

Exactly Why Were You Baptized?

The question asked in this tract is an important question. That this is indeed an important question is seen when one reads Acts 19. Regardless of your answer, it will have an impact on where you will spend eternity after this life.

Acts 19 is the account of the Apostle Paul encountering some "disciples" from Ephesus - "about twelve" according to verse 7. After asking them some initial questions, Paul asked them in verse 3 this question: "Into what then were you baptized?" They replied, "Into John's baptism." That their baptism was of no effect or, if you will, the "wrong" baptism under the new covenant, is seen by Paul's response that "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." It wasn't wrong that they had received "John's baptism" when they did, but there was now another, new baptism that replaced "John's." Through this "new" baptism one would "receive the Holy Spirit," i.e., the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is the baptism that was preached by Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Many people have been baptized. But, like the case just cited, their baptism has no spiritual benefit. They are not brought any closer to being "right with God" than is a person who has never been baptized at all. This is tragic because some are relying on the baptism they received to be recognized by God as one that is valid. Perhaps you are someone who has been baptized but are not sure if your baptism is one that will be accepted in God's sight. This is why this tract has been written - to help you understand what baptism the Bible says is an effective, valid baptism.

Usually people who have been baptized have been baptized for one of two reasons. Let's look at both of them only briefly.

Infant Baptism

Some people were baptized when they were a baby, in some cases only a few days old. Infant baptism is most often practiced in the Roman Catholic Church because of their belief that babies are born with "original sin" but there are other religious groups who also practice this ritual - especially the Presbyterian church. We must ask ourselves what is the purpose of baptizing a baby? To be honest many people have no idea; they merely either have seen it done or have been told by someone that they ought to have their baby baptized. Others just think this religious ritual looks "cute." None of these reasons is a good reason for baptizing anyone, a baby or otherwise. The only good reason to baptize anyone is to do it in the way and for the purpose articulated in the Scriptures. This is true for anything we do in the realm of religion. We must be guided by what the Bible teaches on any Biblical subject.

Infant baptism is usually administered by the mode of sprinkling water on the baby. But that is a sprinkling and not a baptism. Biblical baptism is always by immersion - placing the entire body of the person being baptized under water. That is the way the Bible defines a Biblical, scriptural baptism.

The word baptize is a transliteration of the Greek word (the language in which the New Testament was written) *baptizo*. Those who are scholars in the Greek language, lexicographers, have demonstrated in their studies that this Greek word

can only mean immersion. But you do not have to be a Greek scholar to be convinced of this. John 3:23 says that "Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there." It does not take "much" water to sprinkle.

There is a different Greek word for sprinkling - *rhantizo*. Sometimes pictures of Jesus being "baptized" by John the Baptizer in the Jordan River show John pouring water on Jesus' head. But if that were the way that it happened, which it wasn't, the Greek word for that would be *epicheo*. So whether water is sprinkled or poured on an infant, the infant has not been Biblically baptized.

Should someone ask, "What difference does it make - being immersed in water or having water sprinkled or poured on an infant?" - we would ask when a loved one dies, "What difference does it make how the coffin is handled once it gets to the cemetery - whether it is buried in the ground or has dirt sprinkled or poured on it while above ground?"

But even if an infant has been immersed, that immersion is not a Biblical baptism because there are two requirements for a person to meet before he is immersed. These two requirements are clearly identified in Acts 2:38. "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..." One requirement is that the person must repent of his sins. What sins has an infant committed of which he must repent? Another requirement is that the person must believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. What infant is able to believe this? Since an infant cannot meet the requirements for a Biblical baptism, whether he is immersed or whether water is sprinkled or poured on him, he has not been baptized in the only way that is recognized by God.

Of course, there is one more important thing to notice in Acts 2:38. A Biblical baptism is for the purpose of receiving the forgiveness of sins. Again, what sins has an infant committed for which he must receive God's forgiveness? There are those who say that babies are "born in sin" but this is not true. Babies are not born sinners; they are born without sin. They have not transgressed any part of God's Word.

So if you, as an infant, were subjected to a religious ritual called baptism, you really have never received a Biblical baptism and therefore you need to be baptized as a believing, repentant, adult.

Adult Baptism

It is not unusual to hear in various circles of religion that they baptize adults. Adults, of course, unlike babies, can believe and can repent of sins. It is good when they do this. But in many religious groups what is required for salvation is only a confession of one's belief in Christ. Sometimes it is understood that repentance accompanies the person's belief. According to these religious groups this results in salvation; this "makes" a person a Christian. Then, as the first act of obedience, the church encourages the new "Christian" to be baptized, following the example of Christ, to become part of the local church.

But is this what the Bible teaches? Does the Bible teach that a person is a Christian before he is baptized? Does the Bible teach that a person should be baptized for the purpose of following the example of Jesus? Does the Bible teach that a person is baptized to join a local church? Actually, to the surprise of many, the Bible teaches none of these things.

Jesus said in Mark 16:16 that when a person "believes and is baptized" he is then "saved." Salvation always follows obeying the command to

be baptized. Belief alone, without obedience to the command to be baptized, is not sufficient for salvation. Again, the reason a person is baptized at the time he repents of his sins and believes that Jesus is the Christ, is in order to receive the "remission of sins," i.e., to receive salvation, to be saved.

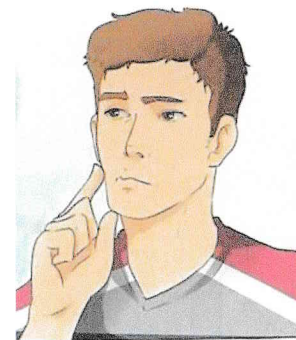
Some religious groups teach that baptism is a "ritual" or an "act" that must be done in order to join the church - to be a church member. But neither can people "join" the church nor can a "church" Biblically establish any requirements for membership in a local church. Only God can do that for the church is His. Acts 2:47 is very clear on this point: "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." The Lord is the one who "adds" people to His church and He "adds" only those who are "saved." Those who are "saved" are those who have been "baptized for the remission of sins." Anyone who has been baptized to become a member of a local church has been baptized for the wrong reason.

So exactly why were you baptized? If you were baptized for the reason stated in the Bible you have been baptized for the right reason. But if you were "baptized" as an infant who was without sin or if you were "baptized" as an adult who was told that this is the first act of obedience following salvation or this is what you had to do to become a member of the local church, you are in a situation similar to those Ephesian "disciples" mentioned at the beginning of this tract. You need to do what the New Testament teaches: be baptized for the remission of sins. Then the Lord will add you to His church. Hopefully, you will do that today.

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