

The Purpose of Baptism (2nd)

(We are continuing to study the purpose of baptism. In this day of emphasizing emotions and experiences over spiritual wisdom, it is essential that the purpose of baptism is ascertained.)

In our last study, we gave a general summary of our study of baptism so far and began looking at the purpose of baptism. After listing some of the purposes, we reviewed somewhat that baptism is a sign of repentance towards God. Now let us consider that baptism is a sign of obedience to the gospel.

Scripture plainly declares that baptism is a command. After Peter preached the gospel to those at Cornelius' house and there were evident signs belief, he asked those that came with him if there were any reasons that they should not be baptized. Then Peter "commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord," Acts 10:48. By this we find that the repentant believer is obligated or duty bound to be baptized. He has no options. Too often today people consider baptism to be merely an option or ritual to be performed for membership into the society of a local congregation. This is not the case. Baptism is a conscientious decision of a repentant sinner to obey the gospel of God. The people who showed "fruits meet for repentance" and confessed their sins were baptized when they heard John the Baptist preaching the gospel of the kingdom. On the day of Pentecost, when those who heard the preaching of Peter and the others were pricked in their heart, and asked "what shall we do?" were commanded not only to repent, but to be baptized. (The words for repent and be baptized are both in the imperative mood which indicates a command.) Again, when Ananias was instructed by the Lord to go to Paul in Damascus, he commanded Paul to "arise, and be baptized," (Acts 22:16). Therefore, no repentant sinner has any excuse for refusing to be baptized unless he is providentially hindered such as the thief on the cross. I am persuaded if he were by some extraordinary way released from the cross he would have sought baptism. Equally, a repentant sinner who may be lying on his death bed would be providentially hindered or he otherwise would be baptized.

Several years ago, I was blessed to meet and know Brother George Davis. Previously, he was a Hollywood actor, but the Lord converted him and his wife out of that ungodly lifestyle. Brother Davis later was diagnosed with ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) or as commonly called Lou Gehrig's Disease. As Brother George was getting to the latter stages and could barely walk, he requested baptism. When told that he might not survive such an act, he was not deterred and insisted on following His Lord in obedience to the gospel. I can still remember the glorious day when Brother George was carefully assisted into the river and baptized by the minister. What a wonderful testimony of gospel obedience! The last time I saw Brother Davis he was totally confined to the bed and could hardly talk, but his testimony of Christ and his love for the Lord was still glowing. Indeed, by such faith in obedience to the gospel, "he being dead yet speaketh," Heb. 11:4.

Brother Davis' example reflects the pattern found in the Scriptures. As we study the history of Christianity in the Gospels and in the book of Acts we find that the believers were obedient to the gospel and were baptized. There is no example (other than the thief on the cross who was, as I previously stated, providentially hindered) of a believer in the New Testament that was not baptized. Just as the repentant sinner obeyed and was baptized by John and the disciples of the Lord as listed in the Gospels, we find the same with the believers in the book of Acts. Clearly, the first outward act of Christian obedience is submitting to the command of the Lord to be baptized.

Obviously, God does not accept obedience by proxy or by an unconscious act. An infant does not make a conscious act of obedience unto the Lord. Equally, when a child is submitted for baptism by a parent or some other authority, it is unacceptable to God. As I said, God does not accept obedience by proxy. There is no outward sign of repentance and belief by an infant, neither is there a conscious act of

obedience to the command of the Lord, and the infant is unable to present himself for baptism. Therefore, infant baptism or sprinkling does not fulfill the purpose of submitting to this command of God.

In close connection to this topic is giving up one's self to God. Though baptism is a one-time act, the reason for submitting to it is not just for the act; it is an open door (if you will) to a life of submission to the Lord. Baptism in New Testament was not something a person did as a simple act for satisfying the peers. For the person who was baptized it indicated that he had "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God," I Thess. 1:9. It was a proof of the believers' devotion to the Lord. Too often today baptism is simply seen as something done so that one is logged on the roll of a congregation or a statistic to be entered for a "conversion record." Scriptures teaches otherwise. One of the purposes of baptism is a public testimony that a person has given up his life to deny self, the world, and all oppositions to the Lord and to devoted himself to the commands of God.

Another reason for baptism is a sign that one is devoted to walking in obedience to God in newness of life. This is essentially the same thing that we discussed regarding giving up one's self to God, but it is different in that we are looking at it from a different angle. The first is making the commitment to the Lord; this is manifesting the genuineness of the commitment with a walk or lifestyle devoted to walking in that obedience. Modern evangelism is committed to getting people to make a decision and then affirming one to be a believer at death regardless of the life one has lived. Such philosophy of modern Christianity is interested in the "born again experience" and the life in the hereafter, but hardly concerned with the life in between. This is foreign to the clear teaching of the Word of God. The Scriptures plainly declare that the sheep know the Good Shepherd, hear His voice, believe on Him, and follow Him, John 10:14, 27, 28. Furthermore, we are told that those whom the Lord loves He chastens so that they "might be partakers of his holiness," Heb. 12:6, 10. Those who "obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" shall be receive in the "flaming fire" of "vengeance" "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels," II Thess. 1:7-10. Indeed, baptism is not a light thing and the Scriptures clearly reveal that therepentant sinner that was baptized in the days of the New Testament followed this lifestyle. They did not live after the world. They followed after the Lord in obedience unto death. This was the argument of Paul in Romans chapter six. He declared the inconsistency of living in sin after one was baptized, Rm. 6:1-12. Let us note some statements of these verses by the Baptist, Robert Haldane. Concerning Romans 3:3, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized unto His death?" Haldane said, "In this and the following verses, Paul proceeds to give his full answer to the objection he had supposed, by showing that *the sanctification of believers rests on the same foundation, and springs from the same source, as their justification, namely, their union with Jesus Christ, and therefore, so far from their being contrary to each other, they are not merely in perfect harmony, but absolutely inseparable; and not only so, but the one cannot exist without the other.* ... The rite of baptism exhibits Christians as dying, as buried, and as risen with Christ. ... This rite, then, proceeds on the fact that they have died with Him who bore their sins." Then following up with comments on verse four, he said, "The death of Christ was the means by which sin was destroyed, and His burial the proof of the reality of His death. Christians are therefore represented as buried with Him by baptism into His death, in token that they really died with Him; and if buried with Him, it is not that they shall remain in the grave, but that, as Christ arose from the dead, they should also rise. Their baptism, then, is the figure of their complete deliverance from the guilt of sin, signifying that God places to their account the death of Christ as their own death: it is also a figure of their purification and resurrection for the service of God. ... Believers are dead to the guilt of sin, and if so, the ground of their separation from God being removed His almighty power is engaged and asserted to cause them to walk with their risen Lord in that new life which they derive from Him. It was, then, the purpose of Christ's death that His people should become dead to sin, and alive unto righteousness." And lastly, from Haldane's comments on verse twelve, "It should here be remarked, that although the apostle had expressly taught that they who are justified are likewise sanctified, yet as God is pleased to cause His people to act with Him in their

sanctification—so that they shall both will and do, because He worketh in them to will and to do of His good pleasure—the earnest exhortations to obedience, and the motives held forth in the conclusion of the chapter, are entirely consistent with what had been declared as to the certainty of their sanctification resting on the power of God, and to be viewed as outward means which God employs to effect this purpose.” *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 243-254.

Many such like quotes could be given from both Protestants and Baptists to support that one of the reasons or purposes of baptism is a sign of the believer walking in obedience to God in newness of life. There are some other purposes of baptism that we desire to cover, but our time is up for today and the Lord willing we will cover them in our next session.