

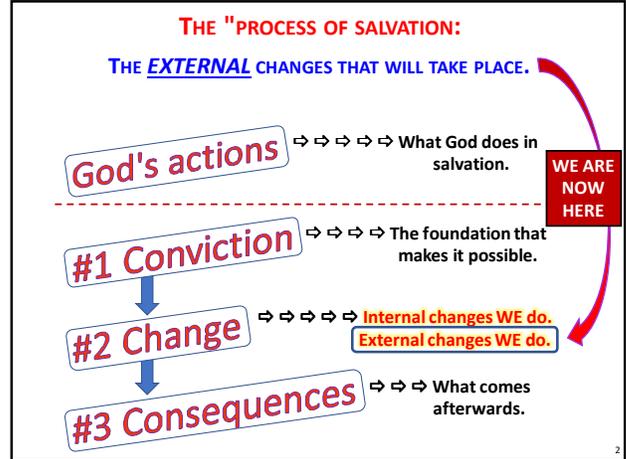


GOOD NEWS

for the unsaved WORLD!

(#120)

Baptism – Another external expression of an internal change.



Faith and repentance are INTERNAL changes. They occur in here.

But they express themselves out here ... as EXTERNAL changes.

TODAY = ANOTHER EXTERNAL CHANGE: "BAPTISM."

OUR FOCUS IS GOING TO BE ON "BAPTISM" AS DESCRIBED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

IF it does not resemble the type of "baptism" you are familiar with...

• YOU WILL HAVE TO DECIDE:
(Hopefully after examining the Scriptures and finding out for yourself.)

- ✓ How serious is the difference?
- ✓ To what degree does it matter?
- ✓ Do you need to make any changes in your response to the issue?

NEW TESTAMENT "BAPTISM" vs. **WHAT MANY GROUPS DO TODAY**

✓ Differences in what it means and why it's done.

THIS IS THE MOST SERIOUS ISSUE

THE REASON

- Is it a religious ritual that a person needs to do at a certain time in life?
- Does it earn salvation?
- Does it have any meaning at all?

If your reasons are significantly different from those given in the Bible, your "baptism" might not even be the same thing!

You might be using the same word, but it may have nothing to do with what the Bible is referring to!

⇨ In the New Testament, baptism was the external expression of internal changes. It was associated with repentance and faith (internal changes) and confession (an external change).

> All of which we have already examined.

It indicated a rejection of past ways and a commitment to following Jesus.

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, ..." Acts 2:38a (CSB)

Many of the Corinthians, when they heard, believed and were baptized. Acts 18:8b (CSB)

Confessing their sins, they were baptized... Matthew 3:6a (NIV)

If you have been baptized,
+ WHAT did it mean to you, and WHY did you do it? +

✓ Differences in when it's done.

SOME DIFFERENCES MAY BE SERIOUS **THE TIMING**

- Some groups baptize people long before they have repented/trusted. (Example: as infants.) Others baptize people after they have repented/trusted – weeks, months, or even years later.

⇒ In the New Testament, there was no significant time gap between repentance/faith and baptism. Repentance, trust, confession and baptism all tended to occur at approximately the same time – like several parts of a single "process."

⇒ Circumstances can complicate matters!

- Some people may be baptized thinking they are saved, but later realize they *weren't* saved. Should they be "rebaptized"?
- In some cases, there might not be any other Christians in the area to do the baptizing! What should the person do?

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✓ Differences in where it's done.

PERHAPS NOT VERY SERIOUS **THE LOCATION**

- Many groups baptize in a building, where it is observed mainly by other baptized people.
- Others baptize in public, where unsaved people can see that the person has chosen to follow Jesus.

⇒ In the New Testament, baptism was **public** - that is, out where unsaved people would know what the person was doing. (Today, it's often done privately, inside a closed building... even though the people doing it talk as though it's a "public" baptism!)

⇒ Circumstances can complicate matters!

- In some places, severe persecution may make it necessary that it be done secretly, with few people knowing about it.

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✓ Differences in how it's done.

PERHAPS THE LEAST SERIOUS **THE METHOD**

- Some groups baptize by sprinkling or pouring water over a person.
- Others baptize by immersion – but even then, different groups may use different methods of immersing.

⇒ In the New Testament, the word "baptism" **means** "immersion" – although it can symbolically refer to being "inundated" by trials. (Jesus described what he would experience on the cross as a "baptism" – Mark 10:38.)

⇒ However, Scripture does NOT give us specific details as to exactly "how" it should be done. Scripture does not make clear, direct statements about some of the things that people argue about today. (We should be careful about making demands where Scripture is silent!)

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THE BIBLE'S INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT "HOW TO DO IT" ARE LIMITED.

The Bible gives us all the answers we need, but not all the answers we might want.

⇒ The word "baptize" normally means "immerse"; but it does have symbolic uses. (Examples: It can mean "ceremonial washing" or "overwhelmed" by trials.)

⇒ Even if we conclude that the word "baptism" tells us something about its nature (i.e., immersion), it still does not give us many of the details that people tend to argue over.

- Though there are a number of references to baptism, and commands to "do it," there are no detailed instructions about techniques. There is no "do it this way..." passage.
- This absence of technical instructions would seem to indicate that, in terms of "where" and "how," there is room for variation. *If we needed to do it with a specific technique, God would have told us!* (Why we are doing it is more important.)

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WHAT DID THEY DO IN THE EARLY CHURCH?

⇒ All the early church records indicate that there was a degree of variation, though there was also a preferred method.

We will look at an example from an early church document, called "The Didache" or, "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles."



The earliest known manuscript fragment of this document that is still in existence. (More complete copies do exist.)

- This document is mentioned by some of the early church fathers, and appears to represent the views of many in the church near the end of the first century, perhaps soon after the last of the apostles had died.
- It suggests that there was a "preferred" method of baptism, but that other methods were "acceptable," if circumstances did not allow for the preferred method.

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These variations are typical of what we find in early church records.

The Didache, Chapter 7, Concerning baptism:

- 1 But concerning baptism, thus baptize ye: having first recited all these precepts [= the instructions/teachings mentioned in the previous chapters], baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in running [flowing] water;
- 2 but if thou hast not running water, baptize in some other water, and if thou canst not baptize in cold, in warm water;
- 3 but if thou hast neither, pour water three times on the head, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
- 4 But before the baptism, let him who baptizeth and him who is baptized fast previously, and any others who may be able. And thou shalt command him who is baptized to fast one or two days before.

[Chapter 7, from The Didache: The Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles through the Twelve Apostles. (C. Hoole, trans; 1900)]

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In the Bible	In early church records
In a lake or stream; in public. The word generally means "immersion"; but there is no passage detailing a precise technique.	In a lake or stream preferred; not always possible. Immersion preferred (not always totally submerged); other forms acceptable when necessary.
At the time of repentance, trust. It was done "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (= in Matthew), or "in the name of Jesus" (= in Acts). [Apparently no exact phrase needed repeated.]	At the time of repentance, trust. [It seems that sometimes there was a time delay, allowing the person to <u>first</u> learn more about salvation and what it meant to "follow Jesus."]*
<p>Knowing when it was done in the New Testament will help us to better understand some of the Scripture passages that link baptism to saving faith.</p> <p>*(In later years, ceremonial and ritualistic elements were added.)</p>	

To SUMMERIZE our observations:

SOME DIFFERENCES ARE MORE SERIOUS.

Why a person is baptized would be one of these.

SOME DIFFERENCES ARE LESS SERIOUS.

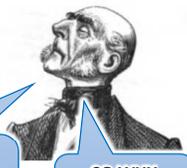
Some technique differences may even be necessary.

Some modern-day reasons for less-serious variations.

- In dry areas, water may be scarcely available.
- In countries with severe persecution, baptism in *public* could result certain death.
- Sometimes people make a "decision" for salvation without really knowing what it means. They should first learn what "following Jesus" is all about.
- In some groups, a *needed* variation (in the past) might have become the *normal* way of doing it (at the present).

ANOTHER ISSUE

WHAT IF I DON'T WANT TO BE BAPTIZED?



SO WHY SHOULD I GET BAPTIZED?

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS DIDN'T GET BAPTIZED... AND HE WAS STILL SAVED!

It may surprise you, but...

- You aren't the thief on the cross!
- You aren't nailed to a cross, in the last agonizing moments of your life, where no Roman soldier would be willing to take you down from the cross, so that you could be baptized!
- Besides, Jesus never commanded him to be baptized!

IT'S NOT THE RITUAL THAT MATTERS, BUT THE HEART!



EVEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT!

To **obey** is better than **sacrifice**, and to **heed** is better than **the fat of rams**.
1 Samuel 15:22b (NIV)

For I desire **mercy**, not **sacrifice**, and **acknowledgment of God** rather than **burnt offerings**.
Hosea 6:6 (NIV)

"... I will punish all those who are **circumcised in body** but not in spirit ... people [who] have **uncircumcised hearts**."
Je 9:25b, 26b (NLT)

A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision **merely outward and physical**. No, a person is a Jew who is one **inwardly**; and circumcision is circumcision **of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code**. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.
Romans 2:28-29 (NIV)

YES! ⇨ THE HEART ISSUE IS MORE IMPORTANT! And the ritual without the heart change is meaningless.

BUT:

↳ There is a **HUGE** difference between:

- ✓ Not being able to do something, and... I WANT TO, BUT CAN'T!
- ✓ Not being willing to do something that God commands. I CAN BUT DON'T WANT TO!

↳ The **BIGGER** issue is this:

- ✓ Why do you claim to be following Jesus, when you deliberately refuse to obey him?
Isn't this a "heart" issue?

YES! ⇨ Doing the "rituals" without a heart change has no value. Old Testament Israel was often like this!

My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to hear your words, but they do not put them into practice. Their mouths speak of love, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for **they hear your words but do not put them into practice**.
Ezekiel 33:31-32 (NIV)

⇨ BUT ARE YOU ANY DIFFERENT, when: you hear the words of Jesus and the apostles, commanding you to be baptized, yet: you do not put those words into practice?

THIS WEEK'S MISSION IS: THINK THROUGH THE ISSUES!

(And whether or not it implies the need for a decision or response.)

We have considered two issues:**① Is baptism necessary?**

We need to consider issues related to the "heart," the role of the "ritual," and the importance of "obedience" in this matter.

② If our baptism isn't identical to the one described in the New Testament, to what degree is it an issue?

- Some differences may be legitimate, or even necessary; others not. We know that Scripture does not give us specific details and commands on some of the issues; and the early church understood this as allowing a degree of flexibility in them.
- But there are other things that are expressly stated and clear (described, defined or commanded) ... and ought not to be changed.

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Another thing to do:**③ Have love and graciousness toward those who don't do things exactly your way!**

After all, the heart is more important than conformity to a technique not clearly stated in Scripture!



- We may think that the implied nuance of an obscure meaning of a difficult-to-translate form of a word "proves" that the specific baptism technique that we promote is the "right" one.
- But if it was that important, God would have made it clear enough that the average person – or at least many of them – would be able to see it!
- In such matters, we need to have grace, love and acceptance for those who don't see it our way.

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Credits

SCRIPTURE

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