

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Bible Baptism

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. (1 Peter 3:18–22, KJV 1900)

What constitutes baptism as Scripture describes this act? Is sprinkling acceptable, or must a person be immersed in water? Is the individual's personal sincerity in believing in Jesus in a loving way sufficient? Or does the substance of what that person believes about Jesus and His work validate--or invalidate--his/her baptism? All of these questions are important, because our study passage describes major blessings associated with Biblical baptism. John 3:23 provides a clear indication that John baptized by immersion. "...there was **much** water there..." If John sprinkled the people whom he "Baptized," he wouldn't need more than a trickle of water, but, if he immersed the people, he would need "...much water." Historically, the practice of sprinkling for baptism began long after the apostolic age, and it began with an errant belief that anyone who died without baptism was eternally lost, so the practice began with the sprinkling of infants to secure their eternal safety. From the Biblical perspective, eternal safety relates to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's one and only surety for the sins of His people. Baptism is depicted in Scripture as a visual representation of the Person and work of Christ for our sins, His death, burial, and resurrection. Accepting this Biblical analogy, baptism can no more save a person from the eternal consequences of his/her sins than my driver's license can actually drive my car. We sing a delightful old hymn, "Safe in the Arms of Jesus," not "Safe in the Arms of Baptism." That said, Scripture clearly and consistently indicates that, when a person comes to believe in Jesus **and** in His finished work, the next and immediate logical action is to make that belief known by baptism. As my driver's license visually represents to anyone who examines it that I am licensed and qualified to drive an automobile, so water baptism visually represents to others that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work. However, our eternal salvation relies on the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, not the symbolic representation of Him and His finished work.

Without question, baptism in this passage is associated with Jesus' death and resurrection. It seems therefore reasonable to conclude that what the person believes about Jesus and His resurrection is integral to the question of validity. Given this association with Jesus' death and resurrection, should we hold to immersion only? Was He merely "Sprinkled" with suffering and death, or was He immersed in it? Did He merely appear to die, or did He truly die and arise from death? Based on the meaning of the word in first century Greek, there should be no question that first century baptism was by immersion. The Greek word translated "Baptize" in our King James Bibles originated in the garment industry and was used in reference to the dying of a garment. The manufacturer of cloth didn't sprinkle the fabric with dye; he immersed the garment in the dye. The above reference to John's baptism adds to this point and further supports the practice of immersion as the only correct mode of New Testament baptism.

Is a simple belief in Jesus sufficient for Biblical baptism, or must a person hold to a more specific belief in Him and in the outcome of His coming and work? We find a highly informative lesson in Acts 19 that tells us much about these questions.

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, ² He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. ³ And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. ⁴ Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. ⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they

spake with tongues, and prophesied. ⁷ And all the men were about twelve. (Acts 19:1-7 KJVP)

Immediately upon reading this passage, we wonder. Did John actually baptize these people originally? If so, and if Paul considered it necessary to baptize them "Again," should not the apostles, who, except for Paul, were all baptized by John, also have been baptized again? We have no indication whatever from Scripture that any of them were re-baptized, so why should Paul require baptism of these people? Since John likely never preached or baptized outside the Jordan Valley, it seems far more logical and reasonable that some of John's disciples left that region before Jesus appeared and was baptized by John. Thus, they would know of John's baptism, but not of Jesus, other than the prophecy of His imminent coming. Since John required that they be baptized to punctuate and to declare their faith, these likely continued preaching as much of John's message as they understood, and baptized those who believed their message and repented.

Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? Paul questions their personal experience and belief. If the content of a person's belief is not related to baptism, why would Paul ask such a question?

We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. Given John's emphasis on the Holy Spirit, it becomes increasingly clear that neither these men nor their teachers correctly comprehended John's message. The substance of their belief was deficient. One of the central points in his preaching relates to the Holy Spirit.

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. (Matthew 3:11 KJVP)

I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. (Mark 1:8 KJVP)

John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. (Luke 3:16 KJVP)

Given the fact that three of the writers of the gospels mention this fact, how could these men have missed it? And if they did miss such a central truth in John's preaching, this deficiency in what they believed seems to be a far better explanation of Paul's requirement that they be baptized again, than any question regarding John's authority to baptize. Clearly, the content of a person's belief at the time of his/her baptism relates directly to the validity of his/her baptism. A person in our time

may be wholly sincere in his/her belief in Jesus, but just as sincerely believe that he/she must do something to complete the eternal salvation process. Such an errant belief is no less central to sound Biblical belief than failure to understand the coming and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Often in today's Christian culture, belief in Jesus is required as the believer's contribution to the new birth. When questioned about belief being a work, advocates of this idea strongly protest that belief is not a work, so they do not at all believe in salvation by works. In this point, they disagree with Jesus, for He specifically taught that belief is a work, a right and godly work, but a work nonetheless.

Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? ²⁹Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. (John 6:28-29 KJVP)

These people asked a sincere question related to what Jesus taught them to do. How should they live, think, and act to do what God would approve? Jesus just as specifically answered the question that they asked, not another hypothetical theological question. And His answer leaves no doubt that "...the work of God" for these people was to believe on Him. Sometimes fatalists will suggest that Jesus taught that God would work belief in these people apart from anything they did, but that was not the question, and it was not Jesus' answer. They didn't ask, "What shall God do in us to work the works of God?" They asked, "What shall **we do**...."

It then stands to reason that requiring that a person believe in Jesus for the new birth constitutes a form of salvation by works. Further, Jesus taught in John 5:24 that the believer already possesses eternal life. If the believer already possesses eternal life, that belief cannot be required as a prerequisite for eternal life. John adds to this truth.

*Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ **is born** of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. (1 John 5:1 KJVP; emphasis added)*

If Paul required baptism, or "Rebaptism" of people who were baptized while holding to a deficient understanding and belief in Jesus and/or the Holy Spirit, the same principle should apply today. The people, generally known as "Baptists" today, were early-on called Anabaptists, falsely implying that they were opposed to baptism. Factually they rejected the validity of Roman Catholic "Baptism," sprinkling as a mode and infants as suitable subjects of baptism. Therefore, their requiring that anyone who had been "Baptized" by that church was required to be baptized by immersion upon coming to believe the gospel and desiring to associate with these ancient believers.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor