it needs to be done for the right reasons, and in the right context.

When it comes to being baptised, it needs to be done for the right reasons; with the right motives.

The Pharisees had a reputation of doing things to be seen of men, for they liked the praise of men (**Matthew 23:5-7, 27-28**). During the time of John’s ministry, they came to him in order to be baptised. However, John seemed a bit surprised by their presence – “*Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*” (**Matthew 3:7-9**). Now the scriptures do not specifically tell us whether or not they were baptised by John. But the words spoken by John in this passage, plus the Pharisees wanting the praise of men, would suggest that their reasons or motive for coming to be baptised was not what it should have been. The fact that they opposed Jesus so often demonstrates that their hearts weren’t right.

When it comes to being baptised, it needs to be done in the right context.

In **Acts 19:1-7**, we read the account of Paul arriving at Ephesus where he met some disciples⁴. After some discussion with them, Paul became aware that they had only been baptised with the baptism of John. Now while John’s baptism had similarities with the baptism of the Great Commission - it involved water (**John 3:23**), and was “*...a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins...*” (**Mark 1:4**) - it was no longer applicable. Their baptism had involved the right physical actions, but it was done in the wrong context. Therefore, Paul had them “*...baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus...*” (**Acts 19:5; Matthew 28:19**).

⁴ A disciple is the name given to “*a pupil, a learner*”. Strong’s Concordance of the Bible, Greek word number 3101, “*Mathetes*”.

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This passage from **Acts** demonstrates that not just any baptism will do. It has to be the right baptism, and done in the right context.

2) Pre-requisites for baptism

Therefore, what pre-conditions, if any, are required to be met before a person is immersed in the waters of baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

- a) People need to be taught the gospel to obtain faith, and to know what to do

In order for people to believe in Jesus and to obey the gospel, they first need to be informed, either by hearing or reading the Word of God.

We are told in **Hebrews 11:6** that “...without faith, it is impossible to please Him (i.e. God)...”. Therefore, if we have no faith in God, then we aren’t even on “first base”. And how do we obtain faith? “...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God...” (**Romans 10:17**).. “...And how shall they hear without a preacher?...” (**Romans 10:14**).

Yes, we can acknowledge the existence of God by observing the creation about us (**Romans 1:20**), but that alone does not save us. People need to know what they need to do in order to be saved, e.g. **Acts 2:37b**. Even the “good” people we read about in the Bible who believed in God, needed to hear the gospel – consider the case of Cornelius (**Acts 10:1-6, 22**). That is why Jesus commissioned the apostles to “...be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth..” (**Acts 1:8b**). The message has to be taken out into all the world so that people can hear, believe, and obey. The examples of conversions in the book of Acts show that their baptism was preceded by teaching of the Word⁵ – refer to Annex A.

- b) Confession of belief in Jesus as the Son of God

Once people have been taught the gospel, they need to believe it, and they need to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. In **Acts 8**, we have the account of the Ethiopian Eunuch’s conversion. On his way home from Jerusalem, he had been reading from the prophet Isaiah when Philip met him. Philip used the passage of scripture (**Isaiah 53:7-8**) as a starting point to teach him about Jesus (vs.35). When they came to some water, the Eunuch asked Philip, “What hinders me from being baptised?”⁶ (vs.36b). Philip responded, “If (emphasis mine – SK) you believe with all your heart, you may.” (vs.37a). The word “if” makes this a conditional statement, which means that one particular thing must be in place (or happen) before another particular thing can happen.

From what is said in the rest of the verse **37**, the “belief” being referred to here is the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. In other words, belief in who Jesus is, is a pre-condition for baptism. i.e. those being baptised must believe and acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God (**Romans 10:9-10; 1 John 4:15**).

⁵ The person does not need to be told and understand every single thing contained in the overall teachings of the New Covenant before they can be baptised. The examples from the scriptures show us that people were baptised once they had been taught enough to believe, to see their need for salvation, and to understand the necessity and purpose of baptism.

⁶ For the Eunuch to have asked this question, the topic of baptism must have been covered by Philip in his teaching about Jesus.

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c) Those who are penitent

“Repentance” is a change in thinking that leads to a change in life (**Matthew 3:8; Acts 26:20b**).

When Peter spoke to the crowd on the Day of Pentecost in **Acts 2**, the people realized that they had sinned, and as a result, they were “...*cut to the heart...*” (vs.**37a**). They had believed what Peter had said, and they now demonstrated a “...*godly sorrow...*”. Such an emotion leads to repentance (**2 Corinthians 7:10**), the point at which a person resolves to change their lives.

In response to their question, “*What shall we do?*” (vs.**37b**), Peter told them to “...*repent, and let every one of you be baptised...*” (vs.**38**). Without a penitent heart, baptism would be pointless, because Jesus himself had said that “...*unless you repent, you will all likewise perish...*” (**Luke 13:3, 5**).

Conclusion:

In this lesson, we have seen that right actions must be done with the right motives, for the right reasons, and in the right context.

We have also seen that a person seeking to be baptised;

- a) needs to be told the gospel so that they know what to do,
- b) must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and confess that belief, and,
- c) need to be penitent of heart.

What does this mean then for us?

For someone who has not yet obeyed the gospel and been baptised for the forgiveness of sins, then I would encourage them to give the matter some serious consideration – have faith in God, acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God, repent of your sins, and be baptised for forgiveness of those sins. Your eternal destiny is at stake (**Mark 16:15-16; Romans 8:1**).

For those of us who have obeyed the gospel, we may be approached by others who have not yet “*put on Christ*” (**Galatians 3:27**), and be asked to baptise them. Before doing so, it may be prudent to be like Philip (in **Acts 8**) and ask them a few questions first to be sure that the person understands what they are about to do, and why they are doing it. If there are any doubts, then a bit of time spent in discussion and teaching may be necessary before proceeding.

When a person responds to the gospel from the heart (**Romans 6:17-18**), having faith in the blood of Jesus to cleanse them of their sins (**Ephesians 1:7**), being buried in the waters of baptism for the right reasons, then their old sinful self is ‘...*done away with...*’ (**Romans 6:6**). They are raised a “...*new creature...*” (**2 Corinthians 5:17**), no longer condemned for their sins (**Romans 8:1**), but children and “...*heirs of God...*” (**Galatians 4:6-7**), receiving all the blessings that are available in Christ (**Ephesians 1:3-14**).

In the third and final lesson in this series, we will consider what the scriptures say about some of the objections that are raised by people concerning baptism.

Acknowledgements:

- Spiritual Sword, “Baptism in the New Testament”, January 1994, Vol. 25, No.2
- Truth for Today, “Baptism” by Owen Olbricht, 1994

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ANNEX A Examples of New Covenant conversions

In the book of Acts, we have an historical record of people becoming Christians in the first century. In the following table, we see examples of people being converted, *i.e.* people hearing and obeying the gospel in order to be saved. Read each of the scriptures, and note what action is *specifically* mentioned in the verses. You will notice that baptism consistently occurs.

NB: Some of the actions (not ticked) are implied from what the verses say, but this exercise is to note what actions are explicitly mentioned.

Scripture	Hear	Believe	Repent	Confession	Baptised
Acts 2:36-41, 42 Jews on Pentecost	✓ 37		✓ 38		✓ 38, 41
Acts 8:5-13 People in Samaria	✓ 5	✓ 12-13			✓ 12-13
Acts 8:26-39 Ethiopian Eunuch	✓ 35	✓ 37		✓ 37	✓ 38
Acts 9:10-18 Acts 22:10-17 Saul / Paul	✓ 16				✓ 18 ✓ 16
Acts 10:24-48 Cornelius & friends	✓ 34-44				✓ 48
Acts 16:13-15 Lydia	✓ 13				✓ 15
Acts 16:25-34 Jailer	✓ 31-32	✓ 34			✓ 33
Acts 19:1-5 The Ephesians	✓ 4-5				✓ 5
Acts 18:5-8 The Corinthians	✓ 8	✓ 8			✓ 8