

The One Baptism (Ephesians 4:5) – Its Purpose

Having previously seen the “mode” and element of the one baptism authorized by the Lord as referenced in Ephesians 4:5, we now turn our attention to the purpose of this one immersion. There are few Bible subjects over which there is more disagreement. Still, the Gospel is plain. Immersion into Christ is for the forgiveness of sins. Acts 2:38 clearly states, “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

The majority of the world that calls itself “Christian” holds to the idea that while immersion is commanded, it is not essential. In the case of Acts 2:38, they would aver that a person who has been saved should be immersed because he has been saved. However, few will go so far as to say that this immersion is absolutely necessary. It’s just something that a “saved” person SHOULD do. If this is the case, then in Acts 2:38 we have an “optional command,” an oxymoronic term. How many of us parents have ever given our children a command to do something yet left it up to their discretion as to whether or not they did it? There is no such thing as an optional command. Furthermore, if immersion in Acts 2:38 is because one is saved, then so is repentance. “Repent” and “be baptized” are two verbs that are joined together by the conjunction, “and.” This conjunction means that the two verbs cannot be separated. Is one saved before he repents? We would be hard pressed to find an example of this in the New Testament. Jesus said, “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” If one must repent prior to receiving forgiveness of sins (and he must), then according to acceptable grammar in Acts 2:38, he must also be immersed as some 3,000 were on that day of Pentecost in the first century A.D. (Acts 2:41).

Staying with Acts 2:38, let’s note that little English word, “for.” “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ FOR (emphasis mine, mg) the remission of sins...” This preposition translated from the Greek language originally meant, “into, unto, towards.” We don’t have to know the Greek word to understand what “for” means but knowledge of it further drives home the point regarding the purpose of immersion. The word is used over 1,500 times in the New Testament. Three notable usages that help to shed light on both its meaning and the way in which it is used in Acts 2:38 are as follows (the translated word is in all caps): “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many FOR the remission of sins.” (Matthew 26:28). “For with the heart man believeth UNTO righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made UNTO salvation.” (Romans 10:10). “For as many of you as have been baptized INTO Christ have put on Christ.” (Galatians 3:27). If we follow the line of reasoning of those who believe that one is immersed after he or she is saved or because he or she has been saved, then we would have considerable difficulties with these verses. We would have Jesus shedding His blood, not for the purpose of remissions of sins, but because sins had already been remitted. We would have individuals believing and confessing, not for the purposes of righteousness and salvation but believing and confessing Christ because they had already been saved. The third reference simply amplifies the significance of Acts 2:38. The ones who have put on Christ are those who have been immersed into him. Immersion puts a soul into Christ, wherein salvation is found (Acts 4:12).

In summary of this three article series, the New Testament shows that the one baptism of Ephesians 4:5 is immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins. Of course, this immersion itself does not effect salvation. One must also believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (John 8:24), repent of sins (Luke 13:3,5) and confess Jesus as the Christ (Acts 8:36-37). It is the blood of Christ that washes away sins (Romans 5:9) but this blood is available only on the conditions set forth by the Lord Himself (I John 1:7).

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:3-4).