

WHAT ABOUT WATER BAPTISM ?

God's washing away of sins is based on Christ's payment of the penalty for sin in His atonement. In regeneration, the believer is born again from above by the Holy Spirit, to put faith in Christ Jesus for salvation. In confession, you acknowledge your sin, and in repentance you turn away from sin, receiving the removal of guilt and forgiveness through Christ. The outward physical act of water baptism pictures inward spiritual cleansing, being baptized by the Holy Spirit, which brings new spiritual life in Christ.

1- JEWISH BELIEVERS ? - Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit in the Gospels and Acts 1. In Acts 2, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, and preached to the crowds at the Jewish feast of Pentecost, *"repent and be baptized everyone one of you 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 for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself."*

About 3,000 Jewish souls, *"those who received his word,"* believed and were baptized, *"and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved,"* up to 5,000 by Acts 4:4. And *"more than ever believers added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women"* in Acts 5:14. Then Acts 6:7 reports, *"the Word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."* They believed and were baptized.

2- GENTILE BELIEVERS ? - Jesus had told them to make disciples *"in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* In Acts 8, persecution scattered the believers, and Samaritans received the Holy Spirit and were baptized, as was the Ethiopian. Then Saul became a believer and was baptized in Acts 9. More Gentiles believed and received the Holy Spirit and were baptized in Acts 10 by Peter, who said, *"God gave the same gift to them as He gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ."* This is the last instance of an outward expression of the Holy Spirit in water baptism.

But the pattern of believing through repentance and faith in Christ Jesus, and then being baptized in water as a demonstration of personal professed faith, continues through the Bible. The apostle Paul baptized the Gentiles Lydia and her household, and the Philippian jailer and all his family in Acts 16 (there is no indication that any infant was baptized). More examples of the believe-and-be-baptized pattern follow in Acts 19:4 and Acts 22:16, as the apostle Paul commands, *"and now why do you wait, arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name."* It's part of the Great Commission.

3- BELIEVER'S BAPTISM ? - the pattern of Scripture is to obey God's command to believe the gospel, professing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior through repentance and faith, and then be baptized in water, as an outward sign of the new inward spiritual reality of salvation. This is called "credo-baptism" (*credo* means believe). Again, water baptism has no saving power in itself, for that would mean salvation by works. Rather, washing with water pictures the washing of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, an outward action demonstrating the inward reality. We are not saved by rituals, but by the righteousness of Christ applied to the believer by the Holy Spirit. Credo-baptism can be described as a *"baptism of profession"* when a believing person professes faith in Christ and is baptized as a demonstration of salvation.

4- INFANT BAPTISM ? - When believing parents present their children for baptism it is called "paedo-baptism" (*paedo* means child). This can be understood as a *"baptism of preparation"* (and often is a "dry baptism" without water and called "infant dedication"). This precedes an actual profession of personal faith, which is prayed for, to come as a result of Spirit regeneration not water baptism. As the child grows in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, they must profess their own personal repentance and faith. This practice came about as early churches began to baptize infants as well as those who were of an age to profess their personal faith in Christ. Some churches today practice both infant and believer's baptism.

5- IS BAPTISM REQUIRED ? - Think carefully. Some churchgoers speak of water baptism as what defines them as a Christian, rather than personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, no works can bring salvation, and none are required for salvation (the thief on the cross was not baptized). Mark 16:16 says *"whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."* Condemnation comes from not believing, not from being not baptized. Some require baptism for salvation and for membership in a church. Do they mean you must perform a ritual to be a Christian ?

To distinguish salvation by grace through faith, some churches do not require baptism for membership, but encourage it as an expected evidence of saving faith as the believer grows in sanctification, trusting and obeying God's Word. Colin Smith notes, *"fruit is visible, and repentance will show up in visible changes in how you live, beyond thoughts and words, coming from change of mind about Jesus."*

6- SPIRIT BAPTISM ? - All the above becomes more clear when we understand the baptism of the Holy Spirit. God had long promised that He would put His Spirit within His people as part of the fulfillment of the New Covenant, the circumcision of the heart, which Jesus came to fulfill. This baptism of the Holy Spirit makes a person a believer, a Christian, through regeneration. That's why outward water baptism beautifully pictures inward Spirit baptism. We'll examine this further, next time! ☐