

[ **Welder's Wife:** Recently (April 2011) the LORD took our Pastor's Mom home. Because the memorial service was on the other side of Montana, our Pastor asked my husband to cover for him while he was gone, & he suggested he talk about 'Believer's Baptism'. Here's his notes 'un-edited':]

## about 'Baptism'

by a certain Welder

A couple of months ago, and I have no idea why, the question popped into my head of "Why did John the Baptist baptize"? Clearly we are taught in the New Testament to believe and then be baptized, first the act of faith, and then the act of obedience. But John was baptizing before Jesus even started His ministry, so there were no 'Christians' yet. So why was John baptizing? When Pastor asked me to fill in, he suggested I cover baptism because of the upcoming ceremony we are planning. At first it didn't appeal to me until I started thinking again about that question why did John the Baptist, who was the last Old Testament prophet, and by the way the first to speak for God in four hundred years, why was he baptizing and why were people coming to him in droves to be baptized, and why did Jesus the sinless Christ seek out John in the wilderness specifically to be baptized?

In trying to answer that question we need to look back to see what baptism meant in the Old Testament,

First of all it is important to note that in the Old Testament God gave them many pictures, many ceremonies, many object lessons. All the major events, for example, of the history of Israel were commemorated by some kind of object lesson, some kind of memorial. And all of the major spiritual truths were basically illustrated by some kind of symbol, some kind of analogy, some kind of picture. And these basically were for teaching aids.

For example the animal sacrifices carried out in the Temple would make a huge impression on the youth as they would observe such a graphic ceremony. The priest would place his hands on the animals head and confess his sins as well as the sins of the people, symbolically transferring those sins to the animal and the animal was slaughtered, its blood being shed to pay for those sins. A graphic picture that would impress upon those youth the consequences and the cost of sin.

Similarly there was a ceremony for a Gentile who wanted to become Jewish and worship the one true God, it was known as melah, tebela, and korbin, so any Gentile who came to believe that the Hebrew God was the one true God would go through these three steps:

The first is melah, which is circumcision, any male converting to Judaism no matter what his age, would be circumcised.

The second stage was tebela. Tebela was immersion into water. Having been circumcised, the Gentile proselyte was then immersed in water. Why? Because they said it identifies a Gentile as dying to the Gentile world. The old life is dead, the old life apart from God, apart from the promises of God, apart from the knowledge of God, apart from the truth of God, is dead and he comes forth a new person with a new life and a new family and a new relationship to the true God. And so they said, "nothing illustrates that better than immersion". And so it was with a Gentile proselyte that we first see immersion or baptism used in a ceremony creating a beautiful picture of dying to an old life and rising to a new.

The third step was korban. And this was an animal sacrifice. There was circumcision, immersion and sacrifice. And when the animal was sacrificed on the altar, the blood was sprinkled on the Gentile, symbolizing that he needed cleansing for his daily sins. Not only did he need cleansing for his wicked nature, but for his daily sins, not only for his sin as depravity but his sins as conduct. So the major note in this proselyte ceremony was an admission of sinfulness, at the nature level, deep down, and at the behavior level on all the actions of life and the desperate need to die to all of that and rise in a new family with a new relationship to the true God. So that's where immersion got started. And it symbolizes the death of the old life and the beginning of a new life.

Now if we follow its history a little bit, we come to the New Testament and we see the last Old Testament prophet that comes into the world is John the Baptist. And his job as the forerunner of Christ is to come and make the people ready for the coming of Messiah----- How is he going to do that? Well, he knows that the coming Christ will be holy. He knows that the coming Christ will demand righteousness. So he preaches repentance and holiness and righteousness. And he calls everyone to repent for the kingdom is near, repent for the King is coming, turn from your sin. And then he baptizes them as an illustration, as a visible symbol of that inward turning.

John 1: 32-34. John commanded by God to baptize. Here we see in the middle of verse 33 that God specifically commanded John to baptize.

So here comes John the Baptist asking Jews to be immersed in water. This is a humbling thing because in the mind of a Jew he's a child of the covenant. In the mind of the Jew he doesn't need to be brought through some kind of proselytizing ceremony to be inducted into the people of God. But the fact of the matter is, the people were flooding out to John, according to Matthew 3, and they were being baptized in large numbers willingly...why? Because they were admitting that Jewish though they were racially, they had been disobedient, ungodly, sinful and apostate in terms of a right relationship to God and they needed to be washed, they needed to have something die and they needed to be brought into a new relationship with God.

So John preached repentance. He preached righteousness. He preached holiness. He called for people to turn from iniquity to holiness. And he immersed them in the Jordan River as a visual symbol of what was going on in their repenting hearts. No better outward symbol could be found than immersion to testify to an inwardly transformed heart. That's a perfect illustration. There's also a cleansing, a washing symbolized. And so John came with that wonderful baptism, that wonderful picture of a repenting people. And that's why in Acts 19:4 Paul says, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe on Him who was coming after him," that is in Jesus. So he called the people to believe in Jesus and then to turn from sin and turn in faith to Christ and to symbolize that in a willingness to publicly affirm that, they needed a washing, they needed a transforming, they needed to die to the old and rise to live in new life even though they were Jews. And when they did that, it was remarkable. It isn't particularly remarkable that a Gentile would do it; it is amazing that a Jew would do it and shows the true repentance of their hearts.

And so, there was John doing that. And on a very special day in the midst of his wonderful ministry a marvelous thing happened. Verse 13 of Matthew 3 says, "Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan, coming to John to be baptized by him." John is baptizing all these multitudes of repentant people who are acknowledging, "We should die and we need a new life." And all of that is going on and all of a sudden Jesus comes, now nowhere in scripture do we have any indication that John and Jesus had met until this moment, but somehow John had to know who He was, perhaps the multitudes of Jewish folk at the scene would be saying "here comes Jesus" they would certainly have known who he was. He had to have become well known, he had to have a reputation with all the community's near Him, at 12 years old He sat in the Temple teaching and the people were amazed at His knowledge. And I'm sure that kind of thing had to continue on until now when He's 30 years old. This is before any of Christ's miracles but still He

was no normal man. I'm sure He would be well known by all, by all except John the Baptist because he's been living by himself out in the desert since a very early age, according to Luke 1:verse 80. I'm sure that Mary the mother of Jesus and Elizabeth the mother of John would talk regularly, you can imagine how that conversation would go----"Well how's your son 'John', Elizabeth?" "Oh fine. We don't see him much. He lives in the desert by himself, dressed in camel's hair, eating locust's and honey!" "So, how's your son 'Jesus'?" And Mary responds "Well He's PERFECT!" "Oh that's just a mother talking!" "Oh no really, He's PERFECT" -----so maybe they hadn't met face to face but Jesus's reputation had to precede Him. John knew He was the Messiah, he knew He was the Lamb of God, the Savior, the coming one. At this point he has already affirmed Christ as the Lamb of God. He knows He's not a sinner. He knows He doesn't need to repent. So why in the world does He want to be baptized?

So when Jesus comes and wants to be baptized, verse 14 in Matthew 3 says, "John tried to prevent Him and he said, I have need to be baptized by You and do You come to me?" How can I a sinner baptize a sinless one? You should baptize me. It was absolutely unthinkable to John the Baptist. He knew Jesus. He knew His divine identity. He knew He was the Lord's anointed. He knew He was the spotless, sinless Lamb. And he could not understand how Christ could possibly confess sin, when He was already the perfect sinless Son of God. So he tried to stop Him.

But Jesus in verse 15 answered him and He said, "Permit it at this time for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then He permitted him. What did He mean by that? What a statement. To fulfill all righteousness...He says it's necessary, John, and it's necessary in fulfilling all righteousness.

It seems that Jesus in asking John to baptize Him to make a statement or a picture of His own upcoming death and resurrection on the cross.

This can be verified rather easily with two verses in the Gospels. In Luke chapter 12 verse 50 listen to what Jesus said. By the way, it wasn't long before His final trip to Jerusalem. He was discussing matters with the disciples and in Luke 12:50 He says (talking about His upcoming crucifixion) "I have a baptism to undergo." Isn't that an interesting choice of words? Why didn't He say, "I have a death to undergo?" Why didn't He say, "I have a sacrifice to undergo?" Why didn't He say, "I have a self-giving to undergo?" Why didn't He say, "I have a crucifixion to undergo?" He said, "I have a baptism to undergo and how distressed I am until it is accomplished." He viewed His death as an immersion, as a dying and as a rising again, which was beautifully pictured in His own baptism. In Mark chapter 10 verse 38 Jesus said to James and John who wanted to sit on His right and left in the kingdom, He said, "You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?" "Or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" Why didn't He say, "Or to be killed with the death which I am to die?" He spoke in the picture terms. He saw His death as a baptism because it was akin to being immersed. He was immersed into death and burial. And He came forth in resurrection. So I believe that when Jesus looked at His baptism and said it's to fulfill all righteousness, He was saying, "My death and resurrection will fulfill all righteousness and I will give a symbolic demonstration of that great baptism yet to come.

So even Christ's baptism was a picture of death, burial, and resurrection of His own death, burial, and resurrection. So in that sense it is the same as our baptism which also figuratively pictures His death, burial and resurrection and our union with Him in that. And by the way, this is another compelling reason why you cannot understand Christian baptism any other way than as immersion. Nothing else fits the picture. Sprinkling, pouring, dotting someone's head with a spot of water does not demonstrate death, burial, resurrection, does not demonstrate total cleansing, washing and is not humbling. Whereas water baptism is very humbling and it should be.

So what is the theological significance of Christian baptism? What is the spiritual significance of Christian baptism? What is it really depicting? Is it just the death, burial, resurrection of Christ?

Not only, but when you as a believer are baptized by immersion into water, you are demonstrating not just the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, but you are demonstrating your union with Christ in that death, burial and resurrection.

For whom did Christ die? For you. Whose sins did He bear? Yours. For whom did He rise? You. Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ..." right? Galatians 2:20. "I died in Him, I was buried in Him, I rose in Him to walk in newness of life." That's the spiritual significance. A person being baptized is giving a spiritual truth physical form, or making it into an object lesson. The moment you put your faith in Christ you become a Christian. By a supernatural sovereign divine spiritual miracle God puts you in Christ and you die at the cross and you rise to walk in newness of life.

Baptism does not make you holy. Baptism does not save you. Baptism does not secure you. Baptism does not provide some on-going power. All baptism does is demonstrate your obedience and give you the joy of obedience and the blessing of obedience.

Does Baptism save you? No, the thief on the cross was never baptized, but Jesus said "today you will be with me in paradise"

When Jesus said, "Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them," He gave a command to the church to baptize, clearly that is The Great Commission. When the Holy Spirit said, "Repent and be baptized," Acts 2:38, He gave a command to the individual believer to be baptized. Christ commands the church to baptize, the Holy Spirit commands the individual believer to be baptized. And when 3,000 believed on the day of Pentecost they were all immediately baptized, they set the example for the church. So we are under the commanding words of Christ as a church to baptize. We are under the commanding word of the Holy Spirit as individuals to be baptized. And we follow in the line of the pattern and example established on the day the church was born when every believer was immediately baptized.

Now as clear and unmistakable as these Scriptures are there is still a widespread non-compliance to this simple command. I think there are only five general reasons why a person who professes Christ would not be baptized.

First reason is ignorance. A believer simply has not been taught concerning the importance of baptism or has been taught wrongly concerning the biblical pattern for baptism. Many church's today teach sprinkling or infant baptism neither of which is in the New Testament. The New Testament Greek word is 'baptizo' which means 'to immerse completely'. It is the same word used to say 'to drown'. It is also interesting to note that 'to baptize' cannot be translated to mean the 'water on the person', but only the 'person in the water'. Now it is common for churches like ours to do baby dedications, which is an entirely different matter, mostly for the purpose of the parent's committing to raising the child in a godly manner, but it is not specifically commanded in the New Testament. Catholics teach that if a baby dies without being christened it goes to a place they call the "LIMBO OF THE INNOCENCE" which is a place where they will live forever in a natural bliss without any vision of God, whereas the christened baby lives in bliss, where they can see God. Mormons teach that you can be baptized for dead, which they call "PROXY BAPTISM". It is not uncommon for Mormons to have three million proxy baptisms in a year.

So the first reason why a believer may not get baptized is ignorance or having been wrongly taught.

The second reason a believer may not get baptized is pride. If a Christian has been saved for long time and not been baptized, he or she has to admit to being either disobedient or ignorant for many years. If that is the case with anyone here I would encourage you to set your pride aside, & know that you are surrounded by people who love you. There is a joy that comes with being

obedient to scripture, and that is true of being obedient concerning baptism.

A third reason why a Christian may not get baptized is indifference. They just can't be bothered. It's not that they don't agree with baptism or are against it, it's just not that important; it's not a priority, they just never get around to it. So the third reason is indifference.

A fourth reason may simply be defiance. A person knows they are not living as they should and feel it would be hypocritical for them to stand in front of the church and profess their love for Jesus and a willingness to be obedient to Him, so they are defiant.

I think the last possible reason why a person may not want to get baptized is they are not saved to begin with. Not being saved, they have no desire to be obedient to Christ, possibly they like going to church and hanging out with Christians, but have never personally believed and trusted in Christ alone to save them, so there is no conviction to be obedient to Him.

There is a verse in 1 Samuel that I often repeat to myself, 1 Samuel 15:22, "So Samuel said: Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams." But the part that often goes thru my mind is "to obey is better than sacrifice"

There are only two ordinances that Christ commanded the church to do, the Lord's table where we remember His body broken and His blood shed for us, and BAPTISM where we are willing to say to the world, "I believe Christ death and burial was for my sin, and I want to publicly align myself with His supreme sacrifice".

Colossians 2: 11-14

AND IN HIM YOU WERE ALSO CIRCUMCISED WITH A CIRCUMCISION MADE WITHOUT HANDS, IN THE REMOVAL OF THE BODY OF THE FLESH BY THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST; HAVING BEEN BURIED WITH HIM IN BAPTISM, IN WHICH YOU WERE ALSO RAISED UP WITH HIM THROUGH FAITH IN THE WORKING OF GOD, WHO RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD. AND WHEN YOU WERE DEAD IN YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS AND THE UNCIRCUMCISION OF YOUR FLESH, HE MADE YOU ALIVE TOGETHER WITH HIM, HAVING FORGIVEN US ALL OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, HAVING CANCELED OUT THE CERTIFICATE OF DEBT CONSISTING OF DECREES AGAINST US AND WHICH WAS HOSTILE TO US; AND HE HAS TAKEN IT OUT OF THE WAY, HAVING NAILED IT TO THE CROSS.