



INVALID BAPTISMS

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Greetings and welcome. It's good to be with you today. I hope you've had a good week and I pray you have an even better week ahead. There's no better way to start a new week than by studying and learning from the Word of God. A headline recently appeared around the nation and the world that has caused a stir among thousands of people and caused them to question their spiritual state. It involved a Roman Catholic priest in Arizona who learned that he had been performing baptisms wrongly for twenty years. A departure from church teaching regarding baptism has caused the Catholic church to invalidate thousands of baptisms performed during that time. That means that to be in good standing with the Catholic church, these thousands of people need to have the rite re-administered. And it could have other impacts. Church leaders expressed concern that since these baptisms have been invalidated, it could make other church rites invalid as well. We'll take in more detail about that in our lesson today, but it begs the question: Can a person be baptized, and that baptism not be accepted by God?

Baptism is a bible command, and it should be taken seriously by not only the church but by every person who submits to baptism. It is not a trivial formality; it is a command of Christ and a fundamental step of faith putting one into the kingdom. Let's let the bible speak about this matter! We do read of a case in the book of Acts where some people who had been baptized had to be immersed again. Why? Well, let's begin by reading the passage found in Acts 19:1-5. The record says: *"And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism." Then Paul said, "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." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."*

Now, here were some religious people who had been baptized believing they were obeying the Lord. The person who taught them, however, was misinformed himself and was administering baptism on the wrong basis. He was baptizing people with John's baptism which was a baptism that anticipated the

coming of the Christ. There was nothing wrong with that during the time John was preaching and his disciples were baptizing people because at that time, the kingdom of Christ has not yet come. In the case of these people in Ephesus, however, they had been baptized with John's baptism AFTER Christ had come and given the Great Commission and established His kingdom rule. John's commission had expired, and Jesus had now commanded men and women to be baptized in HIS name. These people had been baptized with a baptism that belonged to another dispensation and therefore, even though they thought they were doing what was right, they were taught in error and their baptism was not correct. If that could happen to them, could it have happened to you or to me? Today, we'll look to the scriptures and learn about "Invalid Baptisms", after a song from the congregation.

A recent article appearing at CBS News dot com was headlined "A Priest Used One Wrong Word During Baptisms. The Church Now Says Thousands Were Invalid." The article goes on to say that the priest resigned from his position after an investigation found that he had been incorrectly performing baptisms for 20-years. The article says that "As he poured the holy water during the baptisms he performed, the Rev. Andres Arango would say, 'We baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'" But according to church doctrine, he should have stated "I baptize" instead of "we baptize." Changing this one pronoun ended up nullifying all the baptisms he performed using that language. The Bishop of the Diocese of Phoenix, Bishop Thomas Olmsted, sent a message to parishioners telling them that since it is not the community that baptizes a person but rather Christ who presides at the sacraments, that all of those who were baptized by the priest using the pronoun "we" would need to be baptized again. The priest and the Catholic church say that the priest's intentions were good and after apologizing to all who were affected, they pledged to do whatever is necessary to make the situation right.

I'm sure this news has troubled many of the people it directly impacts and has likely raised questions in the minds of many more. Our concern should be, what does the bible teach? Is our baptism valid according to the teaching of the scriptures? Baptism, itself, is a very important thing. Any command of Christ is important, and we should take it seriously. We should want to be absolutely sure that we are living in obedience to that command and the command of baptism is no different. Many people downplay baptism today and don't give it the priority that the bible places upon it.

Let's quickly note some of the passages pertaining to baptism and what baptism its intended result. Jesus said that we make disciples by baptizing those we teach about Christ and that this step comes before we teach them anything else about following Jesus. He said in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..."

Mark records the Lord's commission in Mark 16:15-16 saying, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

Acts 2 is the first example of this commission being carried out when Peter preached the first sermon after the resurrection and ascension of Christ. When Peter convinced the Jews on the Day of Pentecost that Jesus was indeed the Christ, they wanted to know what to do in order to be forgiven of their sins. Peter responded in verse 38: "...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."

Paul later said that we are baptized INTO Christ and in so doing, we “put on Christ”, according to Galatians 3:27.

And Peter taught in 1 Peter 3:21 that just as the waters of the flood separated Noah and his family from the world of sin they left behind, so, baptism marks the end of the rule and ruin of sin in one’s life and a new life in Christ. It is the appeal for a clean conscience before God. He says, "There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,"

So, baptism is an essential step for the person who desires to be forgiven of their sins, enter Christ, have a new life in Him, and thus enter into the church. So, does it really matter when, why, and how we’re baptized? Are there baptisms that are invalid in the eyes of God? Are there cases where a person needs to be re-baptized if we might use that expression?

In the case of the article we cited, these baptisms were invalidated by the Catholic church because of the wrong pronoun spoken by the person performing the baptism. Does the bible make that distinction when it talks about baptism? The truth is the bible nowhere gives an express formula that must be verbally repeated when a person is baptized. We have no examples in the New Testament of what any person said when they baptized another person. The emphasis in the scriptures is not upon what the person baptizing SAYS but rather what the person being baptized understands is taking place.

Now, some point to the statements in Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:38 as examples of formulaic statements that should be made at the time of baptism. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus said to baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:38, Peter told them to be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ.” Some allege a contradiction here and argue that one phrase should be spoken at baptism instead of another. Some baptize in the name of the triune God while others fiercely argue that one should only be baptized in the name of Jesus. Actually, there’s no contradiction at all and both statements are true at the same time. In the Greek Text, two different words are used in these two passages. In Matthew 28, Jesus used the word “eis” which is translated “in”. The Greek preposition ‘eis’ here means INTO or IN THE DIRECTION OF. Jesus is saying that we are to be baptized INTO a relationship with the three of the godhead. In Acts 2:38 though, Peter uses the word “epi” which means UPON. Be baptized UPON the name of Jesus Christ. We are baptized calling upon His name to save. They are two different statements that both true and do not contradict. Neither passage is referring to words spoken by the person doing the baptizing but rather the action that is taking place. The fact is, the preacher can say, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” and that baptism still be invalid. Or one can say, “I baptize you by the authority of Jesus Christ” and that baptism not be done by Christ’s authority. The words are not what is important. It is what is being done and what is in the mind and heart of the person being baptized.

The great irony in this situation is this: the bible never even remotely addresses the use of any personal pronoun that we should or should not use when we baptize someone, but it does specifically address other things about the baptisms referred to in the article and millions of other baptisms besides. Think about this: the baptisms in question in Arizona were all administered by sprinkling or pouring water over a person’s head instead of immersion. Many of those baptisms were performed on babies and small children. And those baptisms were performed as a sacrament – a rite by which some grace was automatically imparted through the rite itself as opposed to a promise being received by faith. The bible nowhere mentions using particular pronouns in baptism, but it does very much address the right mode of baptism, the right candidate for baptism, and the right motive or reason for baptism.

Let's first consider what the bible teaches about the MODE of baptism. The bible does not teach that sprinkling or pouring water over a person's head constitutes baptism. Such is a tradition of man and not of Christ. The word "baptize" itself refers to an immersion in water. When you read the words 'baptize' or 'baptism' in an English translation of the New Testament, you're actually seeing a transliteration, not a translation, of the original word. The Greek word 'baptizo' means to dip or plunge. It would be an accurate translation to use the English word 'immerse' where the Greek word "baptize" appears. Why did translators not do that? The King James translation was commissioned by King James who was the head of what? The Anglican church which, like several other religious organizations, upholds the practice of infant baptism. Well, translating the word as immerse would conflict with their doctrine and so, we thus have the transliteration 'baptize.' But the word means to immerse and not to sprinkle.

Not only that, but the bible also says that baptism pictures a burial. "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection," (Romans 6:4-5) You don't bury a person by sprinkling a few clods of dirt over them. You place them under the sod. You completely bury them. This is the beautiful process that takes place in a scriptural baptism: dying to sin, being buried with Christ, and rising to walk in newness of life. Now my question is this: if baptisms are being invalidated over the wrong pronoun which the bible doesn't even address, why aren't they also being invalidated by the wrong mode which the bible does address? Is it really a big deal? Does it really matter? Well, I remember a story in 2 Kings 5 of a man who had leprosy and was told by the prophet of God to go down to the Jordan River and dip seven times in the water and God would heal him. What if Naaman had gone to the river and bent over and scooped up a handful of water and poured it on his head seven times? Would he have been healed? I think we all know the answer to that question. He would have disobeyed God. Why is this any different?

And then you have the proper CANDIDATE for baptism. The bible tells us WHO should be baptized. Jesus said in Mark 16:16 "He who believes and is baptized will be saved..." Peter said for people to "Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins..." (Acts 2:38) In other words, the bible only commands those who believe and those who have repented of their sins to be baptized. Babies and small children can do neither. A baby can't believe anything. A toddler has committed no sins to repent of. Now, the reason many practice infant baptism is because they hold to the doctrine of original sin. They believe that babies are born having inherited the guilt of Adam's sin and therefore must be baptized for those sins to be taken away. The bible teaches no such thing. Jesus said let the little children come to Him for of such is the kingdom of heaven. The prophet Ezekiel taught in Ezekiel 18 that the sons do not bear the iniquity of the father. Now, being the children of Adam, we are subject to the curse of physical death because Adam brought death into the world affecting all of creation, but babies are not born sinners. They have no sins to forgive. All accountable people HAVE committed sins for which they need forgiveness which is why the bible tells us to repent as a prerequisite to being baptized.

Now, others practice infant and pedo-baptism not because they believe that children are sinners but because they are the CHILDREN OF believers. In the 1500's the Swiss reformer Huldreich Zwingli opposed the Catholic doctrine of baptismal regeneration but preserved the practice of sprinkling infants. His reasoning was this: Zwingli taught that children belong to the covenant like their parents. He got this idea from the Old Testament. He said that Abrahamic covenant and its promises applies then as well as now and just as adults and their children were included in the covenant and that children were circumcised under that covenant, that baptism has replaced circumcision in the New Testament and that children should thus be baptized just like their parents. There's a great difference here though.

First, baptism did not replace circumcision. Second, the bible teaches that the New Covenant is different than the Old in many ways but particularly in this regard. In Jeremiah 31:31-34 the prophet said: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."" (Jeremiah 31:31-34) Notice, he says that under the New Covenant people would not have to be taught to "know the Lord for they ALL shall know Me." What is he talking about? Well, you see under the old dispensation, a Jew was born into the covenant by natural birth. He was born a child of Abraham and accordingly was circumcised. He then grew up and had to be taught of God. Today, however, we are not naturally born children of God. We are supernaturally born AGAIN as children of God. We are born of water and of the Spirit in baptism, according to John 3:3-5. We don't have to later be taught to know the Lord. We were baptized into Christ and thus born into the New Covenant because we HAVE been taught of God.

My friend, baptism is not for babies and small children. Zwingli was wrong. The Roman church was wrong and their teachings down through the centuries have led untold multitudes into believing something that is not true. The word of the Lord is right however, and it teaches that those who are to be immersed are those who have come to believe in Jesus Christ and are repenting of their sins and thus turning to Christ. It teaches that this baptism is "for the remission or forgiveness of sins" (Acts 2:38). It is not an outward sign of an inward grace already received. It is the step of faith by which God washed away a person's sins, saves them by His wonderful grace, declares them righteous by their faith in Christ, and answers their plea for a good and clean conscience. It matters HOW, WHEN, AND WHY we are baptized. Is your baptism valid according to the scriptures? I hope you'll give that some serious thought today. And I'll return with more after another song.

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