

## **THE PROMISE AND ITS PURPOSE (part-five of a seven-part study)**

The controversy surrounding the second participle has existed for centuries and involves several questions. Is baptism required for salvation? When should this ordinance be administered? For whom is baptism appropriate? What is the best mode and manner for fulfilling the command to be baptized? Let's answer the most important question first. Baptism is **not** required for salvation. Instead, it is an important follow-up to the conversion experience in the same way that Bible study, prayer and church attendance contribute to the making of a disciple. It should be viewed as an act of obedience which must be fulfilled on the part of the individual who is already saved. Paul's assertion in 1 Corinthians 1:17 should remove all doubt regarding its exclusion as a requirement for salvation; confirmed in his response to the Philippian jailor in Acts 16:30-31. Baptism is appropriate for the new convert and should be administered sooner rather than later. No evidence is presented in the New Testament for a "waiting period" to determine the genuineness of an individual's profession of faith. The pattern in the apostolic era is just the opposite (Acts 2:41; 8:13; 8:34-38; 10:44-48; 16:30-33).

The best mode of baptism is indicated by the word itself, a transliteration from the Greek "baptizo" into the English "baptize." The verb refers to an act of complete immersion. Such an immersion perfectly symbolizes the spiritual transaction which occurs at the moment of conversion, performed by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13), as the believer experiences a union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection on their behalf. This is why the ordinance of water baptism by complete immersion is often described as "the physical symbol of a spiritual reality." This spiritual reality is depicted for us by the apostle Paul in Romans 6:3-4 –

**"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."**

So why does Peter, in Acts 2:38, seemingly insert baptism as a requirement for salvation during his evangelistic invitation at Pentecost? Since that insertion never occurs again during his ministry recorded in Acts, or for any of the other apostolic invitations, it was likely an expression of Peter's desire to be consistent with the mandate of Matthew 28:19, clarified and corrected during the apostles' teaching in the days that followed (Acts 2:42); resulting in its exclusion from any of Peter's future presentations of the gospel (Acts 3:14-19; 10:43; 15:6-11). In addition, what are we to make of this difficult to interpret statement by Peter in 1 Peter 3:21?

**"Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. . ."**

In stating that baptism "saves" us, Peter isn't referring to the removal of sin (cf. John 13:5-11), but for maintaining a clear conscience before God. The immediate context of the chapter reveals why this is so important for every follower of the Savior, with Peter issuing this admonition in v15a: "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts." This is the key to keeping a good conscience before God and man, with baptism contributing to that process. How? When we obey Christ by submitting to the ordinance of baptism, it serves as public proof that we are submitting to His Lordship over our lives; launching us into further and deeper spiritual growth and development. This is why Peter ends the chapter in v22 by affirming Jesus' Lordship in heaven; connecting it to our baptism as a demonstration of it here on earth. If we refuse to be baptized after having trusted Christ, it becomes an ongoing hindrance to what God is seeking to accomplish in us.