

# Does Baptism Matter?

**Introduction.** When his first child was born, Alexander Campbell was once more confronted with the practice of infant baptism. Unable to produce either command or example of infant baptism in the New Testament, Campbell decided not to sprinkle his baby. His study concluded that baptism was by immersion for the remission of sins. Ultimately, he decided to be baptized scripturally, and he also discovered others wished to be baptized too. On Wednesday, June 12, 1812, Campbell and his wife, Margaret Brown, his sister Dorthea, his father Thomas, James and Sarah Henon, and James Foster were all immersed in Buffalo Creek. Earl West said, "Before long, practically the whole Brush Run church had followed suit."

Does baptism matter? It did to Jesus. His cousin John baptized Him in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13-17). Does baptism matter? It did to about 3,000 Jews on Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Does baptism matter? It did to the Samaritans (Acts 8:12). Does baptism matter? It did to an Ethiopian nobleman on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza (Acts 8:38). Does baptism matter? It did to Saul of Tarsus, the "chief" of sinners, who would become the apostle Paul (Acts 9:18; 22:16; 1 Timothy 1:15). Does baptism matter? It did to a centurion from Caesarea named Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:47). Does baptism matter? It did to Lydia and her household (Acts 16:15). Does baptism matter? It did to the Philippian jailer and his household, even at midnight (Acts 16:33). Did baptism matter? It did to the Corinthians (Acts 18:8). Does baptism matter? It did to 12 mistaken men in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7).

## ***I. To Do The Will Of God***

- A. Why does baptism matter? Why did it matter to Jesus, Cornelius, or Paul? First and foremost baptism is necessary to do the will of God. Jesus' baptism is a wonderful example for us to follow because He did His Father's will (Matthew 3:15). Jesus did not need to be baptized as you or I for He had no sins for which to be forgiven (2 Corinthians 5:21). Yet, because His Father commanded it of Him, He did it (cp. Matthew 28:19). We are asked to walk in the footsteps of Jesus (1 Peter 2:21). So if we truly want to live as Jesus lived, then we too must obey God's will, including being baptized.
- B. Obeying God is proof of our love for Him (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3). Obeying God's word is also proof that we know His will (1 John 2:3-4). Finally, obeying God is proof of fulfilling "all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).
  1. In other words, we must keep all of God's commandments, including baptism. By quoting the Ten Commandments in two places (James 2:11; cp. Exodus 20:13-14; Deuteronomy 5:17-18), James implies that the principle enunciated in this verse was understood even in the days of the Old Testament.
  2. So whether now or then, to obey God means to keep all of His commandments. To fail to keep one commandment, whichever one it might be, is to fail to keep the whole law. In the context of James' remarks on partiality (2:1-13), whether we are guilty of adultery, murder, or bigotry, if we commit one of these sins, we have broken God's law.
- C. Likewise, if we believe Jesus is the Son of God, are willing to confess this before men, and are ready to change or repent of all our sins, if we fail to be baptized

for the remission of those sins, we have failed to accomplish all that God has required of us (1 Corinthians 9:21). This reminds us of the scribe who came to Jesus who was not “far from the kingdom of God” (Mark 12:28-34). He was almost saved. Today, there are too many people who take every step in the plan of salvation except water baptism for the remission of sins. They have obeyed part of the law but not all of it. They too are almost saved.

- D. Because baptism is the will of God, it is necessary to do it in the way in which He commands. Alexander Campbell found this to be true. People today practice sprinkling or pouring while neither way of baptizing can be found in the New Testament. It is evident that no apostle ever taught or practiced it; neither did any New Testament congregation.
  - 1. “Baptize” means to “immerse” or “bury” (Colossians 2:12). John baptized in Aenon near Jerusalem because there was “much water there” or pools of water sufficient enough to immerse people (John 3:23). Jesus and the eunuch were immersed (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:9-10; Acts 8:38-39).
  - 2. Therefore, to obey God, not only must one be baptized for the remission of sins but also he or she must be immersed in water.

## **II. To Be Saved**

- A. Why does baptism matter today? It is necessary in order to be saved. No one can be saved in sin. The only way to get out of sin is baptism which washes away our sins (Acts 22:16). The nobleman, jailer, and centurion, in essence, were all told the same. Each was baptized immediately to have their sins forgiven (Acts 8:38; 16:33; 10:48). Because our righteousness is as “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6), only baptism allows us to “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). Does baptism matter? Yes, if we want to go to Heaven (1 Peter 3:21).
- B. If I had only one verse on the subject of baptism to preach, it would be Acts 2:38. On the day the church began, Peter used the keys given to him and all the disciples by the Lord to open the kingdom (Matthew 16:19; 18:17-18), including hearing, believing, confessing, repenting, and being baptized. To the Jews who cried out for forgiveness for crucifying the Lord, Peter told them to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38).
  - 1. A casual study of the word “remission” reveals it literally means “forgiveness.” It is also translated as “deliverance” and “liberty” (cp. Luke 4:18).
  - 2. In order for anyone to enjoy the forgiveness of sins he must repent of his sins and be baptized for the remission of his sins in the “name of” or “by the authority of Jesus Christ” (Matthew 28:19; Colossians 3:17).
- C. Some today attempt to discredit the essentiality of baptism by teaching that in Acts 2:38 baptism is “because of the remission of sins” instead of “for the remission of sins.”
  - 1. This debate rests on the Greek preposition “for.” But of the 1,773 times in the original text that this preposition occurs it is never translated “because of.”
  - 2. Two parallel passages will help us understand the essentiality of baptism. John came “preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). The preposition is the same as in Acts 2:38. Did

John baptize people because their sins were already remitted? Of course not! He baptized “for the remission of sins” not “because of the remission of sins.”

- D. If baptism did not matter, why was everyone who was baptized in the New Testament baptized immediately? Notice particularly that the eunuch and the jailer were baptized immediately (Acts 8:37-39; 16:33). If they were saved by faith or already saved, why did they not wait until it was more convenient? It was because they knew that eternal life hung in the balance!

### **III. To Become A Member Of The Church**

- A. Does baptism matter? It does if we want to be in the church or the kingdom. No one can join the church, although “Join the church of your choice” is used a lot in the denominational world. This is inaccurate for two reasons. First, God has already chosen His church (Acts 20:28). Second, God does the adding to His church. How? The Bible says through baptism. We may join with a local group of saints, but only the Lord can add us to His church (Acts 2:47). This is identical to being “born of water” to “enter the kingdom” (John 3:3, 5).
- B. There are several descriptions of the church in the New Testament. One of the most often found is the body. The church is described as the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). Jesus is the only head of the church or body (Colossians 1:18). Jesus and His church are inseparable, just as a body and head are inseparable or as a husband and wife are inseparable (Ephesians 5:31).
1. The importance of this image of the church as the body of Christ is seen when Jesus is referred to as the “Savior of the body” (Ephesians 5:23). He is not the Savior of those outside His body or His church.
  2. How does someone get into the church? The same way someone gets into Jesus. The answer is baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27). But, if it is true that Christ and His church are inseparable, which they are, then it is equally true to say that all spiritual blessings are in His church, including salvation or the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:3, 7).
- C. Just as Jesus had only one physical body, so He has only one spiritual body or church (Ephesians 4:4). However, in a world where there are so many groups claiming to be Christ’s church, how does one find the church that Jesus or Paul talked about in the New Testament?
1. There are several discernible traits of the New Testament church that will help us identify it, including the name it wears (Romans 16:16), the name its members wear (Acts 11:26), the a cappella singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), and partaking the Lord’s Supper every Sunday (Acts 20:7).
  2. Water baptism is also a discernible trait, for when the church stops teaching or practicing water baptism for the remission of sins (cp. Ephesians 4:5), it ceases to be the New Testament church and becomes simply another denomination that teaches for “doctrine the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9).

**Conclusion.** Does baptism matter? It does if God, His Son, or the Bible matters to you. The word of God still says, and Jesus still says, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16).