

Series: Baptism - What Does the Bible Really Teach?
“Answering the Tough Questions”

Note: This lesson is built upon the foundation of the previous eight lessons. Without knowledge of our prior studies, it may be difficult to fully understand.

Introduction:

1. As we have reiterated throughout this series, the issue of baptism is one of the most hotly debated issues of our day.
2. Thousands of different denominations and churches hold to different beliefs on this subject. They can't all be right.
3. The answer to this dilemma is "*...rightly dividing the word of truth.*"
2 Timothy 2:15
 - Baptism was an essential part of Christ's commission to the twelve.
Mark 16:15-16
 - Baptism was **not** an essential part of Christ's commission to Paul.
1 Corinthians 1:17
4. There are distinctions in the Bible that must be recognized by the believer or confusion will reign. Why would Christ's commissions differ in their emphasis?
 - Peter and the twelve's focus was on Israel and preparing them for their coming kingdom by proclaiming a risen Messiah.
 - Paul's focus was primarily to the Gentiles and proclaiming the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead.
5. Paul is our apostle. He is the apostle of the Gentiles (**Romans 11:13**) and to him was revealed the great mystery of the body of Christ (**Ephesians 3:1-9**) and the wonderful blessings that accompany this position in Christ.
6. We know from our previous studies the special significance that water baptism held under Israel's program, but what role does water baptism have in the body of Christ?
7. In this lesson we will answer some tough questions regarding water baptism. We will answer them in light of Paul's teaching to the church, the body of Christ.

Is water baptism commanded?

1. One will search in vain to find Paul ever **commanding** Gentile believers to be baptized.
2. We saw that there are a few **examples** of Gentiles being baptized in the book of Acts, but there are also scores of Gentiles that were saved under Paul's ministry where baptism is never mentioned. His entire first missionary journey is an example.
3. Was baptism required of Israel by Peter in the early chapters of Acts? Absolutely, but in our studies we learned **why** this is true and why we don't see this same adamancy with Paul.
4. We see no instructions at all in any of Paul's 13 letters to churches and pastors concerning the issue of water baptism. There is a substantial amount of teaching regarding Spirit baptism, but not water baptism.

5. Peter ministered to Israel, but Paul is our apostle (**Galatians 2:7-9**). You will not find Paul making water baptism an essential doctrine and practice in his Gentile ministry.
6. In many churches, their doctrine regarding water baptism would make you think that Paul's missionary journeys and letters were **filled** with admonitions and commands regarding this issue, but it simply isn't the case.

Is water baptism the first step of obedience after a person is saved?

1. This is a commonly held view among many. It is based primarily on Christ's commissions to the twelve and examples of these commissions being followed in the early part of Acts.
2. Faith, baptism, remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit were inseparably linked under Israel's program. **Mark 1:4, 16:16; Acts 2:38**
3. Christ revealed to Paul the dispensation of grace and the gospel of grace that he proclaimed. Oftentimes Paul would refer to it as "my gospel." Galatians 1
4. Here is an obvious question: If Paul's commission and gospel were identical to the twelve's, how could Paul have said that Christ sent him not to baptize in **1 Corinthians 1:17**?
 - The twelve were definitely sent to baptize. Baptism was an essential part of their message and ministry. Paul said that he could preach his gospel without it.
5. If water baptism was the crucial, first step of obedience for Gentile believers, would not Paul have devoted at least one verse to it in all of his 13 letters to churches and pastors?
6. If baptism was an absolutely essential issue, would not Paul have mentioned it to the Ephesians elders in **Acts 20:17-38** when he reviewed **his** ministry and admonished them to be faithful in **their** ministry?
 - If it were the first step of obedience, would not he have encouraged them to be "getting people saved and baptized" as we hear so often today?
7. Paul never taught that water baptism is the first step of obedience after salvation.

Is water baptism required for acceptance in a local church?

1. Nowhere is this taught in any of Paul's 13 letters to churches and pastors, nor do we see Paul model this belief on any of his missionary journeys in Acts.
2. There is basically only one passage that people use to justify this - **Acts 2:38-41**.
 - Three thousand Jews were baptized and added to the 120 disciples.
 - We have studied this passage previously and we have seen that baptism was an essential part of Israel's program because they couldn't even receive the Holy Spirit until they were baptized in water.
 - Therefore, a person couldn't be added to the church until they were baptized because they didn't have God's Spirit.
3. Believers today have the Holy Spirit the moment they believe on Christ. They are forgiven of their sins and identified fully in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.
 - On what basis could a local church exclude a person like this from their fellowship?

4. There is only one requirement for acceptance in a local assembly - a testimony of faith in Jesus Christ. Paul would write to the churches and address them as "*saints in Christ Jesus.*" You become a saint in Christ by faith alone in Jesus Christ.
1 Corinthians 1:2
5. Isn't it a contradiction to preach Paul's gospel of faith alone for salvation, but then require religious externals to become a member of a church? We've set the bar higher for church membership than for salvation.
6. Here is the message this sends: "To become saved and a member of **God's** family all you need is faith in Christ alone, but if you want to become a member of **our** church family you have to have faith plus baptism (and do it our way in our church), plus tithing, plus Christian service, or whatever the case may be."
7. Paul said that the Colossian believers were complete in Christ (2:10). How did they gain this marvelous position?
 - Through the invisible circumcision of Christ - 2:11
 - Through the invisible baptism of God - 2:12-13
8. These are said to take place through the faith of the operation of God and result in spiritual life, complete forgiveness of sins, and a new identity in Christ.
9. No outward religious ceremony that man can do to you can add one thing to your accepted, complete position in Christ.
10. The local church should be an assembly of believers who have placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ - it is faith in Christ that unites the body as one.
Colossians 2:3-7

In Conclusion:

1. We have seen in this lesson that water baptism is:
 - Not a legalistic command for today.
 - Not the first step of obedience after salvation.
 - Not a requirement for acceptance in a local church.
2. Next week we will examine what place water baptism can have in the life of a believer. We will examine its meaning and purpose for today.