

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 17

Commitment and Baptism

Mahatma Ghandi once said – *“I like your Christ. I don’t like your Christians. They are so unlike Christ.”*

Too many people are Christians in name only. There is no real change in the life, no surrender of self, no commitment to God.

I Peter 2:21 - 23 *“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: “Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;”*

Christ committed himself to God. And Christ, being our example, means that we are to be committed to God as He was. A sign of that commitment is baptism. Baptism is usually thought of as a ceremony signifying a person’s joining a church, and it is that, but much more.

I Corinthians 12:13 *“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.”*

Baptize is translated from the Greek word *“baptizo”* which means to dip under or to submerge. Due to the lack of understanding on this issue, some churches have endorsed "sprinkling" in place of immersion. This is not biblical, but rather another tradition.

In the early centuries most came to understand baptism only as a symbol of the washing away of sins, so many waited until they had committed all their sins and were on their death bed and then

called the priest to baptize them. Since they were bed-ridden, the water had to be poured on them in bed which made a big mess. So the decision was made to sprinkle them with "holy water." Later they reasoned if it's good enough for the dying, it's good enough for everyone so the Catholic Church officially adopted this method of baptism for reasons of convenience at the Council of Ravenna in 1311 A.D.

However, the Bible teaches only one method of baptism. We find that John the baptist baptized by immersion. Phillip the evangelist baptized by immersion. Jesus was baptized by immersion.

Matthew 3:13 - 16 *"Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

Many ask the question, since He had not committed any sin, why was Jesus baptized at all? He didn't need His "sins washed away." Jesus asked to be baptized to "fulfill all righteousness," that is, "right doing," or doing what is right.

He was baptized to set an example in right doing for His followers as well as to identify with the message of John the Baptist.

Note that when Jesus was baptized, He "went up out of the water," which implies He first went under the water as He was baptized.

Baptism by immersion is the biblical symbol of a person's acceptance of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection on their behalf and their willingness to follow His example in life.

The evidence for this is in Romans chapter six.

Romans 6:3 - 5 *"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection"*

When a person is baptized, the eyes are closed and the breath suspended as they are lowered, or "buried," beneath the water. Then they are brought up out of the water – "resurrected" as a new creature in Christ, committed to a new life, a new way of living.

Note verses 10 through 13 of the same chapter -

"For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."

Baptism is a perfect illustration of the death and burial of the old way of life and resurrection to new life in Christ. The main purpose of baptism is to identify with Christ and to confirm a person's commitment to live for and serve God just as Jesus gave us example.

Acts 10:38 *"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."*

To live a life of service to God one needs the power of the Holy Spirit within. And just as the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus at

His baptism, we too are anointed with the Spirit when we are baptized.

Acts 2:38 *"Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

When a person is baptized they "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" to be a helper to them just as He was to Christ. They are given special power to be His witnesses.

Acts 1:8 *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Mein Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

The Spirit and the gifts that accompany the Holy Spirit's presence are given to believers that are needed to do God's work. That work is to witness His love and grace to others.

I Corinthians 12:7 - 11 *"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills."*

This is only a partial list of the gifts of the Spirit. But the point here is that every person is given gifts from the Holy Spirit for the purpose of witnessing for God in their lives.

The "baptism of the Holy Spirit" is not necessarily a separate baptism as some teach. The Bible says there is only one baptism and that is by water and the Spirit.

Ephesians 4:4,5 *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*

John 3:5 *“Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”*

There is only “*one Spirit*” and only “*one baptism*” and that one baptism is with the water and the Holy Spirit! Being “*baptized with the Spirit*” is simply being given the power to live a righteous life and be an effective witness for Jesus.

All committed believers who are baptized have that Holy Spirit power available to them. Some “*receive it,*” that is, they are aware of it and take advantage of it immediately after baptism but others aren’t.

Others, because they do not understand, or do not feel they are ready, may not take advantage of it until later in their Christian walk. But when they do, big changes are seen in their witness for God. They are not “*baptized in the spirit*” later by means of some kind of sudden miracle, but they have just come to the place that they are ready to take advantage of the power that has been theirs all along!

Often the question is asked, is water baptism necessary? The words of Jesus help to answer that.

Mark 16:16 *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”*

Baptism is necessary only for those who “*believeth,*” that is, those who are converted or born again. Without conversion baptism is worthless. Why? Because there is no real change or commitment in the life.

When we commit to live for God, there is a ceremony that confirms that commitment - a public declaration of one's acceptance of Christ and their commitment to live a new life for God. Baptism is as necessary to the Christian believer as the wedding ceremony is to the married couple. Just as the married couple makes vows to one another publicly, the believer is making a public vow as well. He is saying before witnesses: *"I love the Lord, and I am committing my life to Him"*

If a person is not willing to make this public commitment it is evidence that the relationship is weak and there is no real commitment! That is why baptism is necessary. It is not the ceremony; it's the commitment! Without total surrender and commitment to the Lord we cannot be saved.

Of course there are exceptions to the necessity of baptism. There may be circumstances that will not allow the ceremony to take place, but the heart must be willing just the same. Like the thief on the cross for example, if he could have come down from the cross and been baptized he would have gladly done it.

Re-baptism

The question often comes up regarding re-baptism. Is it biblical? And if so, when is it appropriate? The Bible gives us an example -

Acts 19:1 - 5 *"And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism." Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."*

These were not disciples of Jesus, but of John the Baptist. The baptism of repentance was a type of baptism that was done before Jesus' death and resurrection. Later after these men learned about Jesus and the Holy Spirit from the teaching of Paul they were re-baptized with a new commitment to follow Christ and be identified with Him.

There are two reasons for re-baptism:

1. After learning significant, life-changing truth that a person now wants to be identified with as these men had.
2. After a person has drifted away from the Lord and for years lives apart from Him and by all appearances are counted with the worldly. But one day the Lord touches the heart and they return to Him and then want to re-commit their lives to God.

Three steps a person should take before being baptized:

1. Taught - Matthew 28:19 - 20 *"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, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

2. Believe - Acts 8:35 - 38 *"Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him."*

3. Repent - Acts 2:36 - 38 *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Now when they heard this, they were cut to*

the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

How many of them did Peter say should be baptized? *"Every one."*

When you have been taught the truth and you believe it and are committed with God's help to put away sin and live for Him - you are ready for baptism. This is why babies need not be baptized; they are not capable of making this decision.

A person should not wait until they feel they have victory over all their sin to be baptized – baptism is not a graduation – it is a new beginning. Jesus says *"come as you are"* - *"come as a little child"* - willing to listen and anxious to grow up to be like Him.

Jesus is calling –

Revelation 3:20 *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."*

Jesus will not come in uninvited – Will you open your heart and invite Him in today?

Do not put it off – make that commitment today - today is the day of salvation!

Response questions:

1. I understand that the biblical method of baptism is immersion and that it is necessary for the Christian believer who is committed to living for Christ.

Yes __ No __

2. It is my desire to be baptized (or re-baptized).

Yes __ No __

3. I am already a member of the church and do not sense a need to be baptized, but I would like to commit my life to God anew.

Yes __ No __

4. I have already been baptized but I would like to re-affirm my baptismal commitment, and join the _____ Church by profession of faith.

Yes __ No __

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