

WHY BE BAPTIZED?

By Norman J. McLeod



Why should we be baptized? Because baptism saves us: ". . . 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 where unto even baptism doth also now save us ... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:20, 21). The words also of Jesus in the Great Commission (Mark 16:15, 16) say that "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." It saves us, not by washing away our sins, but because it is the answer of our conscience toward God. One who has the right kind of a conscience will want to be baptized in the same spirit in which Christ said, "Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15).

Baptism, as the Apostle Paul explains in Romans 6, is a threefold enactment of the teaching of Jesus: 1) it proclaims that we believe that Jesus suffered and bled

and died on the cross for us, and that He rose again from the dead; 2) it is our testimony that we have adopted the Christian life, and that we are not the same as other people, because we are dead to our old sins; and 3) it points forward to the greater resurrection day of which Jesus' resurrection was the first-fruits, when the dead shall be raised, and Christ's Kingdom shall come, and He shall return to be its king.

To believe that Jesus died is not important—that is historical fact. But to believe that He died for our sins, that He was in the grave three days and nights according to His own predictions (Matt. 12:39-40), and that He rose from the dead are the things that we remember by our act of being immersed in water in His name. That is the first phase of the enactment of the symbolism of baptism.

When we come out of the water in baptism, we rise to walk a new life. This phase of the symbolism has a present-day importance: we have figuratively buried our old sinful natures by that act. Baptism is a constant reminder that we are to follow to the best of our ability in Jesus' steps. Not that we cannot sin any longer, but that we now have an advocate with God, so that our sins are no longer remembered against us. Even though we do not follow Jesus as we should, we still are leading a different kind of life from that day on, because the non-Christian and the Christian alike will point to us as an example of what a Christian is. If we are not good Christians we bring reproach upon the cause of Christ. If we walk the good Christian walk, then our lives are the best sermon we can preach.

Christ's resurrection from the dead is the basis of the hope that we have that some day we shall stand with Him. The Apostle Paul argued (1 Cor. 15) that if Christ is not raised from the dead, then our faith is in vain, and we are of all men most miserable. If the dead are not to be raised, then Christ is not raised. "But," he says, "now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15:20). When we come up from the grave of waters we testify that we believe in the greater resurrection day when we shall come forth to be with Him forevermore.

True baptism is by immersion only. Even a child would understand that if he were given a dead animal and told to bury it, that if he sprinkled a few grains of dust on it, that it would not be buried. Sholem Ash, the Jewish novelist and antiquarian, says that the early Jewish Christians were baptized in the pool of Siloam. During the dry season immersion became impossible, for the water in the pool became so scarce. The early Christians, therefore, scooped up the water out of the pool and poured it over the candidate. But to allow sprinkling or pouring to take the place of immersion in water is not according to the idea of the enactment of the figure. Many people are too proud to stoop to the waters of baptism, as was Clarence Day's father in the book "God and My Father." Immersion only will serve to carry out the Biblical command.

Baptism is the token of the New Covenant. When the waters of the flood had gone down, Noah was given a covenant by God in which God told him that the earth would not be destroyed by water again. The token of that covenant was the rainbow. The significance is that you must have sunlight to have a rainbow. In other words, the rainbow is the sign that the rain is over. Each token of a covenant has something in it that speaks of the covenant, The covenant of Abraham (the New Covenant) which was ratified by the blood of Christ (Gal. 3) is set forth in its token, baptism. The death, burial, and resurrection of its mediator, Jesus Christ, is set forth in burial in the grave of waters, and the rising to walk in a new life is in token of the promise of the resurrection day when Christ shall come again.

Baptism was practiced by the apostles. We read in the Acts about the baptism of Cornelius by Peter. After Peter had preached to Cornelius and had witnessed the descent of the Holy Spirit of God upon that Roman household, he had them baptized in water. (Acts 10: 34ff.) Those who say that it is merely a rite for the Jews and not for the Gentile Christians should note that Cornelius was a Roman centurion and was in no sense a Jew. Paul had some of the Christians rebaptized because they had been baptized by Apollos who did not understand the teachings of *Jesus* correctly. In other words, his baptism was one merely of repentance, it did not teach of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Many other incidents could be cited, if space permitted, to show that baptism was practiced by the apostles.



Baptism has knowledge and repentance as prerequisites. The one who is baptized must understand the teachings of Jesus that we have been outlining. Infant baptism thus becomes a false idea. During the Middle Ages, the pagan doctrine of the immortality of the soul crept into the church. Along with it came the commonly taught doctrines of going to heaven or hell at death. The priests taught that if the infant was not baptized, its soul would go to eternal torment. Thus arose the doctrine of infant baptism. But a baby cannot understand the truths of the gospel. When Jesus gave the Great Commission. He put belief before baptism: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that *believeth and is baptized* shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15, 16).

Hearing, belief, repentance, and baptism are the steps by which one comes into Christ. There is no other way set forth in the Scriptures. If we wish to become naturalized citizens of the United States, we must go through certain formalities before we can earn it. We must come in by a regular port of entry and be registered; must renounce allegiance to our native country; take training in citizenship; pass an examination; and have witnesses to prove that we have lived a good life as Americans. But that does not make us a citizen. We cannot achieve citizenship until we are so proclaimed by a judge of the Superior Court. So it is with citizenship in the Kingdom of God; we must do all that God has commanded us, and baptism is the rite by which we obtain that citizenship. The declaration of the judge will come on that last resurrection day when we shall be proclaimed citizens of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.