

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtminc.org Today's Date: June 27, 2021

What About Baptism?

by Dan Trygg

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all that I commanded you...” Matthew 18:19,20a

“Now when they (the crowd at Pentecost) heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ ...So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” Acts 2:37,38,41

“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:4,5

The frame of reference in which you and I live, in regard to the word “baptism”, is entirely different from that of Jews or Gentiles of the first century. For one thing, “baptism” has now become almost entirely a religious term. *We primarily use it in reference to a religious ceremony done at church.*

Depending on our church background, the word “baptism” brings up specific ideas that come out of our traditions and experiences. These may be very different from those of others who attend churches whose traditions vary from our own. Those who have no church background at all may have very little in their mental dictionary to help them with this word. Aside from direct church experience of some kind, most uses of the word are metaphorical, and can usually be traced back to a Biblical reference as the source from which the saying generated. We have no commonly used, clearly understood everyday usage for this word from which to understand the Biblical references. *The word uses we do have are, unfortunately, steeped in two millennia of religious tradition and practice, and often bear little resemblance to what would have entered the brain of a Jew or Gentile from the first century.*

By contrast, the word, *baptizō*, was an everyday, commonly used term in the household of anyone who spoke Greek, the common and almost universal tongue of that time. It did have some religious usage, but because it was a term that still functioned in everyday life, *the religious usage came out from this common use, not the other way around.* The basic meaning of the word was “to immerse, dip or plunge” something. It was used of washing hands or dishes by dipping in a basin, ...of dyeing clothes by immersing in liquid dye, ...of drawing water or wine by dipping one vessel into another. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT that was the Bible of the early church, this word was used of Naaman as he “dipped himself” in the Jordan seven times, in response to Elisha’s prophetic command, so that he would be healed of his leprosy (2 Kg. 5:14), and metaphorically in Isaiah 21:4 of being “overwhelmed” with horror. All of these examples, show that **the word *baptizō* commonly meant to dip, immerse, or submerge something. It did not mean “to sprinkle” or “to pour”.** These concepts were represented by other Greek words (*rhantizō* – Heb. 9:13,19,21; 10:22; *ekcheō* – Matt. 26:28; Acts 2:17,18,32; 10:45; Rom. 5:5; Tit. 3:5) which were also in common usage in the culture, and indeed are used elsewhere in the NT, but which are never applied to the rite of baptism. Most scholars, even those from other traditions that now practice sprinkling or pouring, will acknowledge that **the practice of baptism in the NT was most likely by immersion. Different practices arose later in church history.**

Another significant piece of the background of this word has to do with what usage it had within religious practices of the time. **Baptism was not a new, or novel, religious practice.**

First, among the Jews, it was a practice used in the process of transforming a Gentile proselyte into a Jew. If the convert was male, he had to first be circumcised, then, male *or* female, the candidate was instructed in certain matters of the Law. Having done so, he or she immersed themselves in water, coming up an “Israelite in all things”. The concept was almost identical to Paul’s teaching in Romans 6. **The person was symbolically buried to their old life, washed from their previous identity and past sins, and they rose up from the water as a new person, with a new identity.** This background helps us to appreciate the significance of the ministry of John the Baptist, who demanded that the Jews be baptized in a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of their sins. This was like telling them that their Jewish identity did not matter. They needed to start all over, just like Gentile converts.

Secondly, other Gentiles, who had no contact with Judaism, would have also understood baptism as a rite of initiation. Among the practices of pagan religions of that time, many employed water immersion as a ceremony of purification and initiation into the cult.

For both Jew and Gentile, then, the concept and practice of baptism would have been familiar. What was different was who or what a person was being baptized *into*. In the case of Christian baptism, converts were

baptized into Jesus Christ, signifying their identification with Him as their King, their source of purity and the focus of their new life. Both Jews and Greeks, and even disciples of John the Baptist, had to be rebaptized into Jesus, after coming to faith in Him (Acts 19:1-5). You had to *choose to be baptized into Jesus* to become His follower.

Not only did baptism symbolize purification and renewal, it also pledged dedication. As a rite of initiation, it marked the beginning of something. This was why Jesus came to be baptized (Matt. 3:13-17). He had no sin, so He did not need to be “cleansed”. What He came to John for was to submit to an act that symbolized *a death to His old life* as a carpenter in Nazareth, *and a new consecration as God's Man, ...on mission* as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. **Jesus' baptism was the dividing line between His private life of preparation and His public life of dedicated service** (Matt. 4:1-17). It was time to get busy. It was time to step outside what was comfortable and familiar into what was a totally new arena for Him. He had to trust God in a fresh way, and was committed to a new path. Jesus identified with humanity by laying down His life humbly before His Father in baptism, just as we are called to do. **He modeled for us this way of consecration to God. Now we are called to identify with Jesus through baptism, and commit ourselves to be His followers and disciples.** As a vow of commitment between myself and God concerning my future, **no one can truly do this for me. It is a commitment I have to make for myself.** Thus, we never see the baptism of any but those who have consciously come to faith. There are no examples of infant baptism.

What are some Biblical word pictures descriptive of the significance of baptism?

We are “buried with Him in baptism”, and thus “baptized into death”, so that being “united with Him in the likeness of His death, ...we shall be also in His resurrection”, “in order that as Christ was raised through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3,4,5; cf. Col. 2:12). It is clear from this word picture that **immersion signifies death, ...being submerged signifies burial, ...and rising again is symbolic of re-birth and resurrection.** In an OT word picture, Israel was “baptized into Moses”, in that they “were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea” (1 Cor. 10:1,2). The way to their deliverance was through passing through the waters of death, a figure of Christian baptism. **It is referred to as a way to “wash away your sins, calling upon His name”** (Acts 22:16; cf. Tit. 3:5,6). As Noah and his family were brought safely through the water, so “baptism now delivers us, not simply a removal of dirt from the flesh, but an answer/appeal of a good conscience toward God by means of the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:20,21). **Baptism signifies that we are covered, marked and clothed with Christ's righteousness.** Just as in death with Him we put off our former life, so now “Whosoever of you were baptized into Christ have put on (as a garment) Christ” (Gal. 3:27). Like the cloth dipped in the dye, so we are changed, forever marked with the “color” of Jesus' righteousness. **Baptism is to clearly follow faith, not precede it** – “...those who *had received* his word *were baptized*” (Acts 2:41); “...*when they believed...* the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, *they were being baptized*, men and women alike” (Acts 8:12); “...and many of the Corinthians when they heard *were believing* and *being baptized*” (Acts 18:8). In another passage, **baptism is presented as a faith-step toward the expectation of God's promise to be fulfilled:** “*Repent*, and let each of you *be baptized* upon the name of Jesus Christ into/toward forgiveness of your sins, and *you will receive* (or, ‘for yourselves *take*’) the free-gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38; cf. 8:14-17). That is exactly what Peter wrote, “...an answer/appeal of a good conscience toward God...” In this verse (1 Pet. 3:21), baptism is both the response of repentance and the appeal of faith. The Greek word can mean either “answer” or “appeal”.

Why should I consider being baptized?

(1.) Out of obedience to Christ. Remember, this is part of the instructions He gave to us (Matt. 28:18-20). He thought it was important enough to be handed down through His apostles to all believers throughout this present age. If we call Him “Lord”, ought we not to do as He instructs?

(2.) As a faith-expression of my heart. Whether we think of this in terms of *an appeal* for forgiveness (based upon Christ's finished work), or as a corresponding *answer* of a heart that *has* been changed, in either case, it is the expression of someone who has heard good news and is personally responding to it.

(3.) As a step of commitment, investing further in the Kingdom of God. Paul plainly tells us in Galatians 6:8 that we can “sow to the Spirit”, meaning that we can do things that are like investments in either our own spiritual life, or in the work of God's Kingdom. These are like seeds, which will produce a multiplied return if they are planted and nurtured. This is one clear way in which we can invest ourselves more toward the things of God. Who knows what spiritual implications, or return, may follow upon my investment?

(4.) The Scriptures clearly place the responsibility for this upon me. In two of these passages, Acts 2:38 and 22:16, the verbs are actually communicating “get yourself baptized”.

(5.) As an expression of my solidarity not only with Christ, but also with the Body of Christ. Paul makes clear that there is one Body and one Spirit, ...one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:4-6). My baptism signifies not only my initiation into Christ, but also my initiation into His Body, the church (1 Cor 12:13).