

Baptism and the Need to Know

This writer understands the New Testament Scriptures to say that a candidate needs to know something about the purpose of baptism when they are immersed.

Let's look at a proclamation from Jesus:

He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved . . .

Mark 16:16 NASV

Believing comes before baptism, so infant baptism is ruled out. To verify this, there is not one instance of an infant being baptized in the book of models, the Book of Acts. The person being baptized needs to know what it is for. Infants don't fit the description.

There is at least one case of baptism for the wrong reason in Acts 19:1-5. These were adult men, but had been baptized into "John's baptism." Paul inquired immediately about the purpose of their baptism with the words,

"Into what then were you baptized?"

Inspired Paul might have reasoned that God, in his grace, would correct the purpose because they had done the best they could.

Rather, Paul required they be **"baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."** The purpose of their baptism needed to be correct. They had

believed in Jesus (verse 2), but had not heard of his baptism. They had a need to know and Paul informed them. They were immersed immediately.

When inspired Peter spoke of baptism, he called it an *appeal*:

Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ

1 Peter 3:21 NASV

Since it is an appeal, the intentions of the candidate must be involved in the process. If the candidate believes that his baptism has nothing to do with salvation, then his baptism is simply an empty form, a religious ritual. Truly, the person being immersed needs to know what he is doing.

More evidence that the candidate needs to know what baptism does comes from Paul:

. . . having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Colossians 2:12 NASV

Baptism is not only a burial, but an act of our faith that God is doing something at this immersion time. He raised Christ from the dead and he is

raising us from our existence in spiritual death to walk in a new life. How can our faith work at this moment if we claim that "we were saved three weeks ago when we let Jesus come into our heart?"

Certainly no one has all of the reasons for baptism memorized, not even seasoned theologians. But a candidate needs to know that he is being baptized to be saved, not because he was saved sometime in the past.

The master Christian theologian reported on his own conversion to Christ. Paul quotes the stranger that came to him as saying:

Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.

Acts 22:16

Looking back over the years, Paul could have explained to his listeners that baptism was not important because he had already had a great experience with the Lord. Instead, he made it clear that not only was immersion required to rid him of sins, but he was to be personally active in the process.

For comparison, taking the Lord's Supper requires that we know what we are doing. Jesus said, **"Do this in remembrance of me."**

When we pray, we are to **"ask in faith without any doubting."** We are to be active in the process of asking.

When we sing, we are told to make **"melody with your heart to the Lord ..."** Again, we are active in the process.

The heart must be involved with understanding. We must know what we are doing. We must also know what we are doing when we are immersed.

This writer was immersed when he was eight or nine years old. The preacher was professional, the baptistery was large and the water was warm. But looking back, he did not know why he had been immersed.

Later, he heard the plain gospel and about being lost. He decided, against family advice, to be immersed because he now understood that it was the point of salvation. The night was dark, the river was cold and he shivered. But he had faith in the working of God.

If in heaven, the Lord says, “You didn’t need to go to all of that bother,” there will still be no penalty. But that’s a whole sight better than arriving at Judgment to learn that the Lord does not accept the baptism of a candidate who did not know what he was doing.

We rule out the baptism of infants because they do not know what it is for. Paul immersed some devoted, baptized disciples because they had not been baptized for the proper purpose. The Lord’s Supper needs to be taken with its purpose in mind. Prayer and singing require the right understanding.

Likewise, each candidate being baptized needs to know why they are being immersed.

Furthermore, the only way disciples can accurately reproduce themselves in the lives of future disciples is to have a clear understanding of what they did to be saved.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” John 14:15 NASB

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