



THE TRUTH ABOUT BAPTISM

The Great Example

John was in a quandary. Not long before, certain Pharisees had presented themselves for baptism. Knowing their insincerity, John had indignantly refused to baptize them.

Now the situation was completely reversed. whereas the Pharisees had not been good enough for baptism, the man who presented himself now was *too* good, and John was embarrassed. Never had this man been known to speak a hasty word or perform an unworthy act. He was not exceptional: he was unique, he was not unselfish: he was selfless.

“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” protested John.

“Let it be so now”, Jesus insisted, “for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness” (Matt. 3:14, 15, R.S.V.).

God’s endorsement

As soon as John had baptized Jesus, an extraordinary thing happened. Let Matthew take up the story:

“And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’” (Matt. 3:16, 17, R.S.V.)

This was God’s way of publicly endorsing the baptism of Jesus.

We can learn a lot about baptism from this account. We have seen that Jesus considered it absolutely necessary. Although John had tried to put him off, Jesus insisted.

He was laying the law down for others too. Did you notice his use of the word us? “Thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness”. Jesus is telling us that we ought to be baptized too.

We get a hint of the method in the words, “... he went up immediately from the water”.

But ...

But there can be no buts if the Lord Jesus tells us to be baptized.

Oh yes, you were going to say that sometimes circumstances make it difficult. It can be inconvenient ...

Which is another way of complaining that the Lord Jesus is telling us to do something impracticable. Fair enough, if that’s your view of it, baptism is not for you—nor Christianity. Jesus Christ wants people on his terms—not theirs.

A straight question for you here. Do you think that Jesus would have found crucifixion inconvenient?

The right attitude

It is true, of course, that dipping in water (because that is the way that Christ and the apostles practised baptism) can, *of itself*, do nothing. What matters is the attitude. Those who have the right attitude will obey, and not quibble. And they will, necessarily, be concerned about the meaning of the symbol. People with a humble frame of mind will not act as if they know all the answers. They will be diligent readers of the Bible. They will already have read Paul’s exposition of baptism in Romans 6, and will know that it is a symbol of death with Christ. By baptism we crucify and destroy “the body of sin”.

The greatest decision

The issue is a mighty one. Shall we continue to serve sin, or shall we give our allegiance to Christ? By baptism we set the seal to our decision to be followers of Christ.

It is the biggest decision of our lives — a decision for mature people, and not children.

We must count the cost first. The Lord has no respect for those who make vows, but do not fulfil them.

But when we know the path of duty, we must not hold back. Life is brief and precarious.

Summing up

Here, in conclusion, is a brief summary of Bible teaching about baptism:

1. It is necessary for salvation.
2. The Scriptural method is immersion in water (see John 3:23; Acts 8:36-39).
3. It is a symbol of crucifixion with Christ. By baptism we associate with Christ in his death.
4. It is an important decision, that only grown people can make. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16).

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