

Fundamentals, Study 29. Baptism (Rom 6:1-11)

by BS Poh

o Baptism does not save but the saved would want to get baptised, when that is possible.

1. Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, that carries with it a meaning and a purpose. It is a *sign* of union with Christ, which indicates the following about the believer: (i) he has died and resurrected with Christ; (ii) he has been forgiven all his sins; (iii) he has given himself to God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life.¹ The *purpose* of baptism is to initiate the believer into the membership of the local church.² Baptism must not be identified (i.e. equated) with the circumcision of the Old Testament. Regeneration (i.e. the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming the human nature) is *figuratively* called *the circumcision of the heart*, or *the circumcision made without hands*. Circumcision pointed to regeneration, not to baptism. Baptism is a *new* sign of the *new* covenant (corresponding to the new age brought in by Christ).³ (1. Rom 6:3-5; Acts 22:16; 2. Acts 2:41; 5:14; Matt 28:19-20; 3. Rom 2:29; Col. 2:11-12; Heb 8:6, 13.)

2. Only those who show a *credible profession of faith* are to be baptised. This means the following: (i) they must actually profess *repentance* towards God;⁴ (ii) they must actually profess *faith* in Jesus Christ;⁵ and (iii) they must resolve to walk in *obedience* to the Lord.⁶ They do not have to be adults, or theologians (i.e. experts on the teaching of the Bible) before being baptised. We do not baptise infants because they are not yet capable of faith, as required by the Bible. The Bible contains no command, example, or certain inference to baptise the infants of professing believers. In this, the paedobaptists (i.e. those who baptise infants) are wrong. (4. Acts 2:38; 20:21; 5. Mark 16:16; Acts 8:36-37; 6. Rom 6:4, 17-18; Acts 19:18-19; 1 Thess 1:9-10)

3. Baptism is to be by *immersion*, i.e. the dipping of the whole person, in water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.⁷ The original Greek words "to baptise" (*baptizo*) and "baptism" (*baptisma*) mean immersion. Baptism is figuratively used in other ways, but the actual meaning of a word must never be determined from its figurative usage. The examples of baptism in the Bible also indicate immersion.⁸ Despite the clear teaching of the Bible, there are Christians who wrongly argue for sprinkling (*rantizo*) and pouring (*katacheo*). The ceremonial washing in the Old Testament is fulfilled in the spiritual cleansing of regeneration, not in the external sign of baptism.⁹ (7. Matt 28:19-20; 8. John 3:22-23; Acts 8:36-39; 9. Ezek 36:25-27 cf. Heb 10:1-4, 12-18; Tit 3:5; Acts 22:16)

4. Paedobaptists like to support their practice of infant baptism by: (i) quoting the "household passages" in the book of Acts; (ii) making much of the phrase "For the promise is to you and to your children" in Acts 2:39; (iii) appealing to 1 Corinthians 7:14; and (iv) arguing from the covenant God made with Abraham. (a) However, the "household passages" show that only believers were baptised.¹⁰ (b) Acts 2:39 has not been quoted fully, nor understood correctly in its context. The last phrase in the verse "as many as the Lord our God will call" qualifies the earlier clause "the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off". Furthermore, "children" is a

reference to the descendants, and not to the immediate children in the family, much less to infants. Salvation is promised to those spread out in time (“to you and to your children”), and in space (“to you and to all who are afar off”), who respond in faith (cf. Matt 28:19-20; Rom 10:17). (c) In 1 Corinthians 7:14, the children of a believing parent is regarded as “holy” not in the sense that they are saved, but rather that they are “set apart” to be under the influence of the gospel, in contrast to those who are born in pagan families. In the same verse, the unbelieving spouse is regarded as “sanctified” or “made holy” in the same sense. Both words, “holy” and “sanctified” are derived from the same root word. (d) God’s covenant with Abraham is fulfilled in Christ, so that all who have faith in Christ are Abraham’s children.¹¹ (10. Acts 16:34; 1 Cor. 1:16 cf. 16:15; 11. Gal. 3:7-9, 27, 29)

= Have you been biblically baptised - as a believer, and by immersion?

Review Questions

1. What does the sign of baptism say about the believer?
2. What is the purpose of baptism?
3. Why mustn’t baptism be equated with with circumcision?
4. Who alone are to be baptised?
5. What three things must be true about those who are baptised?
6. Does the Bible teach us to baptise the infants of professing believers?
7. How is baptism to be performed?
8. What do the “household passages” in Acts actually show?
9. Name two other passages that have been quoted by paedobaptists to wrongly support infant baptism.
10. In the covenant that God made with Abraham, who are his true children?

Assignment/Discussion

Baptism is a special ordinance of the New Testament, commanded by the Lord in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. Can it be possible that the Lord gave a command in which we are uncertain about how, and who, we are to baptise?

Memory Passage (Rom 6:3-4)

3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

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