

WHY SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

By Dr. Bruce McLarty

In the early days of the church, an angel of God instructed a man named Philip to go to the desert road which ran to Gaza. There Philip 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 into his chariot to teach him. As the two men discussed the writings, *"Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him" (Acts 8:35)*. What happened next is almost breathtaking in its powerful simplicity.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, *"Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"*; *"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."* (Acts 8:36, 38)

Isn't that a remarkable story? We find 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. The Ethiopian eunuch asked, "What prevents me from being baptized?" Because baptism is viewed in so many conflicting ways today, we find ourselves asking, "Why should I be baptized?" Some of the most important reasons the New Testament 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 has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Our first reason for being baptized is the command of Jesus. Baptism was 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 each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins..."* then *"...those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls" (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.

Some people today are asking, "Why should I be baptized?" We have already seen that baptism is important because Jesus commanded it and the early church practiced it. Let us look at other reasons given in the New Testament.

#3 - It is Part of the New Birth

One night a Jewish leader named Nicodemus went to see the Savior. Jesus' first words to this man were *"...unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3)*. Predictably, Nicodemus was confused by this strange statement. However, Jesus continued: *"unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5)*.

People often speak of being "born-again Christians." Jesus' words to Nicodemus indicate that a "born-again Christian" is the only kind of Christian! Years later, the apostle Paul drew this same parallel between a new birth 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 Paul's second missionary journey, he traveled to Europe and preached in Philippi. Before long, opposition arose; he found himself beaten and thrown into a prison. Acts 16 tells of that night, when an earthquake shook the jail and opened the doors of the prison. The jailer thought everyone had escaped, and he almost took his own life in despair. When he found that all the prisoners were still present, he called for a light and rushed to Paul and his coworker. He asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (v. 30). Paul responded, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household" (v. 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" (v. 32). The jailer expressed his faith in Paul's words of salvation as he washed their wounds. The jailer's baptism was an act of faith. After the account of his baptism, we read that he had "believed in God with his whole household" (v. 34).

#5 - It is Participation in Christ's Death, Burial, and Resurrection

Baptism is described by some as "an outward sign of an inward grace" - in other words, "merely a symbol." Paul said that it is much more. He described it as a participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus:

"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" (Romans 6:3, 4).

We participate in His saving work when we are baptized into Him.

#6 - It is How We Enter Christ

"In Christ" (see Ephesians 1) is where we all want to be, but how do we get there? We are baptized into Him (Romans 6:3). Then we are "sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" and are "clothed" in Him (Galatians 3:26, 27).

We have already seen six reasons for one who believes in Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of mankind to submit to baptism. Even more reasons can be given.

#7 - It is a 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 grew to love each other deeply. However, in those months before we married, we both knew we were free to end 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 tells the whole world we are giving our lives to Jesus.

#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 marks the place where and the time when God declares our sins to be forgiven.

"Repent, and each of you be baptized...for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38b; see Matthew 26:28).

"Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins" (Acts 22:16b).

"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" (1 Peter 3:21).

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 on the day of Pentecost 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?"

Have you heard the good news about Jesus Christ? Do you believe that He is the Son of God who died for the sins of the world? Will you turn from sin and declare to the world that you are giving yourself to Him? Perhaps you find yourself asking the kind of question the Ethiopian asked on the road to Gaza: "Why shouldn't I be baptized?" (see Acts 8:36b). It is a great question. Salvation is waiting for you at the foot of the cross, in the waters of baptism.

Dr. Bruce McLarty holds degrees from Harding, The Harding School of Theology, and Ashland Theological Seminary. He served as president of Harding University in Searcy, AR from 2013-2022. Additionally, Dr. McLarty has preached for congregations in Searcy; Cookeville and Memphis, TN; Marks, MS; and Williford, AR. He is presently serving as Minister-in-Residence at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, TN. He is married to the former Ann Hutson. They have two daughters and three grandchildren.

Published by Gospel Tracts International™
Fayetteville, AR 72701, USA