

## **The Purpose of Baptism (1<sup>st</sup>)**

(Today we will begin studying the purpose of baptism. Since it is only taught in the New Testament, it is important that we know the purpose for which God gave this ordinance to His repentant believers.)

Previously we saw that both Baptists and Protestants affirm that baptism is associated with the validity of the congregation of the Lord, and for this reason it is essential that we know the truth concerning the doctrine of baptism. It was further stated that we need to know the mode, the subject, the purpose, and the administrator of baptism, and while there may be other questions regarding this subject, I believe it can be agreed by the majority that these four things are foundational to the topic at hand. So far we found that the mode is immersion in water, the subjects are professed believers, and it is generally agreed by both Protestants and Baptists that the administrator is to be the gospel minister. Though the Protestants changed the mode and subjects in later years, they, too, agreed that in the early days of the history of Christianity that immersion in water was the mode practiced and that it was only performed on believers. This was practiced for at least over three hundred years after the time of Christ before any discussion was introduced regarding a different mode. In our study of baptism with the Spirit as prophesied by John and performed on the Day of Pentecost, and afterwards, that the pattern was the same: Christ was the administrator, believers were the subjects, and the Holy Spirit was the element. Spirit baptism was by Christ and not by the Holy Spirit. Today we shall consider the purpose of baptism.

Baptism was something that was first introduced by John the Baptist. There are some who say that it was adopted from Jewish proselyte baptism. The problem with this idea is that Jewish proselyte baptism did not start until years after New Testament baptism. For proof of this see *A Dissertation Concerning the Baptism of Jewish Proselytes* by John Gill. It is at the back of his *Body of Divinity*. Notice this quote by Gill: “Now since it appears there is no mention made of any such rite or custom of admitting Jewish proselytes by baptism, or dipping, to the Jewish religion in any writings and records before the times of John the Baptist, Christ, and his apostles; nor in any age after them, for the first three or four hundred years; or, however, before the writing of the Talmuds; it may be safely concluded there was no such custom which had obtained in that interval of time.” Since baptism as an ordinance is not in the Old Testament and something new introduced by John as ordained by God, the answer to the purpose for baptism comes from the New Testament alone and not from the Old Testament or from any historical custom.

Scripture plainly declares that baptism is a picture of the work of salvation accomplished by Christ as declared in His resurrection, I Pet. 3:21 (“the like figure whereunto even baptism doth also save us ... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ”); Rm. 4:25 (“Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification). I Peter 3:21 also says that baptism is “the answer of a good conscious toward God.” Equally, we are told by the inspired Word of God that baptism is a command of the Lord for the repentant believer, Acts 10:48. Therefore, when one obeys the Lord and is immersed in water and raised up from the watery grave it typifies (or, is a picture of) the death and resurrection of Christ. Sprinkling or pouring does not provide this picture.

Several years ago, a precious Baptist minister and his wife were taking care of a gracious Presbyterian lady. The minister and the lady had several conversations regarding baptism, but the lady was unable to see the difference between immersion and sprinkling and affirmed that sprinkling was proper. After some time the lady’s cat died and she asked the minister to bury the cat for her in the back yard. The minister took the cat to the appointed spot and got some dirt and sprinkled it on the cat. After bringing the lady to the spot for her inspection, she exclaimed that he did not bury the cat. He affirmed that he did after the fashion of her views of sprinkling being a burial to portray the resurrection of Christ. The lady

immediately understood what the minister was teaching about baptism and later was immersed by the Baptist minister. While this story is somewhat humorous, I believe it is a good illustration to show the truth about baptism and that baptism is a sign of the believer with Christ in His death and resurrection. I Peter 3:21 makes it clear that this is one of the purposes of God for baptism.

The 1689 London Baptist Confession and the Westminster Confession agrees that baptism is associated with the congregation and identified with membership in the congregation. The Baptist confession says that it is “to be continued in the congregation” while the Westminster states that it is “for admission of the party into the visible Church.” While much could be said at this point, it is obvious that either directly or indirectly one of the purposes of baptism is associated with the identity of the New Testament congregation.

The London and the Westminster confessions also agree that baptism is a sign of remission of sins, and one giving up himself unto God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life. The difference here is that the Baptists assert that it is a sign only for the believer, but the Protestants maintain that it is not only a sign but a seal of the covenant and that it is a sacrament or a means of conferring grace to or upon the person to whom baptism is administered. In fact, the Westminster goes on to say that “The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to the moment it is administered; yet, ... the grace promised is offered, really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such ... as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in His appointed time.” While the Protestants affirm that it is a sign of “remission of sins,” and a sign of “one giving up himself unto God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life ... the efficacy of Baptism is not tied to the moment it is administered.” So, if none of this is “tied to the moment” that baptism is administered, what is the purpose? What does it prove?

We do find scriptural support that baptism is a sign of remission of sins, and one giving up himself unto God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life. Since unbelievers and infants do not show fruits of repentance, nor do they manifest giving themselves up in obedience to God, and they do not live and walk as a Christian, baptism serves no purpose for them.

I would like to enlarge on some of the things stated before so that we might have a fuller appreciation of them. Without an understanding of the purpose of baptism, it becomes nothing more than some initiatory rite required to become a member of a religious organization, and I am persuaded that for the most part that is all baptism is today in many, if not most, congregations today. Many people (mostly children) are coerced or become emotionally stimulated to follow a trend or their peers to “join the church” when there is no change in their daily lives. In previous times before a person was received as a candidate for baptism and congregational membership he was required to give what is often called “an experience of grace.” The individual was to relate how it was that the Lord called him out of darkness and translated him into the kingdom of God. In other words, the pattern of John the Baptist was followed when he required fruits of repentance before He would baptize such as the Pharisees and Sadducees. Unless some kind of requirement for proof of repentance is seen, congregations will continue to be filled with people who afterwards will cease attending congregational worship. If they do continue to attend, they often deny the truth of the Scriptures and are simply members of societies where nothing is required of them in their daily lives. In many cases they simply return to the world while their names are retained on the membership roll for a better show of numbers. To show the mentality of modern, so-called Christian religion, I recently heard on a so-called Christian radio that unless a person is “saved” by around fifteen, it is unlikely that the individual will ever be saved. Such is the mentality of modern “Christian” religion. The Scriptures plainly teach the God saves His people from their sins, Mt. 1:21. Obviously, the salvation of the New Testament believers proves the modern philosophy and its statistics as false or “another gospel,” Gal. 1:6-7. When the Lord by His grace and power changes a person, he is delivered “from this present evil world,” Gal. 1:4. The true believer is not only given a new heart and mind in regeneration, but he no longer lives, dresses, and acts like the world. He who is given a new heart

and will by God overcome the world because “greater is he” than is in him than “he that is in the world,” I Jn. 4:4.

Therefore, as we find the New Testament opening with the message of John, one of the things that is essential in understanding the purpose of baptism is repentance. Matthew chapter three declares that John preached “repent ... for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” The Scriptures further states that those who went to John “were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins,” Mt. 3:6. And, as we stated before, “fruits meet for repentance” (Mt. 3:8) were required. Charles Spurgeon rightly said, “Baptism, or the washing of the body in water, most fitly accompanied the cry, ‘Repent ye.’ The ‘*Confessing their sins*’ which with baptism in Jordan gave it its meaning. Apart from the acknowledgment of guilt, it would have been a mere bathing of the person without spiritual significance; but the confession which went with it made it an instructive sign.” *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 30.

Our time is up for today, but we see that in baptism there is to be a clear sign of repentance with the confession of the repenting sinner’s sins. Without this, there is no baptism. It is, as Spurgeon said, “a mere bathing of the person without spiritual significance.”