

## What is valid Baptism?

Most likely you have been baptized for one reason or another, and probably by one of several methods. While baptism is universally accepted in the religious world, it is however not agreed as to purpose, mode or subject. There is no doubt that the teachings of Scripture are clear on this matter, despite what men believe and teach. This of course causes most baptisms to be invalid.

When something is said to be *'invalid'* it means that it is without foundation with no law or truth to support it. Today there are a number of invalid baptisms that can't save a flea. Some erroneously baptize infants who are unable to possess faith (Hebrews 11:6), nor can they confess Christ (Matthew 10:32-33), or repent of sin (Romans 7:9). Others fallaciously baptize in order to join their sect and/or as a symbol of their saved condition.

One group believes that baptism of the Holy Spirit is the only way for men to be saved, while another baptizes in the name of Jesus only. Then there is the belief that one can be baptized for the dead, or that sprinkling and pouring of water over the head is sufficient. However a few, though correctly immersing an accountable man or woman in water in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins, their baptism is invalid because of the false doctrines they teach. Unfortunately the majority have been duped into believing that baptism is non-essential to their salvation, accepting only an immersion as proof of their counterfeit salvation. No doubt that baptism is a very serious matter and one none of us can afford to be wrong about or to take lightly.

In Acts 19:1-7 we find an account of 12 men who had received the baptism of John, yet they were instructed by Paul that their baptism was invalid. The gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke as well as the book of Acts tell of John's baptism being four fold:

- (1) Immersion in water (Matt. 3:6)
- (2) Required faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 19:4)
- (3) Demanded repentance (Matthew 3:8; Mark 1:4-5)

(4) Was for the purpose of receiving remission of sins (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3).

Despite these great qualities, they were only preparatory for the baptism that would come. Those twelve men had received a baptism that had been invalidated some 20 years earlier. So in order for them to be saved, they had to meet the new requirements under the New Covenant, understanding the kingdom of God as being the one and only church (Acts 2:38-41; 8:12; 19:8).

No matter how many times you may have been baptized, chances are that they are invalid. Can we know for sure what baptism is valid? By going to the only standard for religious practice – the Bible. It alone determines how we are to behave, and what we must believe and teach (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

## Valid Mode of Baptism

Keeping in mind that the Word of God is the only source of authority in religious matters it is the Bible that will tell us what *'one baptism'* is valid (Ephesians 4:4-6). This *'one baptism'* is not *"Holy Spirit baptism,"* but is in fact immersion in water. How do we know that for certain? The Bible tells us so!

The *'one baptism'* of the Great Commission was one of *'command'* and not of *'promise.'* Invalid baptisms that some claim today were actually baptisms of promise, and not command:

- (1) Holy Spirit baptism (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 13).
- (2) Baptism of Fire (Matthew 3:11)
- (3) Baptism of suffering (Luke 12:48-50)

Holy Spirit baptism was only promised (not commanded) to a certain group of individuals in the first century, to meet the purpose of God in verifying the unwritten gospel (Acts 1:1-5; Mark 16:20; Joel 2:28-29). The baptism of fire was a metaphor to warn the impenitent of their punishment. The baptism of suffering was also figurative for the overwhelming suffering that the disciples would face in the name of the Savior. The

only baptism that is commanded of everyone is the *'one baptism'* - which is immersion in water.

In Mark 1:5 John's baptism was performed *"in"* the river Jordan. If baptism is not immersion, then why the need to be *"in"* the river? In Acts 8:36-39 the eunuch of Ethiopia went down *"into"* the water with Philip and was baptized. Again, why go *"into"* the water? Because the very meaning of the word denotes *'immersion or submersion.'* Thus the only valid form of baptism is the *'one baptism'* of the Great Commission commanded of all men and women by our Lord (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). This means that every man and woman on earth is required by God to be immersed in water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). There is no salvation offered by God except by the *'one baptism'* in water.

## Valid Candidates for Baptism

Just as there are many invalid modes of baptism, there are also many invalid candidates for baptism. So the question is, *"Who is a valid candidate for baptism?"* Again, the Bible is the only way to find the answer to our question. The New Testament teaches that water baptism comes before salvation, and that faith must come before baptism (Romans 14:26; Mark 16:16).

From the Great Commission itself, we are told that before baptism can be valid there must be a certain amount of teaching and learning (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:40). This means that a person must be mentally competent to understand the teaching of the Bible, which would exclude all infants and mentally disabled. In Acts 18:8 Luke tells of the people of Corinth who, *"hearing believed, and were baptized."* An infant is incapable of developing a personal faith in Christ and the promises of God, because an infant is unable to understand what it has heard (Romans 10:17).

Some denominations baptize babies because they believe that men are born sinners. While they do understand that the Bible teaches that sins are forgiven at the point of baptism, they do err concerning at what point sin is charged to our

account. The Bible clearly teaches that no one has inherited the sin of Adam (Ezekiel 18:20) but that little children are models of godly behavior (Matthew 18:3-4). We become sinners by means of our own sins (Ephesians 2:1), and only when we reach the age of accountability (Romans 7:9).

In Ezekiel 28:15 the Lord speaks of the king of Tyrus saying, *"thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee."* We understand sin because of God's law (Romans 3:20). For God will not charge us with sin when there is no law (Romans 5:13). Paul understood that there was a time in his life when he was not under law (Romans 7:9), but when he became accountable, then sin was charged to him and he died spiritually.

Who is a valid candidate for the one baptism in water in order to receive the remission of sins? We turn to the New Testament Scriptures to learn by example. In Acts 8:12 Luke tells of an incident in Samaria where Philip preached the gospel and baptized *"men and women."* Believers were added to the Lord, both men and women (Acts 5:14). It is also said of the noble Bereans that having searched the Scriptures, they obeyed both men and women (Acts 17:11-12). It is difficult to tell exactly when we each become accountable, that is, when sin begins to be charged against us. We know that infants and young children are not accountable. The Bible says that *"men and women"* were baptized not infants, or young children. Only those who were able to understand what they had heard. Only those who understood the difference between right and wrong and that their sins caused them to be enemies of God (Colossians 1:21). Because babies and children are not charged with sin, they have no need to repent of anything, thus they are not valid candidates for baptism.

Valid candidates are those men and women who hear, then understand the gospel and develop faith in Christ (Romans 10:17). That faith will then move them to godly sorrow that brings about repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10) confession of Christ as Lord and Savior (Matthew 10:32-33) and finally immersion in water (Acts 2:38).

## Valid Purpose of Baptism

It is unfortunate that some religious groups have down played the importance of baptism to the point that most believe it has no purpose in God's plan of salvation. What does the Bible say concerning the valid purpose for baptism? In Mark 16:16 Jesus declares, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.*" Every honest English teacher knows that this verse contains two clauses – an independent clause and a dependent clause. The independent clause tells us about the someone who shall be saved; while the dependent clause says there will be someone condemned. Only the someone who believes the gospel 'and' is baptized will be the one who is saved.

Salvation is the only valid purpose behind submitting to the 'one baptism' in water. Peter wrote: "*the like figure whereunto even BAPTISM doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God...)*" (1 Peter 3:21). Peter's illustration about the purpose of baptism is that of Noah and his being lifted by water out of a sinful world. The same is true of water baptism today, when immersed God lifts us out of our sinful past and puts us into the kingdom of God. Nowhere in the Bible can you find that salvation comes before and without being baptized! It is truly sad that baptism has become such a stumbling block to receiving the hope of eternal life – but denominationalism has done a great disservice to the gospel of Christ. What are the valid purposes for being baptized?

**Obedience:** It is a command of God that we obey Him in all things (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus said, "*if you love Me, keep My commandments*" (John 14:15; 15:14). John wrote, "*for this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous*" (1 John 5:3). However most people must see them as grievous by the way they refuse to believe that baptism is necessary to their salvation. The Psalmist reminds us, "*for all Thy commandments are righteousness*" (Psalm 119:172). It is God, not men, who

commands all men and women everywhere to be baptized.

**Forgiveness:** In preparing the way for Jesus and the preaching of the gospel, John the Baptizer preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Luke 3:3). When the church of Christ was first established on Pentecost, AD 30, as Peter preached the gospel to those present, the apostle was asked, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" (Acts 2:37). Peter then instructed, "*repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:38). Peter made it absolutely clear the purpose behind baptism – for the remission of sins! The Greek word in that verse, "*eis*," means '*for*,' '*unto*,' '*in order to obtain or receive*' the remission of sins. This tiny word points forward to the end result, not backward as many have been deceived into believing.

Case in point, in an attempt to make light of the commands of God, men suggest that '*eis*' means '*because of*,' the remission of sins. But that cannot possibly be the truth, for Jesus used that same word in Matthew 26:28; "*for this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*" No intelligent person would suggest that Jesus went to the cross of Calvary and shed His blood on that cross "because of" the remission of sins. No, He shed His blood 'in order that we may obtain' the forgiveness of our sins.

**Rebirth:** In John 3:1-5 our Lord held a conversation with a man by the name of Nicodemus. He wanted Jesus to tell him more about the kingdom of God, to which the Lord answered, "*verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (vs. 3). In verse 5 Jesus adds that he must be born of water and the spirit which is a reference to baptism and obedience to the gospel. Our spiritual rebirth can only be accomplished through our submission to immersion in the baptismal waters (Romans 6:3-6). In baptism our old man is crucified and we are raised up a new man – born again (2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 2:11-13). Jesus said that no one would be able to enter the kingdom of God unless they have been

born again, that is - immersed in water to crucify the old man, to circumcise the flesh.

**Union:** Another valid purpose for baptism is it is the only way for us to get into Christ. The Bible says, "*For as many of you as have been baptized INTO CHRIST have put on Christ*" (Galatians 3:27). Keep in mind that baptism is not the only step required by God to obtain salvation. We must first believe unto righteousness (Romans 10:8-10), then repent (Acts 17:30), then confess Christ (Matthew 10:32-33). Each of these comes before baptism and salvation. Only in the final step of baptism do we receive remission of sins and gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), as well as being put by God into Christ, which is equal to be added to the kingdom of God (the church of Christ). When we are at union with Christ we are promised forgiveness, sonship, eternal life, justification, sanctification, etc. (1 John 5:11; Galatians 3:26; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 2:16-17).

Therefore the only valid reasons for baptism are obedience to God, forgiveness of sins, rebirth and union with Christ and His church – salvation!

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Concerning.....*