

Lesson 9: Water Baptism

- I. In this lesson, we shall examine what the Bible teaches about baptism
 - A. Our focus will be on the water baptisms recorded in the New Testament
 - B. The first accounts of baptism are associated with John the Baptist and are mentioned in the first chapters of Mark and John and the third chapters of Matthew and Luke
 1. From the Greek word found in the early manuscripts, we know baptism was specified to be a total immersion not just a sprinkling or pouring; this was discussed thoroughly in Lesson 6
 2. The fact that this was an immersion in water also is clear from the text
 - a. John openly declared his baptism to be a water baptism in Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; and John 1:31
 - b. A record of John baptizing in the Jordan River is found in Matt 3:6 and Mark 1:5
 3. Luke's account tells us John began his ministry in response to the Word of the Lord which came to him (Luke 3:2)
 - a. John was given the task of preparing the way for the Lord so the nation of Israel would recognize the coming Messiah, whom they awaited (John 1:31)
 - b. This was in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies
 - c. "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts." (Mal 3:1)
 - d. "A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.'" (Isa 40:3)
 4. John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3)
 - a. It is noteworthy, that John required repentance as a condition for baptism
 - 1) The message he preached was "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt 3:2)
 - 2) Moreover, he rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees when they came for baptism telling them first to ". . . bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matt 3:8)
 - 3) This was the same message that Jesus preached in His ministry, ". . . Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:17)
 - b. It is also important to realize John's baptism was associated with the forgiveness of sins
 - c. Paul explained this as a shadow of what was to take place through the sacrifice of Jesus to come
 - 1) In Acts 19:4, "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.'" "
 - 2) The forgiveness under John's baptism was obtained by the same power that was able to atone for the sins of Israel under the Old Covenant

- a) Not by the blood of animal sacrifices for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb 10:4)
 - b) Rather, by the blood of Jesus Christ
 - c) "For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." (Heb 9:15)
 - d) "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb 10:14)
5. Even though John's baptism was for the forgiveness of sins, and he called for repentance as a prerequisite to baptism, Jesus asked to be baptized by John
- a. We know that Jesus had no need to repent and was guilty of no sin according to II Cor 5:21, I Pet 2:22
 - b. So why did Jesus insist on being baptized?
 - 1) It was not to have His sins forgiven for John even tried to prevent it saying: "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" (Matt 3:14)
 - 2) Jesus provided the answer saying: "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matt 3:15)
 - a) Note the Bible defined righteousness in Luke 1:6 as "walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord."
 - a) In the unique case of Jesus, He was baptized not for the forgiveness of sins but to honor the command and desires of the Heavenly Father
 - 3) In being baptized, Jesus also set an example for all of us to follow
 - 4) He has not asked us to do anything that He Himself was unwilling to do
 - 5) "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps," (I Pet 2:21)
 - 6) Heb 2:17-18 say, "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted."
 - 7) Heb 4:14-15 tells us, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."

C. Understanding the significance surrounding the baptism of John prepares the way for us to appreciate the meaning of the baptism Jesus commanded

II. What is the purpose of Christian Baptism? Why did God command us to be baptized?

A. The Apostle Peter said it was "for the forgiveness of sins" in Acts 2:38

1. When the Jews realized they were responsible for killing the Christ, the Son of God, they were pieced to the heart and cried out asking Peter and the Apostles

- "What shall we do?"
- a. They wanted to know what action or steps they should take to be forgiven and made right with God
 - b. Notice Peter did not tell them - they were fine and nothing was required since they now believed and were pieced in the heart with Godly sorrow
 - c. Peter told them there was something they had to do to obtain God's forgiveness
 - d. They must first repent and then be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins
2. Just as in John's baptism, we continue to see repentance and immersion in water, but here it is performed in the name of Jesus, our Savior
 3. By their obedience in repenting and being baptized as instructed by Peter, God forgave their sins and granted them the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)
- B. We also know salvation resides in baptism based on Peter's remarks found in I Pet 3:20-21
1. The New American Standard Version reads: "who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you - not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,"
 2. Here Peter is referencing Noah's family being brought safely in the Ark through the Great Flood waters as the evil was washed off the face of the earth
 - a. He then makes an analogy to the cleansing achieved in water baptism as he says: "Corresponding to that baptism now saves you" (vs 21)
 - b. Notice Peter declares we are saved during the actual act of baptism
 - 1) This is entirely consistent with what Peter commanded in Acts 2:38 where he called for them to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins
 - 2) Since sins are forgiven during baptism, then indeed, it is perfectly proper to claim that baptism brings salvation
 3. As if anticipating the confusion with a physical cleansing, Peter quickly clarifies by stating we are not saved by the removal of dirt from the flesh
 - a. That is to say the significance of baptism has nothing to do with the physical hygiene of washing in water
 - b. Instead, there is something spiritual taking place during this physical act
 - c. Peter went on to say the power to save actually comes "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" not the water
 4. So how does being baptized link us to the resurrection of Jesus Christ?
 - a. In this literal translation of the Greek, Peter says baptism is the way we appeal to God for a good conscience
 - b. The Greek word might also be translated to petition for a good conscience
 - c. By our obedience of faith in being baptized, we are actually calling on the name of the Lord making a formal appeal to God for forgiveness through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ
 - d. In being immersed in water, our conscience is cleared by the knowledge we

have been granted forgiveness of sins

5. This picture of baptism is reinforced by the teachings of the Apostle Paul:
"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." (Rom 6:3-4)
 - a. Paul explains that by being baptized into the name of Jesus we are being baptized into His death
 - b. And just as Jesus was resurrected from the dead, we too rise out of the water to a newness of life - a fresh start, a new life cleansed from sin
 6. Rom 6:5-8 go on to say: "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, 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; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,"
 - a. We are united with Jesus in a death like His during our baptism where we are baptized into His death
 - b. In baptism, God has given us a physical representation of the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus
 - c. By our reenactment, in going down under the water and rising again, we are united with Him in death, spiritually putting the sinful old self to death so we can rise up out of the water free from sin
 - d. What a beautiful image God has given to us
 - e. God has appealed to our dual nature by using a physical event to help us understand the far deeper spiritual cleansing that is taking place for salvation
 - f. Notice Paul says our resurrection to life and our freedom from sin are conditional
 - 1) We possess these spiritual blessings, if we have been united with Him in a death like His
 - 2) And if we have died with Christ
 - 3) That death occurs in our baptism, "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." (Rom 6:3-4)
- C. Additional commentary and support for the teachings of I Pet 3:20-21 are found in Heb 10:19-22, "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."
1. Notice the astounding parallel between these passages

2. We are able to draw near to God by the cleansing blood of Jesus which was offered in the sacrifice of our mediator and great priest on the cross of Calvary (Heb 10:19)
3. How are we able to approach the throne of God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith?
 - a. We do so by having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience
 - b. And our bodies washed with pure water (Heb 10:22)
 - c. It is by the blood of Jesus that our hearts are sprinkled clean and we are able to enter the Holy Place
 - d. And our bodies are washed with pure water during baptism
 - e. Here we learn that we encounter the saving blood sacrifice of Jesus in the water of baptism as we are buried with Him in a likeness of His death
4. Notice the similarity in words describing what takes place during baptism
 - a. The text from Peter calls it an appeal to God for a good conscience
 - b. The Hebrew writer calls it a cleansing of an evil conscience
 - c. Moreover, Heb 9:14 tells us it is the blood of Christ that cleanses our conscience from dead works
5. The consistency among these passages is clear teaching that baptism defines the moment when our sins are forgiven
6. That is why baptism is essential for salvation

III. There also is convincing support for the necessity of baptism found in the conversion of Saul

- A. After being blinded during his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul was told to go into the city where it would be told him what he must do (Acts 9:6)
- B. In his heartfelt remorse over the persecution of Jesus and His followers, Saul spent three days fasting and in prayer - taking neither food nor drink (Acts 9:9,11)
- C. Even though Saul believed in Jesus, had a heart of sorrow and repentance and was granted healing through God's messenger Ananias, Saul was still lost in sin
 1. We know this from the words of Ananias who said to Saul: "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." (Acts 22:16)
 2. By asking Saul why he was delaying, Ananias was indicating there is something more to be done
 3. Even though Saul had been healed, he was still lacking
 4. Salvation had not yet been achieved - he was still in sin
 - a. To remedy that, Ananias commanded Saul to be baptized
 - b. And in so doing to wash away his sins by calling on His name
- D. This account exemplifies the teaching found in 1 Pet 3:20-21 and Heb 10:19-22
 1. Baptism was required for Saul's salvation even though he had believed and repented
 2. Ananias said that by being baptized Saul's sins would be washed away
 - a. This involved having his heart sprinkled clean from an evil conscience
 - b. And his body washed with pure water (Heb 10:22)

3. Ananias also said that in baptism Saul was calling on His name, i.e., the name of Jesus
 4. Clearly, Ananias recognized baptism as an appeal to God for a good conscience (I Pet 3:21)
 - E. In his later ministry, Saul, by then known as Paul, taught these same things
 1. "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." (Rom 10:9-10)
 - a. Salvation indeed will come to a believer who confesses Jesus as Lord
 - b. That is exactly what happened to the Ethiopian in Acts 8:36-38 when he confessed Jesus as the Son of God at his baptism
 2. Paul went on to say "for whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom 10:13);
 - a. That call upon the name of the Lord is executed during baptism
 - b. It is our appeal to God for a good conscience (I Pet 3:21)
 3. In his preaching, Paul reminded the Corinthians that many had been guilty of grossly unrighteous behavior but now they were cleansed
 - a. I Cor 6:11 says: "Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."
 - b. Just like Paul, they were washed by baptism in the name of Jesus while calling on the name of the Lord
 - F. The essential need for baptism in the overall plan of God is further evident in Paul's teaching to the Galatian Christians
 1. Paul wrote "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." (Gal 3:26-29)
 - a. We become sons of God and demonstrate our faith in Christ Jesus by clothing ourselves with Christ
 - b. According to these verses, we get into Christ and are clothed with Him by being baptized into His name (vs 27)
 2. Our baptism is what unites us all as one in Christ Jesus (vs 28)
 3. And if we have been baptized into Christ then we are heirs according to Gen 12:3 where God promised Abraham, ". . . And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"
- IV. Occasionally, baptism is confused as a work that is done by a believer to earn salvation
- A. Nothing could be further from the truth
 1. In fact, such a strategy was shown to fail in Lesson 5 where we discussed potential solutions to the Problem of Sin
 2. Since sin is what separates us from God, according to Isa 59:1-2, the only way

- for us to secure our own salvation would be to lead a perfect, sinless life and never lose it in the first place
3. That, of course, is impossible since all humankind have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23)
 4. Moreover, good works do not remove the guilt and conviction of a lawbreaker
 - a. This is true even in our secular judicial system
 - b. Law breaking must have consequences to preserve justice and righteousness
 5. There is no path to salvation by performing good works to earn eternal life
- B. The Bible is very clear in teaching we are saved by God's grace through our faith in God
1. Eph 2:4-7 say, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."
 2. Moreover, salvation is the gift of God to humankind, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Eph 2:8-9)
 - a. By definition, gifts are never earned
 - b. However, we must agree to either accept a gift or reject it
 - 1) God does not force salvation upon us
 - 2) That would violate our free will and amount to a free pass for our sin
 - c. To receive the gift of salvation, we still must claim it
 - d. That is done by having faith in the promise of God to save us when we comply with His will by believing, repenting, confessing and being baptized for the forgiveness of sins
- C. It also is worth noting even if baptism is called some kind of work, it certainly is not a work done by the believer
1. In baptism, believers allow someone else to immerse them in water
 2. The person being baptized is totally passive and submissive in the process.
 3. There is no work whatsoever being done by the recipient of baptism
 4. They are claiming God's gift by allowing themselves to be immersed into the death of Jesus
 5. According to God's Word, this is the way we contact the sacrificial blood of Christ and claim the precious gift of salvation by calling on the name of the Lord
 6. It is the obedience of faith mentioned by Paul in Rom 1:5 and Rom 16:26
- D. The Bible does, in fact, speak of a work being accomplished during baptism, but it is a work being done by God
1. In Colossians chapter 2, Paul encourages the Christians to walk in Christ Jesus, firmly rooted, being built up and established in the faith just as they were instructed (Col 2:6-7)
 - a. In context, Paul was concerned that men may delude them with persuasive arguments (Col 2:4)

- b. He issued warnings about the threat to their faith in verses 8-10 saying, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority" (Col 2:8-10)
 2. Paul then discusses their spiritual cleansing through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ: "and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (Col 2:11-12)
 - a. Here Paul speaks of a spiritual circumcision in Christ
 - 1) It is not a physical cutting of flesh made with hands
 - 2) Instead, he speaks of a removal of the body of sins from the flesh
 - b. He goes on to specify who has undergone this spiritual circumcision
 - 1) It is those who have been buried with Him in baptism through which they were also raised up with Him (vs 12)
 - 2) Furthermore, this was done through faith in the working of God, who raised Jesus from the dead
 - c. There are two very important points to be made from this text
 - 1) First, the text states baptism is an act of faith on the part of the believer - faith in God's spiritual circumcision, removing the body of sins created by our fleshly pursuits
 - 2) Second, there is a work being done in baptism, but it is God who is doing the work
 - a) God is forgiving our sins
 - b) He is performing a spiritual circumcision
 3. If there is any confusion over what is being said here, it is removed by Paul's next statement: "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions," (Col 2:13)
 - a. Note Paul equates being dead in transgressions with the uncircumcised state
 - b. Being alive together with Christ comes from having sins forgiven
 - c. And that spiritual circumcision is said to take place during baptism (Col 2:11-12)
- V. There are many other passages that link baptism to the forgiveness of sins
- A. Eph 5:25-27 read, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."
 1. The Church is the body of Christ (Eph 1:22-23) and Christ gave Himself up for the

sanctification of the Church, making her holy and blameless

2. That cleansing was performed by the washing of water with the word
 3. In Christianity, the only washing of water associated with sanctification is baptism
 4. Moreover, at the time Paul wrote this letter, he said there was only one baptism (Eph 4:5), and it was the water immersion commanded by Jesus
- B. Another passage is found in Titus 3:4-7: "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for humankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."
1. Here again we see that salvation does not come from righteous deeds or works to earn our salvation
 2. Rather, it comes from God's grace and mercy through two things:
 - a. The washing of regeneration
 - b. And the renewing by the Holy Spirit
 3. Where and how are these two things realized?
 - a. The washing of regeneration for salvation is baptism (I Pet 3:21; Acts 22:16, Eph 5:26)
 - b. And the gift of the Holy Spirit likewise is granted in baptism (Acts 2:38)
 - c. Recall the commands of Peter in Acts 2:38, "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"
- C. The Apostle Paul said: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ," (Eph 1:3)
1. This tells us all spiritual blessing reside in Christ
 2. This includes our forgiveness of sins and salvation (Eph 1:7; II Tim 2:10)
 3. According to Gal 3:27-29, we enter into Christ by being baptized, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."
- VI. By now, it should be clear that baptism is essential for our salvation
- A. It represents the final step in claiming the sacrifice of Jesus as the payment for our sins
 - B. In being baptized into His death, we appeal to God for a good conscience and contact the saving blood of Jesus to rise a new creature, holy and pure
 - C. Make no mistake, however, the journey of a believer does not end at baptism.
 1. It is only the beginning
 2. Equally important is what comes next
 - D. Please join me for our last lesson of the series as we consider what God expects from baptized believers