



## DOES IT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE ABOUT BAPTISM?

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Baptism is one of the most iconic parts of the Christian doctrine, but there are many views about what it is, who it's for, and what its purpose is. Does it make any difference? Greetings and welcome. It's good to begin a new week with you by studying the word of God and considering the teachings of Christ. Thanks for joining me.

Today, we come to the last in a series of lessons we have entitled: Does It Make Any Difference? Though people disagree about many subjects in the bible, we have largely dismissed most of these disagreements by saying that at the end of the day it doesn't really matter any way. But is that true? Today, we wish to consider the rudimentary bible subject of baptism. Baptism is the point in time when one enters the family of God. The New Testament writers place a great deal of urgency and importance upon this act of faith and obedience but changes to the practice of baptism began not long after the apostolic era and peoples' view of the purpose of baptism radically changed with the beginning of the Protestant Reformation and the teaching of the reformer Huldrych Zwingli. The result is that today there are many views about what constitutes baptism, who should be baptized, and what the role of baptism is in a person's life and faith. Different religious groups teach different things about it. Does any of it make any difference? Does God accept all forms of baptism?

As a beginning point, I wish to read from Acts chapter 19, and we'll begin in verse 1. Luke records: ***"And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they***

***should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”***

Here was a group of people who were following religious teaching. They believed and had been baptized. But for some reason, Paul found their baptism invalid and insufficient. They were baptized again. What was wrong with the first one and why did it make any difference? As we shall see, these disciples were baptized believing they were being obedient to God, but something rendered their baptism ineffectual. We'll look at this and other passages today in our lesson: Does It Make Any Difference Why I'm Baptized?

Baptism (as the term is generally applied today) is a near-universal practice of the religious community – particularly those who profess to follow Christ. It is considered one of the most fundamental ordinances taught and practiced by New Testament believers. It is also one of the most debated and controversial subjects throughout church history. Consequently, there are many opposing beliefs today about the purpose of baptism, the mode of baptism, and who is a candidate for baptism. If you consider yourself a Christian, it is more likely than not, at some point you were baptized in water or underwent some procedure the religious organization you identified with called baptism. Very few people would dare argue that water baptism is in some way part of Christianity and relatively few would deny that baptism is a good thing, and a person should submit to it. What does the bible teach about baptism though? With all of the widely varying ideas about baptism, does it make any difference what I believe about it? Does it matter how and why, so long as I was baptized? Like the other subjects in our recent series, many people would say “no, it makes no difference as long as you were sincere in whatever you did...” But is that how we should look at it? Is that how the Lord looks at it? Well, the only way we know how the Lord looks at anything is by seeing what His word teaches about it and that's what we wish to do today.

In Acts 19, the passage we read at the beginning of the program, we find Paul travelling to Ephesus and encountering a group of about a dozen men who had apparently been taught by a man named Apollos. In fact, Apollos had just left there, according to Acts 18. Apollos was an impressive preacher. He was eloquent in speech, very knowledgeable about the Old Testament scriptures, and evidently quite effective and persuasive. Apollos was not a bad man; he was just misinformed. He didn't have nefarious motives; he just didn't know some things, and someone needed to teach him the truth and set him straight. He was like all of us are regarding some things at one time or another, there were things he didn't yet know or understand. Now, in Apollos' case, it was a pretty major misunderstanding. Acts 18:25 tells us, “This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John.” Apollos was not perverting the Old Testament scriptures, nor was he trying to lead people away from Christ, but for all that he DID know, he was missing something very important. All he knew, so far as baptism was concerned, was the baptism of John.

So, what was wrong with John's baptism? Well, nothing was wrong with John's baptism at the time John was baptizing. Jesus Himself even implied that John's baptism was from heaven (Matthew 21:25). He baptized the right way: immersing people in water (John 3:23). He was baptizing them for the right purpose: upon the peoples' repentance and to obtain the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). But John's baptism was for the time leading up to Christ's kingdom. It looked forward to the Messianic appearance and Christ's coming rule. When Christ came and fulfilled all things and was coronated as King, baptism no longer looked FORWARD to the Christ and His kingdom to come, baptism now looks back to the Christ who CAME and admits us into the kingdom that now is! Apollos didn't understand all of this.

So, Apollos was going about the country still preaching the baptism of John. A wonderful couple in the church named Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos preach there in Ephesus and the bible says they took him home with them and they taught him the word of the Lord more perfectly. Now, we can cut Apollos a little more slack than some today who misrepresent Christ's teaching on baptism because all of this was new and Apollos didn't have the New Testament scriptures to read and study. But thankfully, he had this godly little couple who cared enough about him to teach him the truth and put him on the right track. Well, we get the next chapter, chapter 19, and Paul comes to Ephesus and he finds a dozen men who likely had heard Apollos preach before he came to understand the truth. These men were trying to follow Christ and when they met Paul, Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit since they believed. The apostles exclusively had the power to lay hands upon new believers and impart the gifts of the Spirit to them to aid in their spiritual development since they didn't have the completed revelation of truth at that time. So, now asks them if this had happened to them. Their reply was startling and told Paul that something was wrong. They said, "we have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." I don't think they meant they didn't know the Holy Spirit exists but rather they were saying they had heard nothing about the Holy Spirit being given and received. In other words, they were not aware of all that had taken place beginning on the day of Pentecost and this told Paul that they were woefully lacking in their understanding. He then asks, "Into what then were you baptized?" So, they said, 'Into John's baptism.'" Now, please notice a few things. One, they had been baptized. Two, that their baptism was a baptism of OBEDIENCE. There is not doubt when they were baptized, they believed they were obeying God. And had this all taken place before Christ died on the cross, they would have! But in their case, Apollos, and perhaps others like him, were still going about preaching the baptism of John when John's commission had expired and was no longer relevant. The result was that rendered the baptisms of these 12 men invalid and ineffectual. Paul explains to them the difference and in verse 5: "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of (by the authority of) the Lord Jesus." Now, this episode shows us that not only is baptism important but that it's important we understand some things about baptism. It makes a difference, in other words, about MY baptism and whether it was right and scriptural. Let's, for a few moments, explore that in view of the many teachings that exist today about baptism.

First, does it make any difference WHETHER I am baptized at all? Again, most people would likely say that baptism is a good thing. But there's a difference between saying something is good or even important and, on the other hand, saying it is necessary. While most preachers and religious organizations will encourage people to be baptized, they do not believe that it makes any difference in a person's spiritual condition and their relationship to God. Some strangely, think it affects one's relationship to the church more than it does one's relationship to the Lord. The short answer to our question "Does it make any difference whether or not I am baptized" is "yes" because, if for no OTHER reason, it is a commandment of Jesus Christ. The Lord never suggested that people be baptized. He commanded it. He told His apostles in Matthew 28:19 to, "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; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Notice that Jesus connected baptism to people becoming His disciples. He commanded His disciples to baptize those they taught about Christ. Also notice how Christ makes a distinction between the command to "baptize them" and then to "teach them to observe the things Christ commanded." In other words, baptism is not merely a church ordinance for those who are already saved to observe. Baptism is at the beginning. It is the point of entry. THEN comes the teaching of those things we are to do as Christians.

Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom the God." (John 3:5) The Lord also said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." (Mark 16:16) The apostles commanded (not suggested), they commanded men and women to be baptized upon hearing and believing the gospel. When the thousands on Pentecost interrupted Peter's sermon wanting to know what they must do to be saved, Peter said "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

Friend, if the bible connects baptism to receiving the remission or forgiveness of sins (and it does) how can it NOT make a difference whether I am baptized? And please note that even though He had no sins to remit, even Jesus the Lord submitted to baptism explaining that He was doing so to "fulfill all righteousness." It was the right and proper thing for Him to do, in other words, and He set an example in so doing. The widely accepted and parroted idea that baptism is not necessary is contrary to scripture and one cannot be obedient to Christ without first submitting to baptism. Paul said those who do "not obey the gospel" will be punished with everlasting destruction when the Lord returns. (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)

Second, it matters HOW I am baptized. The word 'baptize' is a transliteration of the word used in the Greek text *baptizo* and means to dip, submerge, or immerse. It can mean to overwhelm. It does not mean to sprinkle or pour a small amount of water on one's head. It means to immerse a person. The practice of affusion or of sprinkling did not originate in the church until sometime after the death of the apostles. In fact, several changes to the baptism Christ commanded took place after the apostolic period, the first of which was to substitute sprinkling in the place of immersion for baptism. Even when it was first practiced, it was strongly opposed for several centuries until it was finally accepted by the Catholic church.

Not only, though, does the word itself point to immersion for baptism, but the bible's description of baptism does also. Paul said in Colossians 2:12 "buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." Likewise in his letter to the Romans, chapter 6, verses 3 thru 5: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 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," Sprinkling is not baptism. It is a tradition of man offered in the place of scriptural baptism.

Third, it matters WHY I am baptized. The apostles and the early church taught that baptism was for the forgiveness of sins and was the point in time at which one entered the kingdom of God. Again, Peter in Acts 2:38 said that every one of them was to be "baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission (forgiveness) of their sins." Saul was told in Acts 22:16 that he was to immediately arise and be baptized to wash away his sins, calling upon the name of the Lord. Paul told the Galatians in Galatians 3:27 that we are baptized INTO Christ, thus putting on Christ. He used the same term in Romans 6:3. In other words, we are baptized into a union with Jesus Christ. Jesus taught that when we are born of water and the Spirit that we enter the kingdom of God. (John 3:5)

Friend, this was the general understanding and consensus of the church for fifteen hundred years from the time of Christ and the apostles. It wasn't until the introduction of the teachings of Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin that a shift occurred, and people began believing and teaching that baptism is merely an outward symbol of an inward grace already received. Many contend that baptism is only an outward

picture for the world of our former death to sin and new life in Christ, but that's not what Paul said! Paul told the Romans that our baptism is a picture of CHRIST'S death, burial, and resurrection and that we are entering into a union with Him by identifying with HIS death burial and resurrection in baptism.

Baptism is not just a symbol. It is not just a step of obedience. The bible does not teach that it is a creedal requirement to join a denomination (no denominations existed in the bible). It is the point at which, in faith, we turn from sin and enter Christ Jesus and receive the forgiveness of our sins and are added by Christ to His church. That is what the bible teaches about the purpose of baptism, and it makes a difference. Baptism is not like understanding the book of Revelation. Baptism is a rudimentary step in becoming a Christian and being added to the congregation of Christ. The bible is very clear about what baptism is and what it is for and who it is for! Yes, there are many false doctrines about baptism today. Don't be deceived by them. If your baptism was not FOR the remission of sins, to enter a saving union with Christ, and into His body, the church, it was not a scriptural baptism. Paul said in Romans 6:17 that we must obey "from the heart" that form of doctrine. It is not just a matter of being dipped in water. We must be doing so for the right purpose, from the right motive, and to the right end.

And in conclusion, it makes a difference WHEN I am baptized. For one thing, baptism is not for babies and small children. It is not for the person who has not been taught the gospel or for the person incapable of understanding the gospel. Jesus taught in Mark 16:16 that faith must precede baptism. Well, a baby can't believe. Peter taught that repentance must precede baptism. (Acts 2:38) A baby cannot repent and has no sins to repent of. Baptism is for the believing, penitent sinner who can make the decision at that time to follow Jesus Christ and submit to His Lordship. That's what the bible teaches about baptism, and it makes a difference about your baptism and whether it meets those requirements. And one more thing; the apostles of Jesus ALWAYS made baptism an urgent and immediate requirement for the sinner who wanted to be saved. You never read of people being told to wait a single day to be baptized when they learned of Christ. It was always immediately. It's a command of Christ. It stands between the sinner in his sin and a redeemed person made free from their sin. (Romans 6:17-18). And if you see that you need to be baptized into Christ, the time is now; it's today! Make no delay because it's too important and, yes, it makes a difference.

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