

Baptism

By Ray Wooten

Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph 2:8), it cannot be earned, purchased nor deserved in any way. It is a gift of God.

Since we know and understand this, what must we do? The answer is, believe! John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever *believes in Him* shall not perish, but have eternal life." NASB. Jesus has paid the price for our salvation from eternal death to eternal life. No amount of obedience to law or works of any kind can pay that price.

This concept, when misunderstood and misapplied has caused many to conclude that no action on our part is required. However, the Bible plainly shows that there are some required actions on our part. (Believe, in the Greek, is *pisteuo*. It means to *trust; adhere to; rely on*).

When we understand clearly, we know that "believe" has the connotation of action. It is not passive, it is active. We must exercise our belief. This will prompt us to ask, as so many did on the day of Pentecost, "what shall we do?" I should state here that many think that, because there is something to do, they must "keep the law" to be saved. This was the error that the apostle Paul encountered with the Jewish converts of his day. The Gentiles or Pagans, on the other hand, were convinced that their idolatrous rituals saved them. But, let us notice carefully how the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to answer. After Peter and the other disciples had preached and explained what had just occurred then the people asked, "What shall we do?"

What Shall We Do?

Acts 2:38, " Peter said to them, "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." NASB.

It is at this point, after we receive the Holy Spirit, that we can begin to obey God's Law in its true spirit. Eph 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." KJV

Keeping the Law has nothing to do with one qualifying for baptism or salvation. It is God's free gift to all who believe in and accept Jesus Christ as Savior.

This article is specifically about baptism, which we will discuss in detail. However, based on Acts 2:38, we see a prerequisite to baptism.

Repent

This means to turn from the wickedness of this world, this Babylonian system that has pervaded every segment of our society. This nation, along with Britain and certain other western European nations, has the greatest opportunity in modern times to be a Godly nation, because it has a heritage that is conducive to establishing and living by Godly principles. I believe we are predominantly of *Israelitish heritage*, with God's physical and spiritual blessings. But we have followed Babylon in our practices. That includes our commerce

or business practices, our political system and our educational system. The religious labyrinth which we call "Christianity" is also of Babylonian origin and is why most "Christians" are totally unaware of, or confused about, God's purpose for mankind and His plan of salvation for us.

So, what must we do? Repent! Most "Christians" believe that to repent means to quit sinning, i.e., violating the commandments of God, and start living a better life. And, that is partially true. We should turn from the sins and abominations of this world and turn to Jesus Christ for His solution. But, if obedience to the commandments is the requirement for salvation, then why did Jesus have to die and shed His precious life-blood? The fact is, that the counterfeit ways of paying for our sins are the "dead works" from which we must turn, (Heb 6:1; 9:14), whether it is referring to animal sacrifices of the Israelites (which were only types and "never took away sins" Heb 10:11) or the idolatrous rituals of pagans.

So, we must conclude that repentance means to turn from typical, false and counterfeit means of having our sins removed. We must accept the only true means of forgiveness and reconciliation to God, which is the sacrifice of the one, and only Savior, Jesus Christ. It is His blood alone that pays for our sins when we believe and accept it. It is very important that we understand what the apostle Paul stated about this in Romans 5:8-10,

v8 "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Righteousness is through Faith in Christ

This plainly shows that Christ loved us and died for us, in spite of our unworthiness. We did nothing to deserve this unconditional love He has for us. All we can do is believe it, accept it and be thankful for it. When we do this we become sinless in God's sight. The righteousness of Jesus the Messiah is "credited to us" (Rom 4:20-25, "yet, with respect to the promise of God, he (Abraham) did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, (Abraham is called the "father of the faithful")

v21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

v22 Therefore (because of his unwavering belief in the sacrifice Messiah was going to make) IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

v23 Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him,

v24 but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, (because of our belief and acceptance of the Savior, His Righteousness is also credited to us)

v25 He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification." NASB.

Of course, if we refuse to believe and accept it, we are refusing the only possible way for all of our sins to be deleted from our record. Hence, we reject salvation, but when we believe and accept we, as Abraham, become justified.

Justification is a legal word that is connected with law. When one lives according to the law he is just, but when he breaks or violates the law, he becomes unjust. This is true whether it is God's Law or civil law. A lawbreaker is unjust. When he pays for his violation he becomes justified. The problem is that God's Law demands eternal death of the lawbreaker, or, sinner. All humans are unjust from birth because we are born "in Adam" with a nature that is sinful, 1 Cor 15:22 (for further study on this subject ask for our booklet on "The Two Adams"). So, if you pay for your own sins, you must die without any hope for future life. This is very important for us to realize. This is why Christ's provision for us is more than His death. His death only justifies us; it does not impart life. Life comes from what followed His death and burial, that is, the resurrection.

Notice, v9 "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. v10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. NASU

The next step Peter shows in the process of salvation in Acts 2:38, is to "be baptized".

Be Baptized

The direction which Christ gave to His apostles was that they should baptize all who believed, (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16). The Jews had not been baptized under the New Covenant; and a baptism now would be a profession of the acceptance of Christ, or a declaration made before the world that they embraced Jesus as their Messiah. It was equivalent to saying that they should publicly and professedly embrace Jesus Christ as their Savior.

This was really insulting to the Jews because they thought they were already united to God through Moses and the Law. So, they did not baptize Jews, they only baptized gentile converts into Judaism. Doesn't this understanding make the subject of baptism very important? It was important enough to God that He baptized an entire nation as an example for us.

1 Cor 10:1-2, "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;"

This baptism united Israel with Moses. Baptism in the New Testament sense unites us with Jesus Christ. So, I believe it is extremely important that we obey this directive from Christ. The gospel requires such a profession, and no one is at liberty to reject it.

This declaration is to be made to all that are inquiring about the way to life. They are to exercise repentance, and then, without any unnecessary delay, to exhibit it by partaking of the biblical ordinance of baptism. If people are unwilling to profess grace, they have none. If they will not, in the proper way, show that they are truly attached to Christ, it is proof that they have no such attachment. Baptism is the application of water, as expressive of the need of purification, and as symbolic of the death, burial and resurrection of each individual "in Christ". Paul shows this clearly in Rom 6:3-11.

v3 "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? (This is why Jesus' death was not "substitutionary!" as many erroneously state, it is sacrificial. He died "for us", to atone for our sins, but not in our place. We still must die to ourselves "in Him").

v4 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.

v5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,

v6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;

v7 for he who has died is freed from sin.

v8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,

v9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.

v10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

v11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” NASU (cp. Rom 5:10, “--- *we shall be saved by His life*”).

This is why we must be “in Christ” because otherwise we will be “in Adam” which automatically puts us under the “curse of the law” which is eternal death. (See our booklet on “The Two Adams”)

So, water baptism pictures the entire process of salvation through Jesus, i.e. His death, burial and resurrection. This is why baptism is by immersion. We will discuss this in more detail later in the article.

The next point Peter gives in Acts 2:38 is:

In the name of Jesus Christ

We have already shown that we must be “in Christ”. Here, in the name of Jesus Christ does not mean to be baptized by the authority of Jesus Christ, but it means to be baptized “in Christ” and for His service, to be consecrated in this way, and by this public profession, to Him and to His cause. So, water baptism is merely the public proclamation that one has believed and accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior and Life giver.

The Believer is the Key

The key person here is the one being baptized, not the person, or persons, performing the service. He should understand the purpose for baptism, what it pictures and that the decision is his. No one else can make one’s baptism valid or invalid. That responsibility is on the individual. Disciples or believers have the responsibility to serve by performing the immersion, (Matthew 28:19) but it is the individual’s acceptance of Christ as Savior that puts him “in Christ”.

The expression “in the name of Jesus Christ”: is the foundation of the baptism, or is that on which it was based. In other words, it is with an acknowledgment of Him in that act as being what His name means i.e. the Sinner's only Hope, his Redeemer, Lord, Justifier, King. The *name* of Jesus Christ means the same as Jesus Christ himself. To be baptized in His name is to be baptized “into Him” and is to be devoted to Him.

The profession which we are to make amounts to this: a confession of sins and our sinful nature; a hearty purpose to turn from them; a reception of Jesus as the Messiah and as personal Savior; and a determination to become His followers and to be devoted to His service. Thus, to be baptized unto Moses means to take him as a leader and guide. (1 Cor. 10:2). The special mark of a Christian is that he receives and honors Jesus Christ.

One other point I want to make about baptism is that long, laborious and unauthorized counseling sessions by a “spiritual elder” who tries to “have dominion over one’s faith” (2 Cor 1:24) is at best unbiblical and at worst deadly.

Notice the following scriptures:

Acts 8:12, “But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

Acts 8:34-38, "The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of who does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?"

v35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

v36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"

v37 [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."]

v38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him." NASB

Acts 19:4-5, Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."

v5 "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." NASU

These scriptures in no way imply that the new believer was interrogated by an elder who then either accepted or rejected him as a candidate for baptism.

Method of Baptism

Now, let us discuss the method of baptism.

Verb. Greek, baptizo, "to baptize," primarily a frequentative form of bapto, "to dip," and it was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another, etc. Plato used it, metaphorically, of being overwhelmed with questions.

The word has no other meaning or connotation than to be completely "dipped", or immersed, not sprinkled or poured. The fact that baptism pictures one's death, burial and resurrection substantiates this.

Distinct from this is the usual form of baptism "into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit," which is a spiritual baptism (Matt. 28:19), that takes place when the believer submits himself to Jesus as Lord of his life. Jesus Christ Himself performs this baptism of the Holy Spirit, (Mark 1:8) which places the believer in the begotten Family of God.

For the Remission of Sins

Not merely the sin of crucifying the Messiah, but of all sins. There is nothing in baptism itself that can wash away sin. That can be done only by the pardoning mercy of God through the atonement of Christ. But baptism is expressive of a willingness to be pardoned in that way, and is a solemn declaration of our conviction that there is no other way of remission. He who comes to be baptized, comes with an admitted conviction that he is a sinner; that there is no other way of mercy but in the gospel, and with a professed willingness to comply with the terms of salvation, and to receive it as it is offered through Jesus Christ.

And what is the tremendous promise that results from obeying this directive of Christ?

And ye shall receive ... the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the key to completing God's original purpose for man that is to create man "in His, God's, likeness, Gen 1:26, "Then God said,

"Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; ----". NASB.

John 20:22, "And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."
NASB

When Jesus breathed on His disciples He was making an official statement that because they had turned from their previous traditions and accepted Him as Lord and Savior they would receive the Holy Spirit. This same person spoke and our universe was created. He spoke and man was created. He breathed into Adam's nostrils and man was given life. Now, He breathed with that same breath of authority and gave them the "power to become children of God." (John 1:12). For that is the ultimate purpose of the Holy Spirit. Surely we can believe in this awesome Savior, can't we?

Just before ascending to the Father, Jesus gave final instructions to His disciples. Acts 1:4-5, "Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from me;
v5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." NASB

This promise was fulfilled a few days later on the day of Pentecost.
Acts 2:1, "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.
v4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit-----". NASB

Jesus has made this same promise to you, too, if you submit to the conditions of Acts 2:38, which is to "repent and be baptized."

So, we see that baptism is an outward proclamation of our inner faith in Jesus Christ and His death, burial and resurrection in our behalf. It also shows that we die in Him and this makes His death not a substitutionary death, but a death that we all experience by being baptized into His death. Then we receive life through His resurrection.

If you have already been baptized I'm sure this information has helped you tremendously. However, if you have not been baptized but you have repented and accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, the next step is baptism. If we at United Christian Ministries can be of assistance in this area please let us know we'll be glad to help.

May God bless you as you seek His Grace and Truth.