

Lesson Eight

In Lesson 7 we saw that no one can believe in Jesus without the work of the Holy Spirit. We also saw that he uses the word of God to create that faith in our hearts. The Bible reveals that the Holy Spirit also works through certain 'means' or tools. In this lesson we will see the first of these means—baptism.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are means that the Holy Spirit uses in dealing with us. The term sacrament is used to describe them. What is a sacrament?

A sacrament is a sacred act having the following characteristics:

1. it was instituted by Jesus,
2. it uses an earthly element connected with God's word, and
3. it gives the forgiveness of sins.

The word sacrament does not appear in the Bible; it is simply a term used to describe these sacred acts that are found in the Bible. The Christian church throughout the years has also used other traditions, rites, and ceremonies (confirmation, marriage, etc.) that serve good purposes, but they are not on par with the two sacraments.

What is baptism?

God says:	From this we know:
<i>John 3:5</i> "Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.'"	Baptism is a washing using water connected with God's word in which the Holy Spirit is active. It was commanded by Jesus.
<i>Matthew 28:19</i> "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."	

The Bible does not describe or prescribe the method of baptism. It simply tells us to apply water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Greek word translated "baptize" can mean to sprinkle, wash, pour or immerse. The insistence on immersion as the only correct method of baptizing did not develop until the 1600's. Pictures in catacombs from 165 AD portray baptizing by pouring water over the head.

We should also note that Jesus gives this command to all Christians, not just to pastors. Although baptisms are normally performed by a pastor, in an emergency any Christian can perform a baptism.

What blessings does the Holy Spirit give us in baptism?

God says:	From this we know:
<p><i>Acts 2:38-39</i> "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.'"</p>	<p>He forgives my sins.</p>
<p><i>Titus 3:5</i> "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."</p>	<p>He gives me rebirth, a new life of being able to serve him.</p>
<p><i>1 Peter 3:20-22</i> "...in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and 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, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him."</p> <p><i>Mark 16:16</i> "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."</p>	<p>He saves me.</p> <p>Notice that while baptism can save someone by producing faith in their hearts, it is not a lack of baptism that damns—it is unbelief that damns a sinner.</p>

Some treat baptism as a symbolic act—something we do to show our obedience to God's command. While it is true that God has commanded baptism, it is not something we do for God, it is a gift he has given to us. By God's promise baptism gives us forgiveness of sins, new life, and salvation!

Baptism is only performed once for each person, but what daily comfort does baptism give us?

God says:	From this we know:
<p><i>Acts 2:38-39</i> "Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call."</p>	<p>Baptism gives us the daily comfort of knowing that our sins are forgiven and that the Holy Spirit lives in us.</p>

God says:	From this we know:
<p><i>Romans 6:1-4</i> "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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."</p>	<p>Baptism gives us the daily comfort of knowing that we can say "no" to sin.</p>
<p><i>1 Peter 3:21</i> "...and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also."</p>	<p>Baptism gives us the daily comfort of knowing that we are saved.</p>

Normally, people are instructed before they are baptized. However, when the subject of baptism comes up, one of the most often asked questions is, "Should babies be baptized?"

God says:	From this we know:
<p><i>Acts 2:38-39</i> "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.'"</p>	<p>God's grace is not limited to adults.</p>
<p><i>Psalms 51:5</i> "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."</p>	<p>Babies are conceived and born in sin and need forgiveness of sins.</p>
<p><i>Luke 18:15-17</i> "People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.'"</p>	<p>Babies can believe.</p>
<p><i>Matthew 28:19</i> "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."</p>	<p>Babies are part of "all nations".</p>
<p><i>Galatians 3:26-27</i> "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."</p>	<p>Babies are made God's children through baptism.</p>

The practice of baptizing infants is not a new development. In fact, the opposite is true, as we can see from the early Christian church:

- Origen (185 A.D.) wrote that the practice of baptizing infants was handed down from the Apostles.
- Augustine (358 A.D.) wrote that he had never met anyone who accepted the Bible as God's word who also rejected infant baptism.
- Numerous inscriptions have been found in catacombs that list birth dates and baptism dates of Christians that are days or months apart.
- The practice of baptizing babies was never seriously questioned until the 1600's.

In short, the burden of proof for not baptizing babies is on those who oppose it.

Baptism is not a mere symbol. It is a wonderful gift of God that has the power to save adults as well as infants. It is also serves as a daily reminder of God's love for us and of his promised forgiveness for all who trust in Jesus Christ as their savior.

All Bible passages are from the New International Version.