

Great Questions of the Bible: “Unto What Then Were You Baptized?”

A great many queries are recorded in scripture that point us to important and profound answers. Today’s question follows the one we studied last week, and that I pray every person would come to ask: What must I do to be saved? If you recall, we learned from the book of **Acts** that on the three occasions where that question was specifically asked, the result was that each penitent querist was baptized upon hearing and believing the gospel.

Acts 2:37,41 “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?...Then they that gladly received his word were baptized...”

Acts 9:6,18 “And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?...And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.”

Acts 16:30,33 “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?...And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.”

That leads us to another great question, a question about baptism. It’s recorded in **Acts 19**.

Acts 19:1-3 “And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism.”

Now, why would Paul ask such a question? Does it really matter when, how and why a person is baptized? Let’s look to the scriptures for the answer to that great question.

As we studied last week, baptism is a direct commandment of our Lord and of His apostles. It is impossible to fulfill the commandment of Jesus in the great commission, and impossible to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gospel of His kingdom, and impossible to obey God while refusing to be baptized in water or refusing to preach baptism. The scriptures teach that every person who believes in Jesus Christ is to be baptized.

Mark 16:16 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

I know that this passage is referring to baptism in water, because as the apostles fulfilled the great commission and preached the gospel to sinners, those who came to believe the gospel were immediately baptized in water.

Acts 8:38 “And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.”

Acts 10:47 “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?”

John 3:5 “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

I would assume that all of us, for the most part, who profess belief in Jesus Christ, believe *something* about baptism, and have at some point been baptized. I want to be very clear today that the question is NOT “Do we believe in baptism?” That’s not what we’re asking, nor is it what the apostle Paul was asking in our text. Rather the question is “What do we believe *about* baptism?” What were you taught about baptism? How were you baptized? What was the reason for your baptism?

Let’s look again at our text:

Acts 19:1-3 “And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism.”

I don’t believe that the people here are saying they didn’t know that the Holy Spirit existed; simply that they had not heard that the Holy Spirit had been given to believers beginning on the day of Pentecost. This told Paul that something was amiss with their conversion. If they didn’t know this, then who preached to them? What had they heard and not heard? So, Paul asked them what they had been baptized for, if they had no knowledge of the gift of the Holy Spirit, as Peter had preached back on the day of Pentecost. They told him they were baptized unto John’s baptism.

Now, John the Baptist’s baptism wasn’t inherently wrong. After all, he was a messenger of God, sent before Jesus Christ to prepare the Jewish people for the beginning of Christ’s work and establishment of His kingdom. John’s purpose was to point God’s people toward the kingdom that Christ would come preaching, and soon thereafter establish after His death and resurrection. The nation of Israel was a spiritually dead and corrupt nation at the time that Christ came into the world. Their hearts were hard, and in order for Jesus to plant the seed of the kingdom there and have anything grow from it, He had to have that hardened soil broken up. Well, that was John’s task.

Matthew 3:1-2 “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

In so doing, John was preparing the people for the beginning of Jesus Christ’s work upon this earth. When the people determined to repent of their sins, they were baptized by John in view of the forgiveness of sins that Christ was about to bring to the world.

Matthew 3:5-6 “Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.”

They couldn't realize the full remission or forgiveness of sins at this point because Jesus had not died; His blood had not yet been shed. But they were baptized in view of or in prospect of the sacrifice that Jesus *would* make, that would go back and cleanse those sins. So, for that reason, John's baptism was *for the remission of sins*.

Luke 3:3 "And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;"

There was nothing wrong with John's baptism. John was sent by God to preach that message to them. His baptism was scriptural in how it was carried out: they were immersed by John in the Jordan River, in water, for the remission of their sins.

The problem you have in our text is that there were still some disciples of John lingering about who didn't understand that all of those things had been fulfilled, and that the commission of John's baptism had expired. They didn't understand that the kingdom had now come, and that all of the things that John's baptism had pointed *forward* to were now a reality. These disciples of John were preaching a baptism that now served no relevant purpose.

So, what was Paul's response to that? He *didn't* say, "Well, you know, it doesn't matter. As long as you were being baptized to obey the Lord, that's all that makes any difference. You were sincere in your obedience." No, the Bible tells us his response.

Acts 19:4-5 "Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Here were some people who had to be *re-baptized*, if I may use that term. Notice, these people had already been immersed in water. They believed they were obeying the Lord when they did so. They were sincere in their baptism, but their baptism was not acceptable to God at that time. Therefore, they were baptized in the name of, or by the authority of, the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, they submitted themselves to the one baptism of the New Testament.

Among other things, that tells me that it could be necessary for someone even today, to be re-baptized. I want to look at some reasons why people would need to be baptized or immersed again, and I hope you'll think seriously about this in view of your past baptism, if you've been baptized. Who needs to be re-baptized? Unto what were you baptized?

First of all, any person who was sprinkled or had water poured on them in place of baptism needs to be baptized correctly, scripturally, according to the definition of baptism. Sprinkling and pouring are not forms of Bible baptism. Some denominations have replaced or substituted sprinkling or pouring in the place of immersion, but that is NOT baptism according to the Bible. In fact, that's not baptism at all, according to the very definition of the word. The Greek word that the Bible writers used, that we translate *baptize* is the word *baptizo*, which simply means *to immerse, submerge or plunge*. It means *to overwhelm with something*. Regardless of what element may be specified in the given context, the act of

baptizing means to immerse or overwhelm a person in that substance or element. The apostles were not *sprinkled* with the Holy Spirit; the apostles were *baptized* or *overwhelmed* or *immersed* in power. The same is true of water in the case of the believers' baptism. (When I say that, I'm speaking of the baptism of one who has come to believe in Jesus Christ.) It is a complete covering in water.

When the Ethiopian nobleman heard Philip preach Jesus to him, he immediately wanted to be baptized. He obviously knew what the word meant when Philip used it in his discourse. Read what he said.

Acts 8:36 "And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?"

When he had confessed his faith in Christ, he was baptized.

Acts 8:38-39 "And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing."

Besides that, the Bible teaches us that baptism is a *form* or *likeness* of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:4 "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Romans 6:17 "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you."

Baptism fits that mold of Jesus dying, being buried and rising again.

Colossians 2:12 "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."

How would sprinkling or pouring represent those events? The answer is, they don't and they are not scriptural forms of baptism. So, if you were sprinkled in place of baptism, then you need to be baptized scripturally.

Second of all, if you were sprinkled as an infant, or were baptized as a small child without understanding, you need to be re-baptized or baptized scripturally. My friend, the Bible doesn't give one single example of a baby being baptized, and there's a reason for that. Every time baptism took place in the New Testament, it was after a person heard the gospel preached, believed what they heard, and repented of their sins. **Acts 2** is a classic example. An infant or small child doesn't even have the ability or capacity to do those things. Nor do they have sins in their hearts to repent of if they could. Sin is a transgression of the law, and a child—without the intellectual or moral capacity to understand the law of God and choose to accept or reject it—can't commit sin.

I John 3:4 “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.”

So, baptism is not for him/her until they reach the age at which they are accountable for their moral and spiritual choices, and can understand the basic concepts of sin and salvation through Jesus Christ. Infant baptism and the act of ‘confirming’ children is not a Bible practice. It is a tradition of Catholicism and some Protestant denominations that originated long after the command of baptism was actually given by our Lord. Jesus said that we are to *believe and be baptized*, Peter said that we are to *repent and be baptized*, and a small child or baby cannot do either one. So, if you were sprinkled as a child or did not have the ability to understand the difference between sin and righteousness and what it means to repent and place faith in Jesus Christ and weigh these important matters of the soul, you were not a candidate for baptism at that time, and you now need to be baptized by immersion for the remission of your sins.

Thirdly, if you believe that you were forgiven of your sins and entered into Christ before you were baptized, then you need to be baptized again. Why: because not only the *design* and *form* of baptism are significant, but the *purpose* of baptism is significant. I’ll remind you again of what the apostle Peter told the believers when he preached the gospel on the day of Pentecost in **Acts 2**.

Acts 2:38 “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission you sins...”

Now, I want you to listen very closely now: the overwhelming majority of preachers and churches today do NOT believe that baptism is *for the remission of sins*, and they DO NOT baptize people in view of that purpose. They simply DO NOT. Now, you have to be pointed in how you ask the question of them. The question is not, “Do you/they believe in baptism?” 99% of preachers today believe in some concept of baptism. That’s not the question. Neither is, “Should I be baptized?” or “Is it good to be baptized?” The majority of preachers will advise you, if you ask, to be baptized along the way. The question is not even, “Is baptism important?” Many will acknowledge that baptism is, to some extent, significant.

The question is this: “Is baptism FOR the remission of sins?” Peter says it is. The question is, “Is baptism therefore essential to being saved by faith in Christ?”

I Peter 3:21 “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us...”

That doesn’t mean that we merit salvation in baptism, or that we deserve salvation because we were baptized. But it means that when we submit in faith to Christ’s commandment, we therefore are saved by what Christ Jesus did for us upon Calvary. Peter plainly tells us that in that way, baptism saves us. The question is, “Can my sins be washed away without calling upon Christ in baptism? Can I be saved without having my sins forgiven and washed away?”

Acts 22:16 “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

Can a person have a new life in Christ without being baptized? Paul said he can’t.

Romans 6:3-4 “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

The question is also, “Can a man be ‘in Christ’ without being baptized?” Once again, Paul says he can’t.

Galatians 3:27 “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ?”

Here’s how you know the difference between Bible baptism and the baptism that men and the religious world and most religious denominations teach today: they tell you that you receive the remission of sins, and *then* be baptized later. They tell you that you enter into Christ, *then* you can be baptized. They tell you that you die to your sins and walk in newness of life, *then* you’re baptized later to picture that. But that’s not what Paul said. Paul said that we are baptized *into* Christ, we put on Christ *in* baptism, we’re buried with him *by* baptism and rise *from* baptism to walk in newness of life. We’re not baptized *after* that: that all occurs *when we are baptized*. That’s a very, very significant difference that points to the purpose of baptism.

Friend, if you believe that baptism is merely a church tradition or ordinance, then you don’t understand what the Bible teaches about baptism. It is not an ordinance of the church for Christians to keep. We’re not baptized once we’re in the Lord’s church; we’re baptized on the way into it.

I Corinthians 12:13 “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body...”

This passage teaches us that baptism places us into the body—the *one* body—of Jesus Christ. It is the obedience of faith that the sinner must submit to in order to wash in the blood of Jesus Christ and enter into a new relationship with Him and come forth to walk in a new life.

If you believe that baptism is just a symbol, then you don’t understand what the Bible teaches about baptism. Many believe that baptism pictures the Christian’s death to sin and his resurrection to a new life that took place when they knelt at an altar. That’s why denominations place so little emphasis on it. That’s why people often believe that they are saved and then choose to be baptized at a later time; because he has been taught that is nothing more than a symbolic act picturing his earlier conversion to Christ. But the Bible never says any of those things.

Romans 6:5 “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:”

Colossians 2:12 “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”

The thing that baptism symbolizes is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In baptism, we participate in those things by dying to sin, coming into new life with Him by having our sins forgiven and washed away in His blood. If you didn’t understand that or if that wasn’t the reason you were baptized, then the baptism you were taught came from man, and not the Bible.

Finally, if you were baptized just to join a denomination, then you need to be re-baptized. The Bible does teach that baptism identifies us with the body of Jesus Christ (**I Corinthians 12:13**), but not in the way that most people think. In baptism, we're forgiven of our sins, and are therefore saved through faith in Jesus Christ. The result of that is that we are then considered by the Lord to be one of His. We become part of His family, members of His church, called out of sin, added to the assembly of believers by God Himself.

Acts 2:41 "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

Acts 2:47 "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

Our names are then written in the Book of Life and that makes us citizens of His kingdom and members of His church. Not voted into the church by men, then baptized once we are voted in. That's not the idea. The Lord adds us to the church when we are saved; that's the purpose and the design of baptism.

In light of these things, I would ask you today: unto what then were you baptized?