

Why should I be baptized?

In the early days of the church, an angel of the Lord instructed a man named Philip to go to the desert road which ran to Gaza. There he met a man from Ethiopia who had been to worship in Jerusalem and was headed home in his chariot. As the Ethiopian eunuch rode along, he read from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. Philip asked the man if he understood what he was reading, and the man invited Philip up into his chariot to teach him. As the two men discussed the writings, "Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus" (Acts 8:35). What happened next is almost breathtaking in its powerful simplicity:

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him (Acts 8:36, 38).

Isn't that a remarkable story? There was no fuss, no argument and no debate over baptism. The good news of Jesus was shared, and an earnest God-seeker responded in a straightforward way to what he heard.

One of the sad ironies of the Christian faith is how something as simple and beautiful as baptism has become so complicated and is often characterized by ugly debates. The Ethiopian eunuch asked, "Why shouldn't I be baptized?" Because baptism is viewed in so many conflicting ways today, we find ourselves asking, "Why should I be baptized?" That is the subject of this tract. Some of the most important reasons the Bible gives for our being baptized include the following:

#1 – Jesus Commanded It

At the end of Jesus' physical ministry on earth, following his death, burial and resurrection from the dead, he met with his disciples on a mountain in Galilee. There he gave them what is known today as "The Great Commission." Notice the place of baptism in his instructions to the disciples:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20).

Our first reason for being baptized is the command of Jesus. Baptism begins as his idea, not ours.

#2 – The Early Church Practiced It

On the day that the New Testament church began, a huge crowd from all over the world had gathered in Jerusalem. When the Apostle Peter spoke to these people, they were convicted of their sins and asked, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number (Acts 2:38, 41).

From the very beginning of the church, baptism was practiced. Everywhere the gospel message went, people were baptized. As a matter of fact, it has often been observed that the New Testament never describes an unbaptized Christian.

#3 – It Is Part of the New Birth

One night a Jewish leader named Nicodemus came to see the Savior. Jesus' first words to this man were these:

I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again (John 3:3).

Predictably, Nicodemus was confused by this strange statement. However, Jesus continued,

I tell you the truth, no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5).

People today sometimes speak of being a "born-again Christian." Jesus' words to Nicodemus indicate that a "born- again Christian" is the only kind of Christian there is! Years later, the Apostle Paul spoke of this same connection between being born again and baptism.

He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit... (Titus 3:5).

#4 – It Is How Saving Faith is Expressed

During the Apostle Paul's second missionary journey, he traveled to Europe and preached in the Greek city of Philippi. Before long, opposition arose and he found himself beaten and thrown into a prison.

That night, an earthquake shook the jail and opened the doors of the prison. The jailer thought everyone had escaped, and he almost took his life in despair. When he found that everyone was still there, he called for a light, rushed in to where Paul and his co-worker were, and asked them, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Paul responded, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household" (Acts 16:31). Because the jailer knew nothing of the God who created the universe or of Jesus who had died on the Cross, Paul "spoke the word of the Lord to him" (Acts 16:32). What follows is the way the jailer naturally expressed that evening the faith that Paul had said would save him:

At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole family (Acts 16:33-34).

The jailer's baptism was an act of faith. After he was baptized, it was said "he had come to believe in God."

#5 – It Is Participation in the D/B/R of Jesus

Baptism is sometimes described as merely "an outward sign of an inward grace," in other words "merely a symbol." However, the Apostle Paul said that it is much, much more. He described it as a participation in the Death, Burial and Resurrection of Jesus.

All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:3-4).

Just as Jesus participated in our experience when he was baptized (Matthew 3:13-17), we participate in the saving work of Jesus when we are "baptized into Christ Jesus."

#6 – It Is Where We Enter Christ

"In Christ" (see Ephesians 1) is where we all want to be! But how do we get there? Two New Testament texts answer this question in a very clear way. One is the statement just mentioned about being "baptized into Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:3). The second text is found in Paul's letter to the Galatians.

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 (Galatians 3:26-27).

#7 – It Is Our Public Pledge of Allegiance to Christ

My wife and I dated for two years before we married. During that time we spent countless hours together, and we grew to love each other deeply. However, in those months before we married, we both knew we were free to break up and walk away from the relationship. All of that changed on May 31, 1980, our wedding day. In a church building in Ashland, Ohio, we stood before God, family and friends and pledged to love and be faithful to each other "until death do us part." After our wedding, leaving each other was no longer an option; we had made a sacred pledge.

Baptism is sometimes, for very good reason, called "the believer's wedding ceremony." It is an act that says to the whole world that we are giving our lives to Jesus.

...this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ... (1 Peter 3:21).

#8 – It Is the Place Where God Forgives

We are saved "by grace...through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). That is the "how" of salvation. Baptism is simply the place where and the time when God declares our sins are forgiven.

"Repent and be baptized... for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38; see a parallel passage in Matthew 26:28).

"Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).

Baptism is the right answer if we are clear about the question we are asking. The How? of salvation is faith; the When? and Where? of salvation is baptism.

#9 – It Is Where We Receive the Holy Spirit

An amazing truth of every Christian's life is that God's Holy Spirit lives within us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)! When we become Christians, we become living temples of God. This reality is not based on some emotional experience we have; it is an objective truth based on our baptism into Christ. The promise given to the people on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 was that those who repented and were baptized into Christ would "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

The Holy Spirit comes into our lives, works to change us into the

likeness of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Galatians 5:22-26) and intercedes for us in our struggle to pray (Romans 8:26). This incredible new relationship between us and the Holy Spirit begins with our baptism.

WHY SHOULDN'T I BE BAPTIZED?

We conclude where we began on the Gaza road with Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Have you heard the good news about Jesus? Do you now believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God who died for the sins of the world? Are you willing to turn from sin and declare to the world that you are giving yourself to Christ? If so, do you now find yourself asking what the Ethiopian asked on the road to Gaza: "Why shouldn't I be baptized?" It is a great question, and salvation is waiting for you, too, at the foot of the Cross in the waters of baptism.

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