

Water Baptism

Scripturally Established

by Evangelist Dea Warford

It's interesting what divergent paths churches have taken relative to the doctrine of water baptism, yet I don't know if I have ever heard a sermon on the subject. I thought it might do good to put something in print that lays out what the Bible really teaches on the matter.

Some erroneously think your salvation is dependent upon a perfect application of water baptism, of course, in "their" church's interpretation of the scriptures. Others feel it isn't that important at all, but just kind of a "nice" Christian thing to do. I believe the truth is somewhere between these two extremes. Let me first say, every Christian should be baptized in water. I would say must, but to say someone "must" be baptized in water to be saved, would make that a work necessary for salvation. And, the Bible makes it very clear that "by grace are you saved through faith . . . and not of works" (Eph. 2:8, 9).

Jesus, our Lord, was baptized in water. (That should tell us something. If ever there was a Christian who wouldn't need to go through any religious formality, it was Him!). Yet He did so, explaining to John the Baptist why, "thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). Baptism is necessary, if we want to, like Christ, fulfill all righteousness. Some seem to want to only fulfill the absolute minimal requirements to squeeze into heaven. Such might thus neglect water baptism. But, I would ask them, "what other "righteous" requirements of Christianity are you neglecting?". God warned us, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation" (Heb. 2:3). Foolish indeed is the person who puts off or sloughs off baptism.

There are seven things about water baptism that we can easily establish scripturally . . .

1. Baptism should occur after one accepts Christ, not before, or as a small child: Jesus was about 30 when he was baptized. Peter told the Jews to "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:39). He said "repent" first, then be baptized, not visa versa. You have to be at last a number of years old to make a mature decision to repent of sins. There are no examples in scripture of young children being baptized. If we understand the symbolism of this event, we can clearly see why infants should not be baptized.

2. Baptism symbolizes a death, burial and resurrection: Infancy is a celebration of life. We don't bury a person when they are born. We bury a person when they are dead.

Romans 6:3-5a says, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection".

When we submit to the preacher and allow him to slip us into the water, that is "like" death. When we are under the water, that is symbolic of the "old sinful nature" and the sins of our past being buried once and for all. When we are pulled up out of the water, that pictures us "resurrected" from

sin and eternal death to a new life of victory through Christ. I never hear anybody testifying, "immediately after I was baptized, I had new power over sin". But, I have heard many testify of that happening after receiving Christ. Being born again transforms us (II Cor. 5:17). Baptism celebrates and symbolizes that fact. The cart doesn't come before the horse though.

3. Baptism does not save us: Some believe in what is called "baptismal regeneration" - the belief that the moment you are baptized you are saved. There is one difficult text which some try to use to prove water baptism saves us. It is in 1 Peter 3:21: "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.". Peter had just said in verse 20, "eight souls were saved by water" (referring to Noah' family during the flood). The key word to understand v. 21 is the word "figure". We are talking about a type or symbolization here. Water is the figure. Did the water actually save Noah' family? Of course not – it was the boat that saved them. The boat represented God's grace. We too are saved by a boat (God's grace). Heb. 11:7 says Noah "prepared an ark to the saving of His house". Hallelujah! Noah, as a type of Christ, used an instrument of wood to save His family. Christ used an instrument of wood (the cross) to save us. Baptism is not "the putting away of the filth of the flesh", that is like taking a bath and removing dirt, nor is it exactly like the flood of water that destroyed sinners in the deluge.

Rather, it is "the answer of a good conscience toward God". You were saved, and received a clean conscience. You celebrated it by submitting to water baptism. Thus, water baptism "figures" getting on the boat of God's grace kneeling at the cross, and letting the water "destroy" the sinner that we used to be!

If you don't accept my interpretation of this scripture, "rightly dividing the scriptures" (11 Tim. 2:15), it still couldn't mean we are saved by being baptized in water, because of the wealth of other scriptures which speak the opposite. The best example is the thief on the cross.

The thief on the cross didn't get saved until he was actually on the cross. Apparently for awhile he joined the other thief in taunting Jesus. Mark 15:32 says "they that were crucified with him reviled him". But after a period of time, perhaps seeing how graciously Jesus accepted his punishment, the one thief began to believe in Christ, saw his error, and at last asked Jesus to "remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." (Luke 23:42) To this prayer, Jesus replied, "I'm sorry, but you haven't been baptized". No, thank God! He said, "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." (v. 43) . There was no opportunity to baptize that thief and he is in heaven today. Hallelujah! If one person made it into heaven without being baptized, then others can too! Baptism is not some quick eternal fix. It's not the door to heaven. Jesus is the door to heaven. (John 14:6, 10:9).

Rev. 1:5 says Jesus "loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." Who would dare say "Jesus' blood didn't do a good enough job, we need to wash you some more with the waters of baptism?" No me! Would you? Don't "water down" the precious blood of the lamb!

4. Baptism should be by full immersion, not sprinkling: There is not one example in the Bible of anybody being sprinkled with water to be baptized. In fact, the word "baptize" in the English language comes from the Greek word "baptizo" which clearly means "to be fully immersed or covered with water". Baptizo was used to describe a sunken ship or an article of clothing to be dyed. When someone dies do we sprinkle them with dirt? No, we totally cover cadavers with 6 foot of dirt. In Acts 8:36, "they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" If we were baptized by sprinkling, he wouldn't have had to wait for

a body of water, but could have simply poured some from their water jugs. Then, vv. 38, 39 continues, "and they went down both INTO the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." Again, why get your clothes wet, if all you are doing is sprinkling. It doesn't make sense.

John the Baptist didn't sprinkle people. "They were baptized by him in the Jordan" (Matt. 3:16). It says "in the Jordan" not "sprinkled with the Jordan". Furthermore, "Jesus came up OUT of the water" after His baptism (Matt. 3:16). The "coup de grace" of this matter is John 3:23, "John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there" (John 3:23). If all John did was sprinkle, he certainly wouldn't have needed to bother to go where there was "much water", would he?

Now, I don't believe sprinkling an infant is evil. But, plain and simple, it is not baptism. If you were sprinkled as an infant, and have not yet been baptized by immersion, I strongly recommend you do so at your earliest convenience.

5. Baptism is an important point of acknowledging the authority of Christ in your life: In Matt. 28:18-20, Jesus said, "All power (authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world". By being baptized, we show Jesus' is the authority in our life. Submission to baptism is submission to the authority of the scriptures too. "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" surely includes baptism! If you have not been baptized, you need to ask yourself, "what rebellion, what stubbornness, what disobedience is in my life that I have not been willing to submit myself to this important scriptural word?"

"Repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:39) is a command still valid today. If you've repented, get baptized! Soon! "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16) is not saying that believing is half your salvation and baptism is the other half, but that saved people do get baptized, and that it is expected, by Jesus, that every saved person will get baptized! It's God's plan for good reason ...

6. Baptism is a public confession of your faith: Jesus said, "whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before the Father" (Matt. 10:32). Baptism is one very real way we say to the world, "I confess Jesus as my Lord and savior". Luke 9:26 says, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come". If a person is too proud to get wet, to get his hair messed up, and to openly admit to family and friends that he really has indeed given his life to Christ, has really done so? If you can't say, "I am proud to be a follower of Christ" inside a church service by being baptized, you surely won't say "I am proud to be a follower of Christ" outside in the world. To have such shame of being a Christian is to endanger your very soul!

Water baptism is a wonderful plan of God to help you get other family members and friends saved. It's a wonderful occasion to invite them to come to church by explaining that there is something you are doing that is very important to you. When they see you standing up there, boldly sharing your faith in Christ; When they hear the gospel preached by your pastor; When the altar call for salvation is given: all this becomes a very real opportunity to help others find Christ. Don't question the wisdom of God in this lovely event!

7. Baptism is "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit": During the

outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the early part of the 20th century, there was a split among Pentecostals concerning how people should be baptized. Most believed they should baptize as Jesus commanded "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost". But, others believed such scriptures as Acts 19:5 ("they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus") proves that we should baptize only in Jesus' name. They argue that "Son" is a title, not a name. Most "Apostolic" churches baptize this way. The largest denomination that baptizes in "Jesus name" is "The United Pentecostal Church".

You and I may not believe baptism is necessary for salvation, but, "Jesus only" people do. In fact, they believe one's salvation is fully dependant upon being baptized with this "correct formula".

When I pastored a church in Sheridan Wyoming, a United Pentecostal pastor re-baptized a woman from my church in the "correct way". Even if baptism in "Jesus name" were the correct way, consider these points. Do you think there is any confusion in the Father's mind when we baptize in the name of the "Son" that we mean Jesus? How ridiculous!

Does Christianity boil down to secret formulas and exacting rituals? Where is the grace in this? Isn't this just a modern version of ancient Gnosticism?

Does a judgment day with Jesus saying, "you were baptized with the wrong formula, go to Hell!" sound like the loving Jesus in the New Testament?

Wouldn't a salvation dependant on the right formula be a salvation by works? (See Romans & Galations) Some pastors have chosen to give both sides of the scriptural evidence the benefit of the doubt by baptizing in the following way: "I now baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. And, this I do in Jesus name". (Some may think this is compromising, but it does cover both bases, doesn't it? Just food for thought and an interesting final note). Been baptized? Walk in it's symbolism. Not yet baptized? Do it! (Do feel free to make copies of this article and give to your pastor or friends and family)