

LESSON FIVE: BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

SESSION ONE

TO THE LEADER/FACILITATOR

To help you be more effective in leading your small-group discipleship study, we have prepared the **General Leadership Guide** to help steer you through the basics of facilitating a small-group study. If you have not already done so, please read the Guide.

ABOUT THIS SESSION

This is the first of three sessions dealing with the subject of biblical baptism. In this Session, Pastor Rogers reviews what the Bible teaches about the method of baptism, along with providing the historical context for the word “baptism” that is used in English translations of the Bible.

PREPARING TO LEAD/FACILITATE THIS SESSION

Read through the **Session Guide**, and watch the video in advance of the session. Review the **Additional Scripture to Study** at the end of the **Guide**, along with the suggested **Personal Application**. Make sure you print out enough copies of the **Student Handout** which mirrors this **Leader's Guide**.

CONDUCTING THE SESSION

At the beginning of the session, read the **Introduction** to your group, then open discussion by asking the **Reflection Questions** before viewing the video segment. After viewing the video together, you may want to ask for comments before next leading your group through the **Amplification and Discussion** section. Feel free to add your own commentary if needed, but be cognizant of time and do not personally dominate the session. As you read through the **Amplification** section, engage your group by using the provided **Discussion Questions** to stimulate additional dialogue.

As you prepare to conclude the session, review the **Personal Application** for the week and encourage participants to engage in the suggested activity, as well as to read and study the **Additional Scriptures to Study** section. The **Additional Scriptures to Study** section contains questions or reflections intended to guide participants in their respective personal studies. This is best presented as a positive activity designed to help everyone in the group to grow spiritually through the week (as opposed to being presented as homework).

Allow participants to share prayer requests and lead your group in prayer using any of the suggested formats in the **General Leadership Guide**. Remember to provide an atmosphere of confidentiality within the group as participants share.

LESSON FIVE | SESSION ONE

INTRODUCTION

The subject of baptism has, in modern history, become a source of contention, or at least some division, among different denominations of the Christian faith. This should never be so because baptism is a foundational act of obedience for every believer who sincerely identifies himself/herself with the Lord Jesus Christ. In this, the first of three sessions on the subject of baptism, Pastor Rogers explores the biblical method of baptism as practiced by Jesus and the early church, and will also provide the historical context for the word, “baptism,” which is used in our English translations of the Bible.

OUR KEY PASSAGE

Matthew 28:19-20 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is your view of baptism? Does it matter if one who claims to be a follower of Christ is ever baptized or not? Why?
- Does it matter whether one is baptized by immersion, or by sprinkling? Why?

PRESENTATION OF VIDEO CLIP OF: “What the Bible Teaches about Baptism”**AMPLIFICATION AND DISCUSSION**

Baptism is not incidental, it is fundamental! Don't ever minimize what God has so maximized. —**Adrian Rogers**

Amplification: Baptism is a crucial, but too often downplayed ordinance of the New Testament Church. As Pastor Rogers pointed out, baptism was important enough for our Lord Jesus Christ to personally require Himself to be baptized by John the Baptist at the beginning of His ministry. It was also important enough to be the last command He gave to His disciples before ascending to Heaven after His resurrection. As followers of Christ, we should place importance on what the Lord has obviously deemed to be important.

As we previously studied, we are saved by grace, through our faith, not by any works we do (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Therefore, we are not saved by the act of baptism. However, because the Lord modeled baptism for us, and then commanded us to baptize and to teach the nations (all peoples) to observe (obey) all things He commanded, baptism becomes an important act of obedience essential for spiritual growth for everyone who claims the name of Christ. “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 John 2:3), and “Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (1 John 3:24). Genuine salvation results in an inward desire to do what pleases our Lord. As previously discussed, none of us is totally immune from sin, but the mark of true believers is that they do not want to sin; they want to live by the Lord's example, and they want to follow (obey) what He taught and what the Bible teaches.

For Discussion: How important do you think it is to obey what the Bible teaches, and what the Lord Jesus Christ modeled, concerning baptism?

Amplification: Convenience and culture have severely weakened the church over the centuries to the point that many things considered absolutes in the early church have become almost rewritten to accommodate convenience. Among these has been the method of baptism. Originally practiced as full bodily immersion, sometime around the thirteenth century sprinkling was introduced as a matter of convenience within the Roman Catholic Church. However, we know from the biblical record, as well as from the writings of the early church fathers that this was not the practice of the early church:

- **Tertullian** (AD 200): “We are immersed.”
- **Hippolytus** (AD 235): “When the person being baptized goes down into the water, ...”
- **Cyril**, Bishop of Jerusalem (AD 348): “The body is dipped in water.”
- Further, many of the founders and early leaders of denominations that now practice sprinkling acknowledged in their writings that immersion was the biblical method of baptism:
- **George Whitfield** (Methodist) on Romans 6:4: “It is certain that the words of our text are an allusion to the manner of baptism by immersion.”
- **Conybeare and Howson** (Episcopalians) on Romans 6:4: “This passage cannot be understood unless it is understood that the primitive baptism was by immersion.”
- **John Calvin** (Presbyterian): “The very word ‘baptize,’ however, signifies to immersion, and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient church.”

- **Martin Luther** (Lutheran): “I could wish that the baptized should be totally immersed according to the meaning of the word.”
- **Philip Schaff** (Lutheran): “Immersion and not sprinkling was unquestionably the original normal form of baptism. This is shown by the meaning of the Greek word and the analogy of the baptism of John which was performed in Jordan.”

For Discussion: Should culture and/or convenience trump the authority and commands of Scripture? Why or why not?

Amplification: In addition to the biblical record, the writings of church fathers, and the writings of early denominational leaders, we also have the archeological and historical record of baptism by immersion as having been the method of baptism for followers of Christ for many centuries. One can still visit in Europe Roman Catholic cathedrals built before the thirteenth century where there are baptistries similar to those used by churches today which practice baptism by immersion. Historians document sixty-seven immersion-type baptistries in Italy alone that date from the fourth to fourteenth centuries.

The challenge before the Bible believing Christian is simply this, “Am I to be obedient to what the Bible teaches concerning the method of baptism, or am I going to allow convenience and culture to dictate my response?”

Sir Cliff Richard has said, “Baptism seemed such an integral part of New Testament Christianity that I couldn’t imagine a droplet of water dribbled on my head when I was a baby could be a proper substitute for that adult symbol of submission and obedience.”

For Discussion: Why do you think it is hard for someone who was baptized by sprinkling to submit to baptism by immersion?

For Discussion: What would you say to someone who sincerely desires to follow Christ, but has never been baptized, or was baptized by sprinkling?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

This week in your personal devotions, meditate on Romans 6:4, and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any aspect of your life that does not align with you having put the old man to death in order to live in newness of life to the Father’s glory. Determine to adjust any aspect of your life that does not reflect that reality, and journal your thoughts.

GROUP PRAYER REQUESTS

Suggested group prayer – “Lord, You submitted to John’s baptism not because you needed repentance, but in order to fulfill all righteousness! Forbid that we should fail to do the same.”

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES TO STUDY

As you study the following verses, note how carefully Scripture records baptism by immersion “**in** the Jordan ... **coming up from** the water”, that more than a cup of water was needed “because there was **much water** there”, and that they “went **down into** the water”.

Mark 1:9-10 “It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.”

John 3:23 “Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.”

Acts 8:36-39 “Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.”

There is a reason why baptism by immersion is so important. It provides a clear depiction of a death and burial by use of a watery grave, along with a resurrection to “newness of life” empowered by the Holy Spirit. Question: Is your baptism on the right side of your salvation, and for the right reason?

Romans 6:4 “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

ADDITIONAL READING RESOURCES

- T. Robertson, “Word Pictures in the New Testament,” (Broadman Press, 1930)
- “The Outline Bible Five Translation Practical Word Studies in The New Testament,” (Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 1998)
- William Smith, L.L.D., “Smith’s Bible Dictionary,” (Thomas Nelson, 2004)

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For Discussion: Should culture and/or convenience trump the authority and commands of Scripture? Why or why not?

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