



"ARISE, AND BE BAPTIZED" (1)

The introduction to the previous lesson mentioned individuals who asked, in effect, "What must we do to be saved?" In each case, baptism was included in the answer. After the Jews asked, "Brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37), Peter replied, "Repent, and each of you be *baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). After Saul asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10), he was sent into the city. There a preacher came to him, saying, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be *baptized*, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16). After the jailer asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30), he was told to believe (Acts 16:31). He and his family were taught the Word of God; then "immediately he was *baptized*, he and all his household" (Acts 16:33).

Thus far, we have established the necessity of belief, repentance, and confession. In this lesson, we will see that our initial response to the Lord should also include being baptized into Christ. There is little controversy concerning faith, repentance, and confession; but, through the years, there has been disagreement regarding baptism. Such controversy did not exist in New Testament times, however. All who decided to follow Jesus were baptized without question.

BAPTISM: WHAT IS IT?

Before we discuss baptism, we need to understand what we mean by the term. "Baptism" is a transliterated Greek word. This means that, years ago, rather than translating the Greek

word, someone made an English word out of it.¹ Here is what the word "baptism" looks like in the Greek:²

βαπτισμος

The Greek word has two forms: *baptismos* (the form above) and *baptisma*. The verb form is *baptizo*.³ You can see how similar these words are to "baptism" and "baptize."

What does the word "baptize" mean? If you look up the word in an English dictionary, you will find a variety of meanings, but keep in mind that English dictionaries give you present-day usage, not biblical meanings. You can find the meaning of *baptizo* by looking in a *Greek* dictionary, which is called a lexicon. If you were to check *Bagster's Analytical Greek Lexicon*, you would see that the root of *baptizo* is *bapto*. Here is the heart of the information you would be given on this family of words:

bapto, . . . to dip . . .
baptizo, . . . to dip, immerse . . .
baptisma, . . . immersion . . .
baptismos, . . . an act of dipping or immersion
 . . .⁴

"Baptize" simply means "to immerse," and "baptism" means "immersion." Peter literally told his listeners, "Repent, and let each of you be *immersed* . . . for the forgiveness of your sins." Ananias literally told Saul, "Arise, and be *immersed*, and wash away your sins."

The word "baptism" does not specify the *element* in which the immersion is to take place. Jesus was baptized (immersed) in suffering (see Mark 10:38, 39; Luke 12:50). The apostles were baptized (immersed) in the power of the Holy

Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; 2:1–4). The baptism we will study is an immersion in *water* (as shown in Acts 8:36–38; 10:47, 48).

Keep in mind the basic definition of baptism: immersion. That will prevent much confusion as we proceed with our study.

In this lesson and the next, we will ask three questions: “*Why* should one be baptized?”; “*How* should one be baptized?”; and “*Who* should be baptized?” Let us begin with the “*Why*?”

JESUS’ INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN (MARK 16)

When Jesus gave the Great Commission to His disciples, He said,

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,⁵ baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Jesus’ Arrangement

Mark’s account of the Great Commission reads like this: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned” (Mark 16:15, 16).⁶ The KJV says, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (v. 16). Jesus could not have made it much simpler: If we want to be saved, we must believe and be baptized.

Once I was studying with a man who had a prejudice against baptism. We looked at passages on the purpose of baptism, but he refused to accept the plain teaching in them. Finally, I asked, “If the Lord *had* desired to teach that baptism is essential to salvation, how could He have expressed it more clearly?” He thought for a moment, and then said, “If baptism were absolutely necessary, I think the Lord would have said, ‘He who believes *and* is baptized will be saved.’” He was surprised to learn that he had, for all practical purposes, quoted Mark 16:16.

Mark 16:16 is clear, but occasionally I hear this protest: “The last part of the verse does not say that he who does not believe *and is not baptized* shall be condemned. It only says that he who does not *believe* will be lost.” Here is my answer to that argument: To mention baptism

in the last part of the verse would have been redundant.

Consider this: In the first part of verse 16, faith precedes baptism. Faith is the foundation of all we do in response to the Lord. Without faith in Jesus, one will not repent or confess. Even so, without faith in Jesus, one cannot be scripturally baptized. Eliminating faith—as the last part of verse 16 does—automatically eliminates *any* response of faith, including baptism. It is unnecessary to add “and is not baptized.”

To illustrate this idea, let us imagine that I hire you to build a shed. I tell you, “If you build the shed and paint it red, I will pay you \$2,000.” You would understand that to receive the \$2,000, you must do two things: (1) Build the shed and (2) paint it red. What if I then added, “But if you don’t build the shed, I will not pay you the \$2,000”? Would you conclude from this second statement that it was unnecessary to paint the shed red? No, you would understand that a failure to build the shed would automatically eliminate the painting of the shed. After all, it is impossible to paint a shed that is not there. Even so, it is impossible to be scripturally baptized if one does not first have faith in Jesus.

Again, look at the simplicity of Mark 16:15, 16. God’s plan is given step by step:

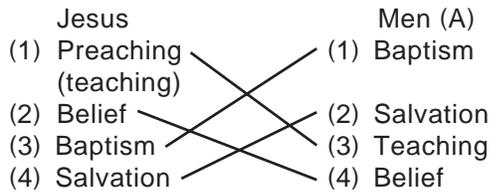
- (1) Preaching (teaching)
- (2) Belief
- (3) Baptism
- (4) Salvation

Men’s Rearrangements

Unfortunately, mankind has seldom been satisfied to leave the simplicity of the Lord alone (read 2 Corinthians 11:3). In a previous lesson, we discussed the teaching that babies are born tainted with the guilt of Adam’s sin. Some insist that baptism⁷ is necessary to wash away that guilt. According to their doctrine, if an unbaptized baby dies, it cannot go to heaven.⁸ Those who endorse “infant baptism” say that when a “baptized” child reaches a certain age, he needs to be taught and “confirmed.”⁹ They rearrange the Lord’s order as follows:

- (1) Baptism
- (2) Salvation
- (3) Teaching
- (4) Belief

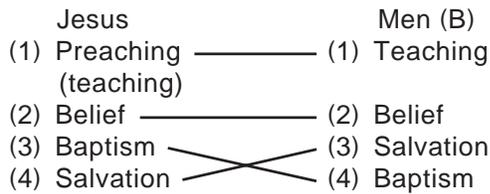
Obviously, this arrangement is not the Lord's arrangement:



In some parts of the world, another doctrine that we have already discussed is prevalent: the doctrine of salvation by "faith only." Those who hold this view teach that one is saved as soon as he believes in Jesus.¹⁰ They teach that it is *good* to be baptized, but not really *essential*. Thus their arrangement looks like this:

- (1) Teaching
- (2) Belief
- (3) Salvation
- (4) Baptism

Once again, this alters the order given by Jesus in Mark 16:15, 16:



JESUS' INSTRUCTIONS FOLLOWED (ACTS 2)

In contrast with those who alter Jesus' arrangement today, Acts 2 gives an example of one who followed Christ's arrangement exactly.

The Start of the Story

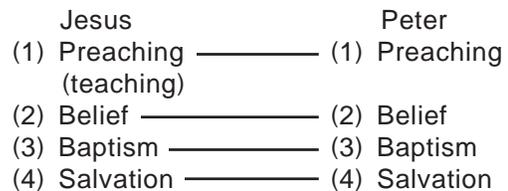
In Acts 2 Peter preached the gospel in its fullness for the first time. His sermon centered on Jesus. The climax of his lesson is found in Acts 2:36: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." When the Jews heard this, "they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37).

Notice that, to this point, Acts 2 followed the order set forth by Jesus: (1) There was *preaching*, and (2) this produced *belief*. (The word "believe"

does not appear in verse 37, but if the listeners had not believed Peter's message, they would not have been "pierced to the heart.")

Those in Peter's audience wanted to know what came next in God's plan for their salvation. If Peter followed Jesus' pattern, what would he tell them? He would tell them (3) to be *baptized* (4) in order to be *saved*. Let us see if he did:

"Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you [3] be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ [4] for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:38). (To receive "the forgiveness of sins" is the same as being saved from those sins.) We see, then, that Peter followed Jesus' instructions:



The Rest of the Story

Now let us continue with the rest of the story: After Peter told believers to repent and be baptized, he encouraged them to obey the Lord. He said, "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself" (Acts 2:39). "All who are far off" referred to the Gentiles. This was God's plan for all people. We read next, "With many other words he . . . kept on exhorting them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation!'" (Acts 2:40).

Verse 41 says that "those who had received his word were baptized," and then tells us, "That day there were added about three thousand souls." Those who were baptized and who were thus "added" had been saved from their sins. Verse 47 says that "the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved." The phrase "their number" refers to the number of the saved—in other words, the church, which is the body of the saved (Ephesians 5:23, 25). The KJV has "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

Think about the phrase "The Lord was *adding* to their number." Men speak of "joining the church." You can join a manmade church, but you cannot join the Lord's church. The difference in "joining" and being "added" is impor-

tant: When a person *joins* an organization, that is something *he* does. When he is *added* to an organization, that is something *done to him*. Since no one can earn salvation, no one can *join* the body of the saved. Rather, the member of the Lord's church must be *added* by the Lord, who saves by His grace and mercy!

In most denominations, being saved and becoming a member of the church are considered two separate actions. This is not true of the Lord's church. That which saves a person makes him a member of the church; that which makes him a member of the church saves him. The Lord adds to His church everyone who is saved.

Returning to the question under consideration ("Why be baptized?"), take a moment to review Acts 2:38, 41, and 47. The one who desires to be saved faces certain challenges: There is the challenge of the *past*: How can he find relief from the guilt of past sins? There is the challenge of the *present*: Where can he find the strength to live each day? There is the challenge of the *future*: Where can he find support to live faithfully until death? At the point of baptism, God gives him the resources needed to meet those challenges:

- The challenge of the *past*: The one baptized receives "the forgiveness of [his] sins." How wonderful it is to have the burden of guilt removed!
- The challenge of the *present*: He receives God's Spirit to help him live each day. The Holy Spirit is a gift to everyone who is baptized, a gift received at the point of baptism. This gift does not enable the one baptized to perform miracles, but rather gives him needed strength to live the Christian life (see Romans 8, especially verses 13 and 26).¹¹
- The challenge of the *future*: He automatically becomes part of the Lord's "support group," the church. After he is baptized, he is not on his own. He has brothers and sisters in Christ who love him and will help him.

Any one of these blessings would be sufficient reason to desire baptism, but the Lord gives all three!

CONCLUSION

In the next lesson, we will finish our study of the question "Why be baptized?" and will discuss the "How?" and the "Who?" For the moment, think about the blessings that God showers on those who are scripturally baptized. Would you like to have these blessings? ❖

¹This may have been done to escape the force of the Greek word: The Greek word means "to immerse," but the translators were practicing sprinkling.

²I will give you a few simple Greek lessons in our studies. I hope this will not be too painful.

³This is pronounced "bap-tid-zo."

⁴*The Analytical Greek Lexicon* (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1971), 65.

⁵The KJV has "teach all nations." The word "disciple" means "learner." You make a man a "disciple" by *teaching* him.

⁶Most translations have Mark 16:15, 16 more or less as I have given it from the NASB update. A few, however, put the passage in brackets, and one or two even put the passage in a margin note. This is because there is some controversy concerning the exact ending to Mark 16. In any case, most scholars agree that Jesus did say the words attributed to Him in Mark 16:15, 16.

⁷Most of those who teach this do not really baptize babies. They sprinkle or pour water on the babies instead of immersing them, but they *call* the rite "baptism."

⁸Since this is a rather shocking thought, they invented a place for the souls of unbaptized babies to go that is not as bad as hell. This place, totally foreign to the Scriptures, is called "Limbo."

⁹The rite of "confirmation" is another unscriptural rite. Unscriptural doctrines and practices seem to multiply.

¹⁰Sometimes people are also asked to repeat what they call "the sinner's prayer." No such prayer or concept is found in the Bible.

¹¹Saying that the Holy Spirit helps us is the same as saying that God helps us. If the subject of the work of the Spirit concerns you, tell the person who gave you this publication. He will help you find answers to your questions, but he may want to wait until this basic study has been finished.

GETTING RIGHT WITH GOD

In the New Testament, erring Christians are told to pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22). Alien sinners (those who have never been in covenant relationship with Jesus [Ephesians 2:12, 19]—in other words, non-Christians) are never told to pray for forgiveness. Rather, alien sinners are told to be *baptized* for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38). The so-called "sinner's prayer" is not found in the Scriptures.