

Paradise Lost and Restored: What is Baptism?

Ricardo Campos, Pastor Grace Chapel, Orange, CA November 9, 2014

I. Introduction

What does it mean to get baptized? Where did this practice come from? Is it simply a religious ritual or does it have a deeper meaning? Does God have a purpose for it, if so what? Do you have to be baptized to go to heaven? Can I get re-baptized?

II. Baptism: when God brings you into the Body of Christ and all its blessings

Baptism has been around since the beginning of time, God uses water and His Spirit when He brings something to life: the earth was born this way, Genesis 1:2, 9-10, and so is every human being, Genesis 2:7; Job 12:10; John 3:5—the mother's water breaks and God's Holy Spirit gives each baby the breath of life. And notice that the things God brings to life are always meant for a purpose: the earth was created to serve humanity, Genesis 1:28-29, and every human being was also made with a specific life in mind, Psalm 139:16.

Baptism has an element of cleansing, when God baptizes something, He's cleansing it, preparing it for His service. God sent John the Baptist to cleanse the people of their sins, calling them to a life of repentance in service to Him, Luke 3:1-14. We are likewise cleansed of our sins and baptism is a very real sign of that, Colossians 2:11-13.

When God baptizes you, He's calling you into His service, our baptism follows Jesus' baptism. When Jesus was baptized God the Father and God the Holy Spirit were ordaining Him for ministry which He began immediately after being baptized, Matthew 3:13-4:1. We likewise are ushered into God's service through baptism, Hebrews 10:19-25.

Baptism is the first step in becoming Jesus' disciple, at the end of Matthew Jesus commands all of us to make disciples and the first step in making a disciple is to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Matthew 28:19. In Acts we see Jesus' disciples doing just that, Acts 2:38-41; 8:12, 35-38; 9:17-18; 10:44-48; 16:14-15, 25-34; 18:8; 19:1-6.

Baptism gives us a new identity, the moment we believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit baptizes us into His Body, Acts 11:15-16, and water baptism is a very real sign of that process. 1 Corinthians 12:13. As we go down into the water and come up, we're identified with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, Romans 6:1-4. And as the Spirit empowered Jesus to live His life before God, so the Spirit empowers us to live life differently, Romans 8:11-13. Before, we were strangers to God, Ephesians 2:12, but now we've been brought close to Him, Ephesians 2:13. God takes us out of Satan's kingdom of darkness and places us inside Jesus' Kingdom of light, Colossians 1:13.

Baptism unites us to Christ's Body on earth, our water baptism also plays a role in ushering us into Christ's Body here on earth where we live, grow, and find salvation, 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:1-5, 13-16. How can water baptism save us? When you're united to Christ's Body, the Church, you gain an entire family that rejoices when you rejoice and suffers when you suffer, Romans 12:15; 1 Corinthians 12:26 (cf. Mark 10:29-30).

So it's not that you're not eternally saved or that your sins are not forgiven if you're not baptized. All this happens the moment you believe in Jesus Christ. As Jesus puts it, you get eternal life, you won't face the final judgment, and you go from death to life the moment you believe in Him, John 5:24. However, when you're baptized, this really does something. Baptism by itself does nothing. As Peter tells us, merely applying water to the body is like cleaning your body when showering. But applying water (in baptism) at the request of a good conscience towards God, this really does something. As mentioned above, it saves us through the benefits we get from our identification and unification with Christ's Body, 1 Peter 3:20-21.

Do you have to be baptized to go to heaven? No. Scripture is clear that eternal salvation is based solely on faith in Christ, John 3:16, which is why the murderer crucified next to Christ went to paradise with Jesus even though he was not baptized, Luke 23:39-43. Thus, once you have believed in Christ, then you are to be baptized, Acts 8:12. But what about Mark 16:16? Notice: the one condemned is the one who does not believe, **not** the one who doesn't believe and is not baptized. Baptism has nothing to do with being condemned in this passage.

Should I get re-baptized? If you've never been baptized in the name (by the authority) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then you need to be baptized not re-baptized. What if a Christian lived a wicked life and wants to be re-baptized? There's nothing wrong with this. In fact, this re-baptism would acknowledge and honor their initial baptism (similar to renewing wedding vows). However, you should not get re-baptized every few years in order to "re-commit" your life to Christ. Instead, you need to honor your initial baptism by taking up your cross and following the One in whose name you were baptized. You can also be re-baptized for conscience' sake, i.e., if you think that you haven't obeyed Christ's command to be baptized because you see your previous baptism as invalid (for whatever reason), then you should be re-baptized.

How do I apply this? If you have believed in Jesus Christ, but have not been baptized in His name, then you need to be. Not because you're not eternally saved without it, but because baptism does something real concerning your identification with Christ's Body and all that this implies.

III. Conclusion

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.