

A BIBLICAL STUDY OF BAPTISM

By Mark E Moore, PhD

1. What baptism is:
 - a. Immersion, not sprinkling
 - i. The Greek word means to dip or dunk, to immerse.
 - ii. Acts 8:38 demonstrates the mode of baptism is immersion.
 - b. Sacrament, not symbol
 - i. A symbol is a picture of something else. A sacrament is when the symbolic act on earth coincides with what is actually taking place in heaven.
 - ii. This is not man's work for God but God's work in us.
 - iii. Galatians 3:27 and Ephesians 4:5 illustrate this work God does in us through baptism.
 - c. A work of faith, an appeal to God for a clean conscience
 - i. Faith without works is dead. A faith that claims to believe in Jesus but doesn't do what he commands is bogus. So what did Jesus tell us to do when we encounter him for the first time? He commands us to be baptized.
 - ii. I believe about baptism what many "faith only" brothers believe about "The Sinner's Prayer." When coming to Jesus we ask his forgiveness of sins through this enacted prayer. It is more visual and therefore more memorable than a spoken prayer.
 - iii. This is best described in 1 Peter 3:21.
 - d. The culmination of conversion
 - i. The N.T. includes a number of things in the process of conversion including: hearing, faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. All of these go together as a person is converted to Jesus. While some passages mention only one or two elements, no passage intends to exclude any of these from the process of conversion.
 - ii. It belongs at conversion (Pentecost [Acts 2:41], Samaritans [Acts 8:12], Eunuch [Acts 8:36], Cornelius [Acts 10:47-48], Lydia [Acts 16:15], Philippian Jailer [Acts 16:33], Paul [Acts 9:18; 22:16]).
 - iii. It is in conjunction with water (John 3:5-6; Titus 3:5-6, etc.).
 - iv. It aligns us with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12).
2. What Baptism Does:
 - a. Baptism makes disciples -- Matthew 28:19
 - i. Like circumcision of the O.T. covenant, it is our entrance into the new covenant (Colossians 2:11-12).
 - ii. Baptism is when we "put on" Christ (Galatians 3:27).
 - b. Through repentance and baptism we are granted forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38).
 - c. Through baptism we are promised the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
 - d. Baptism saves us as the culmination of conversion (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21)
 - e. It serves as a ritual of remembrance and community.
 - f. It alleviates guilt through God's forgiveness and shame through being brought into the community.
3. Can a person be saved without baptism?
 - a. It was not until Huldrych Zwingli (c. 1523), that anyone divorced baptism from conversion. He did this for theological (and political) reasons, especially a commitment to the sovereignty of God.
 - b. Only God is the judge, but he judges willful disobedience harshly.
 - c. If men can figure out a C-section, where a baby would come into the world without passing through the normal birth canal, I'm pretty sure God can too. However, neither a C-section nor an unbaptized Christian is either natural or healthy.

The Interplay of Immersion (Baptism), the Holy Spirit, and Salvation

Let's start with the crucial issue: We are saved when we are "sealed" with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 1:13 says, "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, *you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit*" (Cf. 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 4:30). Notice that the Spirit is granted when we believe: "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who *believed* in him were later to receive" (John 7:39); "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by *believing* what you heard?" (Gal 3:2; cf. v. 5; Acts 19:2); "God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through *belief* in the truth" (2 Thess 2:13). Few would dispute this clear scriptural teaching.

So what about baptism? The Bible links belief with baptism. This was true of John's baptism (Matt 21:25) as well as Christian baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12-13; 18:8; 19:4; Col 2:12). Again, this "belief" is not a theological stance on a point of Christian doctrine; it is obedience to the will of God. Baptism is thus a visible vehicle of faith. For example, in Acts 8:12 "When they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." The same is said of Simon Magus (Acts 8:13), Crispus (Acts 18:9), and these twelve disciples (Acts 19:4-5). Paul puts it this way: "Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your *faith* in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col 2:12). The notion that acts of faith (such as baptism) have no place in our conversion, that somehow belief is intellectual assent rather than submissive obedience, is anti-biblical and should be thoroughly rejected. As an act of faith, it was natural for the Apostles to connect baptism to conversion. Peter said, "This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). Paul wrote, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Rom 6:4). John cites Jesus, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5, see also Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Gal 3:27; Col 2:11-12). Those with a low view of immersion should reconsider their position based on the high position it repeatedly takes in Scripture. This is not our work for God but indeed his work in us through the power of the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:27; Eph 4:5). Yes, the Holy Spirit is connected to baptism!

Obviously, the Holy Spirit is involved with the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:11; Acts 1:5; 2:1-4; 10:44-46; 11:16). But the Spirit is also clearly connected with water baptism (Eph 4:5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Titus 3:5; John 3:5). This is natural enough since a number of texts describe the Holy Spirit in terms of working through or like water both in the OT (Psa 46:4-5; Isa 32:15; 44:3; 55:1; 58:11; Eze 39:29; Joel 2:28) and in the NT (John 7:38-39). Even more specifically, several "New Birth" texts mention both the water and Spirit as effective forces in the conversion process (John 3:3-7; 1 Cor 6:11; Titus 3:3-7). But is this "water" merely a metaphor, or does it signify immersion? There is no question that the Holy Spirit is connected to immersion in Acts 2:38-39; 19:1-6 and 1 Cor 12:13. It seems fair, therefore, to interpret the other "water" passages as baptism. The bottom line is that the Holy Spirit is clearly connected with water baptism in the process of conversion.

So, belief, baptism and the Holy Spirit are all central to Christian conversion. The Holy Spirit, the true mark of a Christian (Rom 8:9; 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13) is promised both through belief (John 7:38-39) and immersion (Acts 2:38-39). Baptism is not a work by which we earn the presence of the Holy Spirit. Rather it is an expression of our faith which causes us to open our lives to the Spirit's indwelling.