

Why Be Baptized?

Text: I Peter 3:18-22

The apostle Peter sometimes scratched his head as he tried to understand the writings of his brother in Christ, the apostle Paul. Well, students of the Bible are still struggling to fully understand what Peter was saying. Identifying who the spirits were and when they were spoken to has led to a number of interpretations. Since I am a simple person I want to choose a single item from these verses. Although it is simple it makes a powerful statement about baptism. In verse 21 Peter used a legal term, somewhat like we would use the word "contract." The **pledge, demand** or the **appeal** is to a good conscience. Before the contract was signed the person was asked, "Do you pledge to obey and fulfill the terms of this contract?" His answer had to be "Yes, I do" or he could not sign. The converts to Jesus desiring baptism they were asked, if they intended to obey God and serve Him and to break with their sinful past. If they had reservations in their hearts, or deliberately lied, they would not have a good conscience and would wilt under persecution.

The act of baptism has been a source of controversy throughout church history.

1. Who is a proper candidate for baptism? It seems quite clear from the text that Peter considered baptism as a thoughtful action from the believer. One might say, "I was baptized when I was born." Well that may have been a thoughtful act by the parents, but the infant certainly didn't exercise repentance and faith. Perhaps it could be seen as a prayer from the parents that when the child came to understand their fallen condition he or she would turn to Christ in personal faith. But salvation is a personal decision and cannot be accomplished for another even though we might want that power.

The first chapter of the believing church seemed to be clear in this matter.

- Acts 2:41: those who accepted his message were baptized.
- Acts 8:12: but when they believed Phillip as he preached the good news of the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus, they were baptized,
- Acts 8:35-37: Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. 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?"
- The desperate Philippian jailor asked, "What must I do to be saved?" The answer in Acts 16:30-34 was "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and all the others in his house and then immediately he and all his family were baptized. His baptism came after his confession of faith.

2. The mode is a second issue which has caused conflict among believers. When the King James translators came together to publish an

English Bible they didn't translate or define the Greek word baptizo. They transliterated it: The beta they made a b, the alpha became an a, the pi a p, the tau a t, the iota an a, the zeta a z. The epsilon an e

So the word baptize that clearly meant "immersion, dip or plunge" lost its original meaning. The denominations have defined the word according to their traditions instead of the actual meaning of the word. This is a word that was used in dyeing a garment or a ship that sank. With due respect for those translators if they had translated the word "immerse" they would have been executed. The reverend and respected Anglican Bishop Ryle explained the mode of baptism as "Death is down, burial is whole and baptism is up."

3. To publicly identify with Jesus. Read I Corinthians 10:1-2

The emancipated slaves from Egypt walked between two walls of water with the cloud of glory above them established Moses as their leader. So when one publicly is immersed one is saying "Jesus is my Savior, my CEO and Leader."

4. To picture the cleansing from my sins. Read Acts 22:16, as we bathe the body with water the water of baptism pictures the blood of Jesus shed on our behalf.

Without the blood there no remission. The important phrase is "Calling on the name of the Lord." Romans 10:13, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

5. To preach the Gospel, I Corinthians 15:1-4. It like the Lord's Supper pictures the historic facts upon which our faith is based.

6. To add my story to the book of Acts.

- The 3000 on the day of Pentecost, 2:41,
- The Ethiopian Eunuch in 8:36-38.
- The Hero of church planters in 9:19,
- The entrepreneur named Lydian and her family in 16:15
- The family of the Philippian Jailor 16:33

7. To offer my body to God. The pledge "if it means my life, I will be loyal to Jesus." The baptism is a burial in water and essentially says, "My faith in Jesus might cost me my physical body." It certainly did in the reformation when Ana Baptists like Baltasar Hubmaier, Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz were murdered by 1530 because they dared to baptize again believers. Their accusers said drowning befitted them and called it the 3rd baptism. But the Ana Baptists died in good conscience based on the verses found in I John 5:6-8 this was a foundational verse, verse 7 my blood if needs be. And it does still mean that to many in China, in Muslim countries and the suffering church worldwide.

Let me share the decision of two of our Baptist heroes. [Here I share the story of Adoniram and Ann Judson as they were on their 114 day voyage to India changed their minds about baptism. Upon their arrival they were immersed by William Ward. It was costly indeed since they lost the support of the Congregational Church. But this act was the birth of American Baptist missions. But they did in based on a contract with the Lord.