

1 Answering Questions About Baptism

[Acts 8:26-39]

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✦ “Why so many Christians today reject or resist water baptism as the initial testimony of their own faith in Christ is hard to explain. Have they been taught to accept some ‘spiritual baptism’ as an adequate substitute for the New Testament practice? Are they captives of some emotional reaction to a meaningless baptism in their past? Those who refuse to follow the New Testament practice will have to answer these questions.”

Bruce Shelley, professor of church history at Denver Seminary and the author of Church History in Plain Language

3 1. What is baptism?

✦ The Greek word for baptism means to “ dip, plunge, or immerse.”

✦ Boyd’s Bible dictionary says Baptism is, “The sacrament, ordinance, or rite commanded by Christ, Matt. 28:19, in which water is used to initiate the recipient into the Christian Church.”

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✦ Baptism is one of two ordinances of the N. T. Church, communion [the Lord’s supper] being the other. Both were instituted by the founder and head of the N.T. Church, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself [Matt. 28:19-20, Matt. 26:26-29].

5 2. What is the significance of baptism?

✦ Essentially, baptism is an outward symbol of one’s identification with Christ’s death, burial and resurrection.

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✦ Romans 6:3-5: “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were *baptized into his death*? We were therefore *buried with him through baptism into death* in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. *If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.*”

7 **3. Does baptism have anything to do with salvation?**

✦ **Baptism does not have anything to do with regeneration [being born again] in the sense that the rite itself saves anybody! Regeneration is the supernatural transformation of the believer through the work of the Holy Spirit and baptism is the outward acknowledgment of what has happened inwardly.”**

Pastor Bruce Roeder

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✦ **Many Christians are confused by the teachings of certain groups which insist that baptism is actually instrumental in salvation.**

9 **“The sacramentalist view” of baptism:**

✦ **Historian, Bruce Shelley says these things about the sacramentalist view:**

- *“These Christians believe that, when He was on earth, Jesus founded a special institution to be the channel of His saving grace. This institution is the church, and to the church Jesus committed special ceremonies called ‘sacraments’ to convey his grace to men and women. The sacraments are outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace which they actually convey.”*

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- *“Sacramentalists then believe that baptism when applied to a Christian convert or to an infant actually accomplishes what the baptismal waters symbolize. Thanks to the presence of the holy Spirit in the church, the sacrament of baptism cleanses the soul and communicates new life to the recipient. The water not only symbolizes grace from God, it actually confers it on those who receive it worthily.”*

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- *“‘Worthily’ is an important word in this description because the sacramentalist view does not require that personal faith be present in the convert or the child. Receiving baptism ‘worthily’ simply means that the recipient of baptism, usually an infant, does not obstruct the grace of God in any way. Faith is present, but only in the sense that the church holds the truths of God revealed in Jesus Christ.”*

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- *“This is the doctrine held by most Roman Catholics and, with slight modification, most Lutherans and Episcopalians. The primary teacher*

of this sacramentalist view was Augustine, the influential bishop of the early fifth century, who stressed that all humanity participated in Adam's original sin."

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- ***"As a result every child born into the world not only inherits a tendency to sin but also shares in the guilt of Adam's disobedience. Baptism is the sacrament given by Christ to negate that guilt and introduce the infant or the adult convert into the saving life of God. By baptism the child or the convert is not fully saved but is 'born again' to begin his or her lifelong quest of full salvation."***

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- ◆ **Shelley notes that the great protestant reformer, Martin Luther, "changed the traditional doctrine very little."**

15

◆ **Shelley says:**

- ***"In his highly significant book The Babylonian Captivity of the Church Luther admitted that the normal pattern of baptism in the New Testament was believer's baptism. He had no desire, however, to be identified with the radical reformers called Anabaptists, who practiced believers' baptism. His problem, then, was how to relate his central doctrine of justification by faith alone to the traditional doctrine of baptism. ... He chose to claim that either the adult sponsoring the infant in baptism had the necessary faith or else God gave the infant faith during the baptismal act. ..."***

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Our Conclusion about this view:

- ◆ **It simply does not conform to the pattern revealed in the early church contained in the book of Acts!**

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- ◆ **To suggest that: 1) personal faith in Jesus Christ and His work of atonement on the cross is not a requirement for salvation; or**
- ◆ **2) that the proxy faith of an infant's parents is sufficient to gain salvation, seems to us to be without solid Scriptural foundation and purely arbitrary.**
- ◆ **We would consider this a dangerous ground for the assurance of one's personal salvation.**

18

The linking of saving faith with the obedience of baptism:

- ◆ **There are some who argue that faith in Jesus Christ alone is not sufficient to make us Christians, that we must also obey the Lord in baptism, thus making baptism a work of righteousness for salvation.**

19 ☐

- ◆ The effect of this teaching for some Christians may be confusion and a hesitation to be baptized, or to recognize the need to do so, ...insisting they do not need to be baptized because salvation is by grace through faith alone and not by any works, including baptism.
- ◆ Shelley comments: *“When a zealous believer insists, however, that obedience in baptism is a prerequisite or a condition of salvation, he is in danger of diluting the gospel of God’s grace with human effort.”*

20 ☐ **Shelley does an excellent job in developing this line of reasoning:**

- ◆ ***“To put the point directly, a believer is baptized not to make himself a Christian; he is baptized because that is what a believer does.”***

21 ☐

- ◆ “The point rests on the difference between root and fruit. Zealous believers argue, it seems to me, that obedience in baptism is one of the roots of the Christian life. If there is no obedience in baptism, along with repentance of sin, confession of Christ as Savior and trust in God’s mercy, then there is no salvation. I am arguing that the New Testament teaches Christian obedience, including baptism, but this obedience is the fruit of the new life in Christ, not its root.”

22 ☐ **4. Who are the proper subjects of baptism? [i.e. Who should be baptized?]**

- ◆ What about infant baptism?
- ◆ It seems far fetched and arbitrary to us to assume, contrary to common sense and without any biblical support, that infants can receive salvation by proxy, based upon the faith of their parents, or that God somehow gives faith to infants at the moment they are baptized, even though they have absolutely no understanding of what is happening to them..

23 ☐

- ◆ Most importantly, there is absolutely no definitive, specific case of infant baptism in the New testament. It seems unwarranted to us to assume that some infants must have been baptized in the household baptisms in the book of Acts, and to build an entire system of teaching and practice upon a mere assumption without even one actual

example as a precedent!

24 ☐ **What about infants who die without being baptized?**

- ✦ In II Samuel 12:23, after the infant died which was born as a result of David's adultery with Bathsheba, David said: "... *I will go to him, but he will not return to me.*"
- ✦ Numbers 14:29 - Only those who were twenty years old or more were condemned to die in the wilderness after Israel's failure at Kadesh Barnea!

25 ☐

- ✦ We can take comfort in the knowledge that God is both merciful and just. We can also hold on to Abraham's words [Gen. 8:25] "... *Will not the judge of all the earth do right?*"
- ✦ We would suggest that grieving parents, like David, should seek comfort by trusting in the goodness and mercy of our sovereign Lord instead of some religious act performed by a religious official.

26 ☐ **Our Conclusion:**

- ✦ According to the New Testament teaching and the historical record of the early church in the book of Acts, we must conclude that the only true candidates for baptism are those individuals who have heard, understood, and believed the Gospel.

27 ☐ **5. Why should I be baptized?**

- ✦ To follow the example of Jesus Himself
- ✦ To obey Christ's command
- ✦ To publicly acknowledge my personal faith in Jesus Christ
- ✦ To express my love for Christ and His Word
- ✦ *"To make it public and responsible."* [Bruce Shelley]

28 ☐ **6. Why should I be baptized by immersion?**

- ✦ "Baptize" means to dip, plunge, or immerse.
- ✦ The wording of Matt. 3:16, describing the baptism of Jesus, seems to suggest immersion: "*As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.*"

29 ☐

- ✦ Acts 8:38 & 39 have the same wording regarding the baptism

of the Ethiopian eunuch: they “went down into the water” and “came up out of the water.”

30 **Early baptisms required “much water:**

- ✦ We are told that John baptized in a certain place “*because there was much water there.*” [Jn. 3:23]
- ✦ I have visited Israel and seen large baptismal pools [there is one atop the Massada] used for baptisms by immersion by the Jews for O. T. proselyte baptisms. Therefore, baptism by immersion would not have been a novel idea for the early Jewish Christians.

31 **Our conclusion:**

- ✦ Even though other churches practice different methods of baptism which were introduced after Scripture was written, we feel it is in the best interest of the individual as well as the church to uphold the straightforward teaching and example of Scripture.

32 **7. What about re-baptism? Is it necessary?**

- ✦ It would seem that infant baptism is not a valid form of baptism and that such individuals should be re-baptized as believers.

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- ✦ If you were sprinkled and not immersed, but you believe you were actually saved at the time, we would say the decision to be re-baptized should be based on your own discernment before the Lord.
- ✦ If you were previously baptized, but you know you were not truly saved at that time but have been saved since, we recommend that you be re-baptized as a born again believer.

34 **8. When should I be baptized?**

- ✦ **Answer: As soon after conversion as possible.**
- ✦ **The Bible indicates that baptism is one of the first steps a new believer takes.**

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- ✦ “*As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and*

the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water, Why shouldn't I be baptized?' And he ordered the chariot to stop. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down to the water and Philip baptized him."

[Acts 8:36-38]

36 **9. How can I go about being baptized?**

◆It's actually very simple. The church regularly offers informational classes about baptism, or one-on-one appointments can be scheduled by calling the church office for those interested in being baptized. This enables you to learn more about baptism before your own baptism takes place.

37 **10. What happens at a baptismal service?**

◆Prior to the baptism:

◆The baptismal service itself:

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◆A public baptismal service is one of the very best ways to give unsaved loved ones an opportunity to hear your testimony and to hear the Gospel itself. It is a powerful testimony of the Gospel!