

6 - PREREQUISITES FOR BAPTISM

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Anyone familiar with the New Testament knows it has many references to baptism. While the word is familiar, all that is involved in baptism is misunderstood by many who are guided by the assumptions of popular religious ideas rather than what the Bible actually says. With all the confusion about the subject, it will be helpful to understand what must be true of persons who are to be baptized properly. A person cannot "just walk in off the street" and be baptized. What must happen first?

After Jesus rose from the dead and before He ascended to the Father, He gave to His apostles what is commonly called "The Great Commission." "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Making disciples involves teaching. No one was ever baptized in the Bible who was not first taught. One example will suffice. "And Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and proclaimed unto them the Christ" (Acts 8:5). It was after this that they were baptized (Acts 8:12). The first prerequisite for baptism is to be taught about Jesus, baptism, and forgiveness. One who is incapable of being taught, whether infant, mentally handicapped, or unconscious is not ready to be baptized.

Being taught by itself does not prepare one for baptism. Hearing must lead to believing. "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him" (Hebrews 11:6). Luke states a historical fact succinctly, "Many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). Just as faith only does not save, one is not prepared for baptism just by believing. This can be seen by the example of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter preached to a vast assembly of Jews, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto

you..." (Acts 2:22). He reminded them that they knew of His works (Acts 2:22). He also brought to their remembrance their part in having Jesus killed (Acts 2:23). What they did not know was that God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:32). The sermon was brought to a close with a startling declaration, "God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts 2:36). This brought faith and a conviction of sin to thousands who asked what to do (Acts 2:37). They were told, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:38). So a believer is not prepared for baptism until repentance takes place.

Baptism is important as we can see from Acts 2 and other conversion accounts recorded in Acts. Baptism is God's appointed way to be brought into Christ, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). If you have never been baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you need to be. Are you ready? Do you believe? Will you repent? If so, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).

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