

Baptism, Christening or Sprinkling, Which is Correct?

Many Christian denominations believe in baptism. There are, however, some denominations that don't believe baptism is a requirement for the hope of salvation. In this message I will, hopefully, explain not only why baptism is a requirement but also why full immersion baptism is the God ordained method of performing it.

Although some churches believe that baptism is not required, and that God's Amazing Grace is all that is needed, the Bible, the inspired Word of God, states otherwise. Now I have no doubt that God can save anyone He wishes to, and likewise condemn whosoever He wishes, but I personally would rather follow His prescribed method than 'roll the dice' on a hope that God will bail me out on the day of Judgment.

Let us examine the Scriptures to, first of all, see why (or if) baptism is truly needed and then secondly, if it is needed, how it is to be performed.

Some people claim that Christ saving the "thief on the cross" is proof that baptism is not required for salvation, so let's start by addressing this issue. Jesus saving the soul of the thief was one of the last acts of forgiveness by the living Christ, not the arisen Christ. While Christ was alive He was fully able to forgive people of their sins, and indeed He did so frequently (John 8:1-12, Luke 7:47-50, Luke 23:34, Mark 2:5-11). As Jesus told the 'thief' that he would be with Him in paradise while they were both still alive, the New Covenant was not yet in place. In order for a covenant to come into effect there has to be a death. A Will and Testament is only read and activated after the death of the owner of the Will (Hebrews 9: 16,17). Also, consider this, how can you possibly be buried with Christ if He wasn't dead? The requirement for baptism for the forgiveness of sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit didn't come into effect until after Christ's death on the cross. But it is a requirement or, as some would say "just an outward sign of an inner change"? Is it a work of man or a work of God? Is it enough to be sprinkled, or signed with the cross with water on the forehead? Does it have to be performed with Holy Water? As always, the place to look for the answers is to search God's Word and I encourage you to do so even for this message.

Before we discuss the method or manner of baptism, let us first decide if it truly is a requirement or not, and who said it was if it is.

In John chapter 3 we read where Nicodemus visits Jesus at night. Now Nicodemus is an interesting study in his own right. He was a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish Council. The Pharisees, as you probably know, were intent on testing and trying to get rid of Jesus, yet in John 12:42 we learn that many Pharisees actually believed Jesus was sent by God, despite the fact that blasphemy was one of the main charges made against Jesus. Nicodemus, when he visited Jesus that night, said in John 3: 2 "Rabbi we know that you are a Teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with Him" (NKJV, emphasis mine). Nicodemus seems to be including himself among those who know that Jesus is sent by God. This would seem to be

confirmed in John 19:39 where Nicodemus is now bold enough to go and help prepare the body of Jesus for burial. Not just to help but to also buy a substantial amount of expensive myrrh and aloes to be used to prepare the body. When Nicodemus visits Jesus he doesn't greet Jesus with a particular question, yet Jesus responds to Nicodemus's initial greeting with a statement (John 3:3). Jesus says to him "Most assuredly" (NKJV) or as the NIV says "Very truly". Now coming from Jesus that would seem to imply "I am not kidding around here" or "You had better believe it". So believe what? Let us continue reading John 3:3 "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (NKJV, emphasis mine). Notice it says cannot, not might not. The NIV puts it this way "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again" (NIV, emphasis mine). So whatever this "Born again" thing is we have to do it in order to see the Kingdom of God. Not only does the Bible tell us this but Jesus Himself emphasizes it. It is very interesting to note that Jesus knew what Nicodemus was going to ask without Nicodemus having to actually ask it. Fortunately for us Nicodemus asks the obvious question for us in John 3:4, basically he asks "What"? How can this possibly happen? And Jesus replies in John 3:5 by saying once again "Most assuredly (Very truly), I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (NKJV, emphasis mine). Jesus unfortunately doesn't go as far as to describe what "born of water and the Spirit" actually means but there are several schools of thought on this subject. One theory is that it means much the same as just "born of the Spirit". Another theory is that the "water" part refers to the purification of the body. Yet another theory is that "water" refers to the physical human birth with water being the amniotic fluid inside the womb. Let us not get to bogged down trying to prove or disprove any of these particular theories but rather let us look at some facts. One fact is that everyone is born once! that is indisputable I hope! Another fact is that Jesus implies a second birth (or rebirth) in His use of the phrase "you must be born again" (John 3:7, emphasis mine).

Another fact is that baptism was not a new thing. Jesus Himself was baptized (Matt 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22) and indeed His disciples also baptized others (John 3:22; 3:26). If you notice in Mark 9:10 and Matt 3:16, Jesus came up out of the water, so I believe it is safe to assume He first went into the water of the River Jordan in order to be baptized. Luke never actually mentions the coming up out of the water, however, if we drop back to Luke 3:16 (on a side note have you ever noticed how many key scriptures are in verses 3:16?) we find John the Baptist (who baptized Jesus) saying "I indeed baptize you with water, but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire". So I believe it is safe to assume that Jesus was baptized by John with water, common river water not Holy Water. So what have we established so far? Well we know that water (common water) was used in baptism. We also know that both John the Baptist and the disciples were baptizing people. We also know that people that were being baptized were doing so for repentance (Matt 3:11) during Christ's lifetime. So if Jesus was Himself baptized and was also encouraging people to be baptized then it is pretty safe to assume that baptism was required at least while Jesus was alive ... but what about afterwards? Is it still really needed? Early Christians were certainly being

baptized after Jesus had ascended to heaven. Acts is full of people being baptized, so they must have had some reason for doing so surely? So let us investigate why the apostles were still baptizing people and how. The why is pretty easy to find, Jesus told them to! The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 clearly states. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: (NIV, emphasis mine). Those are words spoken by Jesus. He is speaking after His resurrection. Notice that He doesn't say "blessing them", "getting them to say the sinner's prayer", or "accepting Me into their hearts," it says baptizing them.

Another verse that reinforces this is Mark 16:16 which says "He who believes, and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (NKJV, emphasis mine) Again notice that it says, "and is baptized," not "or" is baptized. Apparently, according to Jesus, we must to do two things in order to be saved; believe and be baptized. Think of it like one of those childproof tops where you have to push down and twist to remove the top and gain access. Doing one without the other won't get the job done.

Some people argue that baptism is a work of man and that the Bible clearly states in Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Let us look deeper into this. The first thing we should note is that Paul's letter to the Ephesians was written to the church, to believing Christians! ... So if they were believing then that would imply that they followed Christ's instructions and were baptized. The second point is that the passage never refers to baptism, it is really saying that you can't "buy" God's grace solely by doing good works. To totally dispel the argument that baptism is a work of man Colossians 2:11-14 tells us that it is God's work that performs "the circumcision (of the heart) made without hands."

Some people will argue that Ephesians 2:5 saying "even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" NKJV is proof that it is God's Grace that saves us. This is Certainly true, but the Grace Paul is talking about here (and again it is to believing Christians in Ephesus) is that God graciously (i.e. through His good Grace) sent His only Son to die in order to take away our sins. Notice that it says "made us alive together with Christ". So how do we get made "alive together with Christ"? Once again, the scriptures tell us the answer. In Romans 6:3-11 it tells us that we have to die to our sins and be "buried with Him through baptism, so we can be raised with Christ". Hmmm there is that baptism thing again!

This may be an appropriate place to examine what baptism is, and what it is not. As we have already learned baptism involves water. The word baptism comes from the Greek word "Baptizo" which, at the time that the Bible was first being translated, had the equivalent English and Latin translation of "immerse". King James as head of the church of England would not allow "immersion" to be used. So the translators anglicized the

word and came up with the word "baptism". This was done to conceal the real meaning of the word baptizo and so to allow the church of England to continue to practice sprinkling, a deviation from the truth of God's word that exist today. The word Baptizo is used 63 time in the New Testament. There is also a very similar Greek word "Bapto" which actually means "to dip" but the word used in the scriptures is "Baptizo". I will take a quick diversion here in order to better demonstrate the difference between "Bapto" and "Baptizo". I will also, hopefully, provide a more definite definition of the word "Baptizo" or baptise. About 200 B.C., which is a long time before the Bible was translated and long before the NT was even written a Greek poet physician named Nicander wrote (in Greek) a recipe that says that in order to make a pickle the vegetable should first be 'dipped' (bapto) into boiling water and then 'baptized' (baptizo) in the pickling solution. It is the 'baptizing' that produces the permanent change from a vegetable to a pickle. When you buy pickles, they are usually still totally submerged in the vinegar or pickling solution! Webster's dictionary states baptism as "To immerse or dip" it further defines "immerse" as "to plunge into the liquid that surrounds or covers". The early churches, in particular the Catholic Church, would have had a problem if the true translation of "Baptizo" were used as they had been 'sprinkling' and 'christening' people for centuries, nobody was immersed. Their solution was to simply altar the definition of the new word 'baptism' to include "sprinkling" and therefore claim "sprinkling" is Biblical and indeed "sprinkling" is mentioned in the Bible. It is, in particular, mentioned in the New Testament, in Hebrews 10:22 and 1 Peter 1:2. So let us examine these scriptures a little deeper. Hebrews 10:22 says "let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water" (NIV). If you recall, in the Old Testament, blood was sprinkled on the horns of the altar in order to cleanse and consecrate it (Lev 16:14) before the sacrificial offering. By the time Hebrews was written the need for animal sacrifices had been removed by Christ's death so what the Hebrew writer would be saying is that Christ's blood sprinkles our hearts to cleanse us and consecrate us. Obviously having our hearts sprinkled is figurative! Therefore the "sprinkling of our hearts" is through the sacrificial Lamb's blood, which is, in the New Testament, represented by Jesus. The blood of Jesus which was shed at Calvary is what cleanses our hearts when we chose Christ as our Savior. Notice too that in Hebrews 10:22 it says "and having our bodies washed with pure water "not or not instead of but and! I know when I was a boy I would try and get away without having a proper wash by just dabbing water here and there, but mum always seemed to know ... even if I was smart enough to wet the soap! Then it was time to get in the bath and 'do the job right'. We have, hopefully, explained what Hebrews 10:22 is talking about so what about 1 Peter 1:2. 1 Peter 1:2 says " ... to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with His blood" in other words "obey what Jesus commanded and be cleansed and consecrated by His blood". Note that in Matthew 26:28, Jesus himself tells us what represents His blood. It is the fruit of the vine not water!

We effectively sprinkle ourselves with "Christ's blood when we partake of the fruit on the vine at the Lord's Supper. This makes sense when you consider that the horns of the altar were not just sprinkled one time, but every time a sacrifice was to be made. If

"sprinkled" and "baptism" were the same thing then baptism would need to be a repeatable, and indeed repeated, process but this cannot possibly be the case as baptism is a symbolic circumcision of the heart by God (Romans 2:29). You can't be circumcised multiple times. The prophet Jeremiah also refers to the circumcision of the heart in Jeremiah 9: 25-26 as a prediction of God's salvation coming to all nations. Circumcision of the flesh only will result in punishment. God requires circumcision of the heart which He performs by? Baptism!

Just to totally disprove the "sprinkling=baptism" argument let us look again at Romans 6:3-11 and in particular at verse 4. Verse 4 says "We were therefore buried with Him through baptism in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (NIV). How many traditional burials have you seen where the person was buried by just throwing a little dirt over them or leaving bits uncovered? How many graveyards have you walked by and seen the odd limb sticking out of a grave? Bury according to Webster's definition means: inter; to put into a grave, to overwhelm, to hide. Overwhelm is defined as, amongst over similar things, as "to be submerged". There appears to be NO definition of burial that mentions "sprinkling".

It has been suggested that "sprinkling" is permitted where water is scarce, so let us take a second to examine that. The first thing to mention is that, even if the suggestion is valid, we hardly live in such a place. Water is all around us in sufficient supply so as to make full immersion baptism possible. Probably the most water deprived places on earth are deserts. Even most deserts are not totally devoid of water but let us assume for a minute that they are. With the lack of water available in them surely anyone who had to travel across a desert area would be well advised to take an ample supply of water with them? The more people and animals in the group, the more water would be needed. With that in mind let us consider the account in Acts 8:26-40 of the Ethiopian eunuch. He was a "eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians" (Acts 8:27 NKJV) and "who had charge of all her treasury". We also know he was religious as he had been to Jerusalem to worship and he was reading from the book of Isaiah (Acts 8:30). It is also safe to assume that he was educated given his position and that he could read. Such a powerful and educated man would hardly travel through bandit ridden country and deserts alone as his journey back to Ethiopia would certainly entail. Acts 8:28 tells us that he had animals with him as he was sitting in a chariot, so at the very least he must have had a few animals to pull it. We would also assume that he would not be stupid enough to not take any water with him on his journey across such dry, inhospitable terrain. We know that when Philip met him he was already on a desert road (Acts 8:26). Yet once Philip had taught the eunuch about Jesus it was only when they came to water that Philip baptized him. He didn't stop and sprinkle him (Acts 8:35-39) even though he very well could have. Notice also that Acts 8:38 says " ... both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him" (NKJV, emphasis mine). In other words, he didn't just stand by the water and dab some on him.

Just to further prove that baptism is God ordained let us consider what happened at

Pentecost to the apostles. In Acts 2:1-4 that the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, began to speak "as the Spirit gave them utterance" (NKJV). We are told, by Jesus Himself, in John 16:13-14 that the Spirit only speaks the truth and only what He hears. Therefore the apostles were speaking the Words given to them by God. This is proved in Acts 2:33 which reads "He (Jesus) poured out this which you now see and hear" (NKJV, emphasis mine). In other words, everything that the apostles say has divine origins. It is Jesus speaking via the Holy Spirit and the apostles. So when Peter tells the gathered Jews (a large number from many nations according to Acts 2:5-6) what they must do to be forgiven of their sins; it is really Jesus saying it. Now what does 'Peter' say? In Acts 2:38 we are told what must be done; "Repent and be baptized, everyone 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" (NIV, emphasis mine). I have no doubt in my mind that this passage alone should be enough to prove the requirement for baptism, especially given the source of the command. The promised result of baptism is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Notice it is a promise not a 'maybe'. Also notice that it is conditional on repentance and baptism. It is a little like one of those TV commercials where they tell you if you buy their product now they will give you a free gift, you won't get the gift if you don't buy the product. The gift has prerequisites!

Let us prove this point by looking at when Saul was given the gift of the Holy Spirit. Saul saw Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6) and he (Saul) received proof by being struck blind. Did he receive the Holy Spirit then? No. He fasted or three days (Acts 9:9) yet he didn't receive it then either. He prayed (Acts 9:11) but he didn't receive it by praying either. No Sinner's Prayer will ever result in the gift of the Holy Spirit and Saul was, by his own admission, chief amongst sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). In Acts 9:12 we are told that Ananias would restore Saul's sight by "putting his hand on him" so bear that in mind as we look at Acts 9:17. In Acts 9:17 Ananias tells Saul that Christ sent him to restore Saul's sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. As we look deeper into this and read verses 17 & 18. Clearly Ananias lays his hand on Saul to restore his sight, which we are told that he does in verse 18 so there is the sight thing taken care of. So what is left? Oh yes! The Holy Spirit. Take a closer look at the end of verse 18 "and he arose and was baptized". I wonder why? I now refer you back to Acts 2:38 ... " ... and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". Saul only received the Holy Spirit after he was baptized. He couldn't pray it, fast it, confess it or even get it after allowing Jesus into his life, he was baptized in order to receive it.

In conclusion then we have, I hope, established that baptism is God ordained, we have further dismissed "sprinkling" as being equivalent to baptism and we have established, through the scriptures, that baptism is the only means (these days) of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Wait a minute" I almost hear you say "these days?, when wasn't it?". Look at John 20:22 "And when He (Jesus) had said this He breathed on them and said to them. "Receive the Holy Spirit". So Christ can give you the gift Himself it seems. The breathing on the disciples was to give them the strength and

spiritual fervor needed to carry out their commission until they received the permanent gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, fifty days later.

Some people will point to Acts 19:6 as proof that the laying on of hands can bestow the gift on to people, it reads "And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, ... " (NKJV), however take a peek just one sentence before that. It says in verse 5 "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (NKJV). So in fact they were baptized before receiving the Holy Spirit.

So the message I hope that you have is that baptism, full, immersion baptism, is the God ordained method of receiving the Holy Spirit and showing that you are a changed (permanently changed) person. And that you are no longer a slave to sin and the world but a slave to God.

By the way baptism isn't the "finish line", it is more like the starting line. After baptism is the part where, after paying our admission fees we now have to walk the talk. We have to live the Word of God and we can only do so if we know the Word of God.

If you have not been baptized with a full-immersion baptism, I encourage you to consider doing so, calling on the name of Jesus Christ and repent of your sins.

God Bless.
K E Ferguson
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