



BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

A GFC DISTINCTIVE



BELIEVER'S BAPTISM IS THE ACT OF IMMERSING A NEW BELIEVER IN WATER TO SYMBOLIZE THEIR SALVATION. SINCE SALVATION IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT SUBJECT TO GOD, THE BIBLE HAS A LOT TO SAY ABOUT IT. WHEN WE OPEN IT UP, IT TELLS US THE FOLLOWING THREE THINGS:

1. BAPTISM IS BY IMMERSION ONLY.

Numerous passages demonstrate that baptism is by immersion only. In a dry place like Israel, it would have been much more convenient for the early disciples to sprinkle new believers or pour a little water over them to symbolize their salvation. It would have been much more economical since water was hard to come by, but they did not do that. Instead, they went out of their way to submerge the new converts.

For example, John 3:23 says that "John [the Baptist] also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there." In other words, John the Baptist made a special trip to Aenon to baptize because there was a lot of water in that location. John did most of his work in the desert where springs and rivers dry up during certain times of the year. When that happened, he would simply move to another place where water was more readily available. He did not carry water to sprinkle his converts with. He took them to rivers and streams where he could submerge them.

Acts 8:36-38 also tells us that when Philip baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch, the Eunuch said: "*Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized? ... And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went into the water... and he baptized him.*" This passage does not say that the Eunuch went beside the water to be baptized or near it but he went into the water. He got out of the chariot and entered in because that is how baptism is done.

The Greek word for "baptize" in each of these passages further highlights this because it is the word *baptizo* which means "to immerse or dunk something in water." In some cases, it can mean "to drown" because that is what baptism did. It submerged a person entirely in water.

2. BAPTISM COMES AFTER SALVATION, NOT BEFORE.

The Bible also teaches that baptism occurs after salvation; it does not precede it. When a person comes to faith in Christ, one of the first things that they are asked to do is to make a public profession of faith. They do this by being baptized.

For example, Acts 2:38-39 says that when the church first started, several thousand people were saved. A great revival broke out which caused Peter to make the following announcement:

Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off. Notice that the first thing Peter asked these people to do, after being saved, was to be baptized. Why? He did this because it was their public profession of faith. Baptism was their way of saying "I follow Jesus now."

Some people take this passage to mean that children should be baptized before salvation. However, this text does that say that "baptism is for you and your children." It says that "the promise is for you and your children." Peter says that children can have salvation too if they believe in the promise. The same goes for "all you who are far off."

Other examples of people who were baptized after their salvation include Paul (Acts 9:18), Cornelius (Acts 10:48), Lydia (Acts 16:14-16), the Philippians Jailer (Acts 16:33), Crispus the Synagogue Ruler (Acts 18:8), and the disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:5-6). There are no examples of someone being baptized prior to salvation in Scripture.

3. BAPTISM IS FOR BELIEVERS ONLY

All of this bring us to the final point which states that baptism is for believers only. Baptism is for those who have believed in Jesus Christ. It symbolizes our salvation and, therefore, we must be saved before we can undertake it. It is not enough that our parents believe on our behalf. It is not enough that we grew up in church. We must believe for ourselves before we can be baptized.

Matthew 28:19-20 says: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

This passage tells us very clearly that we are to baptize disciples. We are not to baptize their children but the disciples themselves because they are the ones who have believed. After baptizing them, we then teach them to observe all of Jesus' commandments.

Romans 6:3-4 also says: "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Now Paul says that we were baptized into Jesus' death. He says that our souls were baptized into His sacrifice on the cross which is a reference to spiritual baptism. It is a picture of what happens to us on the inside when we are saved.

However, Paul's point is that the physical act of baptism should imitate the spiritual act. We should be baptized on the outside to demonstrate what has occurred to us on the inside. As one author writes, "Baptism signifies the believer's confidence that Christ's work was complete for his forgiveness and justification." [1] Therefore, it is for believers only. We cannot participate in this act until we have personally placed our confidence in His complete work.

CONCLUSION

Baptism is a very important topic because anything that represents our salvation must be taken with the utmost degree of seriousness. Therefore, we need to search the Scriptures to see what they say about it.

When we do that, we see that baptism is by immersion only and it comes after salvation. It is also for believers only because it demonstrates what has taken place in a believer's heart. It signifies that our confidence is in Christ's complete work and nothing else which is why this is a distinctive of our church. We encourage all of our members to be baptized upon placing their faith in Jesus Christ.

If you would like to know more about believer's baptism or anything else in this pamphlet, we would love to hear from you.

[1] Thomas J. Nettles in Understanding Four Views on Baptism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007) 25.



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