

Foundations Course

7. BELIEVERS' / WATER BAPTISM

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you’.”
Matthew 28:18-20a

Baptism is one of the two sacraments of the Protestant church. The other is Holy Communion.

A sacrament is defined by Augustine as “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace”.

The elements in a sacrament (water, in the case of baptism) do nothing of themselves. Baptism does not bring anyone into salvation. The prerequisites for Christian baptism are:

- repentance
- faith towards God

There are two Greek words in the New Testament which are translated “baptize”:

‘bapto’ means to dip or immerse;

‘baptizo’ also means to immerse, but has a more intense meaning.

A good illustration comes from an ancient Greek recipe for making pickles where both words are used.

“Of all the texts that might be cited from antiquity the one that gives greatest clarity to this issue is a text from a Greek poet and physician, Nicander, who lived about 200 BC. In a recipe for making pickles he used both words. Nicander said that the vegetable should first be dipped (bapto) in boiling water and then baptized (baptizo) in the vinegar solution. Both had to do with immersing the vegetable in the solution. But the first was temporary, while the other, the operation of baptizing the vegetable, produced a permanent change. We could say that the baptizing had identified the vegetable with the brine.”

Foundations of the Christian Faith – J.M. Boice

Old Testament

During Old Testament times various kinds of ritual washings (ablutions) were carried out and converts to Judaism (proselytes) also underwent a kind of baptism.

New Testament

The forerunner to Christian baptism as we know it was John's baptism. This was a baptism signifying repentance, which was to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah. John pointed them ahead to a greater one who was to come, who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire. *Matthew 3:1-11*

The people baptized by John displayed:

- a public identification with his message
- a public commitment to live by God's standards of righteousness
- a public expression of eagerness to welcome the Messiah.

Jesus submitted himself to John's baptism, although John tried to deter him.

Jesus was baptized to:

- identify with John's call to righteousness
- identify with sinful man *Hebrews 2:14*
- fulfil all righteousness *Matthew 3:13-17*

Jesus came to be our High Priest and sacrificial lamb. *Hebrews 4:14; John 1:36*

The High Priest in the Old Testament was initiated into office by washing and anointing. Jesus was initiated by baptism and anointing of the Holy Spirit.

The spotless sacrificial lamb was washed before being placed on the altar as an offering. Jesus was spotless (sinless) and washed (baptized) before becoming a sacrifice, once, for all.

Baptism for the believer:

- is commanded by Jesus *Mark 16:16; Matthew 28:18-20*
- is an expression of obedience *John 14:15*
- signifies cleansing from sin, through the blood of Jesus *1 John 1:7*
- signifies the sealing of a new covenant with God *Colossians 2:11-13*
- is identification with Jesus in his death, burial and resurrection

"We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 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." Romans 6:2b-4

J.M. Boice in 'Foundations of the Christian Faith' explains how we are baptized into Christ's death:

"We are baptized into Christ's death in two ways:

First, when Jesus died on the cross God regarded us as having died with him as far as our sin is concerned....

Second, there is a sense in which our union with Christ in his death refers to our life here and now. Paul says that believers are to count themselves as dead to sin but alive to God through Jesus (Romans 6:11). Through our identification with Christ in his death the power of sin over us is broken and we are set free to serve God.

We are also identified with Christ in his resurrection. Paul says, 'For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.' (Romans 6:5)That identification means two things – first, our future resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:22). It also means newness of life now (the main point of Romans 6)."

In the early church people were baptized:

- the same day that they heard the message, repented and believed Acts 2:37-41; 8:36-39; 10:44-48; Acts 16:32-34
- after instruction Acts 19:1-7
- within a few days Acts 9:18

Summary

We should be baptized after we:

- repent (turn away from sin) Acts 2:38
- believe (trust in Christ's death and resurrection for our salvation) Mark 16:16

We are not saved by baptism, but by grace, through faith. Ephesians 2:8-9

We are baptized because we are commanded to do so.

"We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands."

1 John 2:3

APPENDIX

The Empty Tomb

Matthew 27:57-60; 28:11-15; Mark 15:42-45; Luke 23:50-53; John 19:38-41

Jesus' body was actually placed in Joseph's tomb in a garden after being wrapped in spices. When his friends came to the tomb on the first day of the week, it was empty. The disciples were as surprised as anyone. Such would not be the case if any of them had stolen the body, as the soldiers were bribed to say. Only the resurrection explains the empty tomb.

The Roman Seal

Matthew 27:62-66

The tomb was sealed with the official Roman seal, thus making the body of Jesus Roman property. For anyone to touch or attempt to break the seal of Rome and to steal the body of Jesus was to come under the danger of death. None dare tamper with the seal of Rome. The seal was a very important sign of ownership in all nations of antiquity. It was the Angel of the Lord who broke the seal on the tomb and rolled the stone away, not some fearful disciples.

The Rolled-away Stone

Matthew 28:2

The tomb was closed by a stone door. Even the women, in their innocence, when they went to wrap the body in more spices, wondered who would roll away the stone. However, when they arrived at the garden tomb, the stone had already been rolled away. The stone was rolled away, not to let the risen Lord out, but to let the disciples in. The rolled away stone was another resurrection evidence.

The Missing Body

Numbers 19:11-22; Acts 2:24-32

As far as the body of Jesus was concerned, there are several things worthy of consideration. The disciples were Jews and very much bound to the Laws of God, moral, civil and ceremonial. One of the ceremonial laws concerned the touching of dead bodies or bones. Any who did so were ceremonially defiled. The disciples would have had to fulfil the ceremonial laws for handling the dead body of Jesus.

But far greater than this was the disappearance of the body of Jesus. The disciples were fearful of all the events relative to the crucifixion. How could they muster up enough courage to break the sealed tomb, overpower the Temple Guard, and then steal the mangled body of Jesus? What would they do with the body if they did steal it but bury it in some other place? The disciples themselves were amazed at the disappearance of the body of Jesus. They themselves did not understand nor yet believe His prophesied resurrection. His body was not stolen by the disciples but raised by God from the dead and neither friends nor foes could produce it. The body of Jesus was preserved incorruptible by the power of God. All other human bodies are corrupted in death.

The Transformed Disciples

Added to all the previous evidences we have the amazing transformation of the fearful disciples to bold and courageous men. The Book of Acts reveals that the resurrection of Jesus was the foundation and centre of every sermon preached in Acts. His death and His resurrection were like two sides of the one coin and became the foundation of the Gospel.

The Lord's Day

Acts 2:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10; Matthew 28:1-2

Another evidence of the resurrection is the Lord's Day, celebrated since the early Church as the day of the resurrection. No Jew would change the Sabbath Day and make the first day of the week the day of special worship. It was the resurrection of Christ that changed the calendar for the whole world.

