

DAWN CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE COURSE — LESSON 11 — Baptism

In our last lesson we saw that belief and understanding of the gospel, followed by obedience to God's commands were essential to salvation. We read the words of Jesus after his resurrection, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.' (Mark 16 v 15-16)

We see at once, then, that Scriptural baptism can only take place when a man or a woman is able to understand and obey the word of God. Then it is an essential condition of our acceptance with God. We have the example of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, who was a 'good' man by any standard (see Acts 10 v 2), yet God told him to send for Peter, 'This one will tell you what it is necessary for you to do.' (Acts 10 v 6) Peter came, and taught Cornelius about Jesus.

"He charged us to preach to the people and to testify that this is he who is appointed by God as the Judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him, that through his name everyone who believes in him will receive remission of sins."

One thing still was necessary,

"He commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." (Acts 10 v 42,43,48) From this and the other records in the Acts of the Apostles it is plain that God has laid down three essential conditions for salvation: knowledge, belief and baptism. (Read Acts 2 v 37-38, 41; Acts 8:35-38; Acts 16 v 25-33)

BAPTIZE

This English word has been taken directly from the Greek word 'baptizo' which means to dip, plunge, or completely immerse in liquid. It is used in Greek in the art of dyeing. In order to dye material, it has to be completely dipped into the dye, so that the material is wholly changed in colour.

BAPTISM

The use of this word throughout the New Testament makes it clear that sprinkling or pouring water is not sufficient. Scriptural baptism requires a complete immersion in water. So we read of Philip when he baptised the Ethiopian eunuch, 'They went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptised him.' (Acts 8 v 38)

We read also of John the Baptist, that he baptised in Aenon near to Salim 'because there was much water there.' (John 3 v 23)

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM

If we read the New Testament carefully we shall find that baptism has a four-fold significance.

1. Washing away, cleansing

'Arise, be baptised, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.' (Acts 22 v 16) Or don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? -Such were some of you, but you were washed. But you were sanctified. But you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus' (1 Corinthians 6 v 9-11)

We find the same symbol used even in the Old Testament, together with the figure of a change of colour.

'Wash yourselves, make yourself clean. Put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; Cease to do evil. Learn to do well.....Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' (Isaiah 1 v 16-18)

2. Association with the death and resurrection of Christ

As we are completely covered by water in the act of baptism, we symbolically die, and as we rise from the water, we symbolically rise to a newness of life. In this we associate ourselves with the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The apostle Paul writes of this:

'Don't you know that all we who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism to death, that just like Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we will also be part of his resurrection.' (Romans 6 v 3-5)

In baptism we undergo a figurative resurrection to newness of life, a change of outlook which is an essential part of our obedience to God.

Jesus said, 'unless one is born of water and spirit, he can't enter into the Kingdom of God.' (John 3 v 5)

Paul also wrote to the believers at Colosse of baptism, 'When you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. Even when you were dead because of your offences and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with him when he forgave us all of our offences.' (Colossians 2 v 12-13)

3. We are united by baptism into Christ

We are united by Baptism into Christ and so related to Christ and to the promises which God made through him, 'For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all given to drink into one Spirit.' (1 Corinthians 12 v 12-13) 'therefore that those who are of faith, the same are children of Abraham. ... Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He doesn't say, "To seeds," as of many, but as of one, "To your seed," which is Christ ... For you are all children of God, through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise..' (Galatians 3 v 7, 16, 26-29)

Paul writes again of the change which takes place at baptism, 'that you were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off are made near in the blood of Christ ... So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.' (Ephesians 2 v 12-13, 19)

4. A change of masters - a call to separation

Read 2 Corinthians 6 v 14-18 | John 2 v 15-17 God is not pleased with the idolatry of the world. Men and women naturally are the servants of sin.

When we are baptized we change our service:

'... that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be in bondage to sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. ... Thus also consider yourselves also to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore don't let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts....Don't you know that to whom you present yourselves as servants to obedience, his servants you are whom you obey; whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that, whereas you were bondservants of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto you were delivered. Being made free from sin, you became bondservants of righteousness..' (Romans 6 v 6-7, 11-12, 16-18)

In baptism we begin a new life of obedience to God which relates us to the promised gift of God.

'But now, being made free from sin, and having become servants of God, you have your fruit of sanctification, and the result of eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.' (Romans 6 v 22-23)

We reject utterly man's way, the way of the world. In baptism we turn unto God's way, obeying the gospel - 'the power of God unto salvation.'

THE EXAMPLE OF NOAH

This is what Noah did. The world of his day was filled with violence and wickedness. Noah built an ark, and when the rest of the world were destroyed by the water of the flood, Noah and his family entered the ark and were saved.

'God waited patiently in the days of Noah, while the ark was being built. In it, few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. This is a symbol of baptism, which now saves you - not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, .' (1 Peter 3 v 20-21)

The judgment of the wicked when Christ returns will be sudden and final as it was in the days of Noah. As Noah in the ark was saved, so we, if we are 'in Christ' shall be saved. We have seen that the way to be in Christ is through knowledge, belief, baptism and continued obedience.

HOW IMPORTANT IS BAPTISM?

Many feel that provided that they change their way of life for the better there is no need to submit to this act. How wrong they are, how ineffective all their efforts to do right. Consider the case of Naaman the Syrian. (2 Kings 5 v 1-27) Elisha the prophet, a man of God, told him to wash in the river Jordan to cure his leprosy. At first he refused, but when his servant persuaded him to obey the specific detail given by God, he was cured at once.

If we obey the word of God as closely as we can, we too can be cured and start afresh. But we may wonder about subsequent mistakes and sins, that is those committed after baptism. As we have seen earlier, in baptism we are associated with the death of Jesus Christ and this event was a once-and-for-all-sacrifice for sin, and those things which we do wrong in our new life in Christ are forgiven by prayer through our new-found Saviour. When we repent and ask for God's forgiveness, all our sins and errors are blotted out from the record and therefore we can go forward daily confident that if we try to do right, God has promised to mercifully forgive us.

God has offered us this wonderful opportunity through His Word. Do you yet feel the need to start your life again? With your experience of the mistakes you have made and the desire to erase some of the dark patches of your previous life, here is a unique opportunity to start again, not this time on a life that leads to the grave but on the road to immortality and the glorious kingdom of God. God's way is the only way by which you can be reconciled to your Maker.

This is the importance of baptism. It is an essential act of obedience, an essential part of God's way of salvation.

SUMMARY

1. Baptism should only follow a full understanding and belief of the gospel.
2. Baptism requires a complete immersion in water.
3. In the act of baptism - (a) our sins are symbolically washed away
(b) we are associated with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ
(c) we are united in Christ, and so related to God's promises through Christ
(d) we change masters, serving God instead of serving sin, and separate ourselves from the world.
4. As Noah was saved by entering the ark, we must enter Christ through baptism in order to be saved from the coming judgments.
5. Baptism is important for salvation.

PASSAGES FOR BIBLE READING

Genesis 6, 7 and 8 Mark 16 Acts 8 Acts 22 Romans 6