

浸礼——真的有必要吗？

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一、引言

倘若针对浸礼问题，向一百个家庭作调查：“为要符合圣经中关于得救的条件，一个人应该怎样受洗？”那么，等待您的，将是一打各不相同的答案，甚至会是一百种。

有些人会说，得救根本不需要受洗，另一些人则宣称，真正的洗礼要完全浸入水中三次；有人主张在头上洒几滴水即可生效，而另一些人会坚决要求倾倒大量的水；还有少数人会坚称，正确的洗礼乃是受洗者向后仰身浸入水中，一次即成……

不知何故，诸怎样施洗、向谁施洗等有关受洗的问题，人们已经衍生出来的看法，简直是五花八门。但每个人又都认为，只有自己的方法才是以权威的圣经为依据。那么，既然阅读的是同一本圣经，又怎么会引起信仰上如此巨大的混乱呢？

在加利福尼亚的好莱坞，有一个人坚决要求浸入充满玫瑰花瓣的巨大水箱中受洗。如果你觉得这件事有些离奇，再看看最近两起与牧师有关的新闻事件吧：在巴尔的摩一条街道，一位传教士聚集了一群刚刚“皈依”的人，然后打开消防水龙头，使水冲在他们身上，同时宣布，他们都已受洗了！而另一位牧师在杂货店遇见一位想要受洗的女士，他当场将一瓶可口可乐洒在她身上……

尽管这些人的主张相互对立，但显然，在这个问题上，他们对圣经的研究都是非常肤浅的。他们寻求得救的基本模式，大都是基于异教徒的传统、或是出于对圣经的无知。然而我们不要注目于人的发明，只有在圣经的证言中，我们才能找到有关洗礼之真实意义和方法的确切真理。

二、进天国的两个必要条件

让我们首先转向圣经，看看主耶稣关于进入天国所必须之条件的亲自教导：“人若不是从水和圣灵生的，就不能进上帝的国。”（约翰福音 3:5）这或许是耶稣针对这一个问题，所做过的最权威、最肯定的陈述。祂的话十分浅显易懂，绝不会被人误解。进天国有两个必要的条件，并且，为了得救，我们每个人都必须经历这两个过程。

那么，耶稣对尼哥底母所说的这番话是什么意思呢？什么是从圣灵生的？从水生的又是指什么？如果我们仔细阅读了这番谈话的上下文，就会对主所说的话明确无疑。

在第3节中，耶稣十分简明地讲述了何谓从圣灵所生。“我实实在在的告诉你，人若不重生，就不能见上帝的国。”可见，“从圣灵生的”很显然是指“人心悔改而归主”。接着，耶稣在第7-8节中继续讲述了圣灵潜移默化、改变人心之工作的奥秘。“风随着意思吹，你听见风的响声，却不晓得从哪里来，往哪里去；凡从圣灵生的，也是如此。”

现在，让我们来证明耶稣所说“从水生的”就是指“洗礼”。人心悔改而归主与受洗，这两件事在圣经中常常紧密地结合在一起。悔改是强有力的内在改变，而洗礼则是这一内在改变已经发生的外在宣告。请留意，基督在另一场合重述了得救的双重条件：“信而受洗的，必然得救；不信的，必被定罪。”（马可福音 16:16）

耶稣说：“信而受洗的，必然得救。”那么什么是“信”呢？就是对基督十字架之救赎的接纳和“确信”，它相当于“从圣灵而生”，因为人接受十字架的救主，乃是圣灵作工的结果。并且，从这处经文我们可以看到，“信”是与“受洗”相连的，也就是说，“受圣灵的洗”是与“受水的洗”相连的。

这让我们想起，耶稣在与尼哥底母交谈时，也是以同样的方式将“从圣灵生的”与“从水生的”紧密地连在一起。事实上，正是圣灵将十字架上的主耶稣在人们的心中高高地举起，以致人们对基督的救赎产生了确信，而内心也因基督的舍己而悔改。这一改变，则被称为受圣灵的洗，即指圣灵改变人心。“摩西在旷野怎样举蛇，人子也必照样被举起来，叫一切信祂的都得永生。”（约翰福音 3:14-15）但同时，当圣灵改变人心时，人们也需要一个外在的预表性的宣告，而“水的洗礼”正是对其内心所发生之变化的一个宣告。

对此有人可能会争辩说：“鉴于十字架上强盗的例子，洗礼不可能是主所规定得救的一条硬性条件。耶稣难道没有应许那个罪犯会在天国里有一席之地吗？要知道，他的确没有受过洗啊！”

诚然，我们没有强盗受过洗的记载。但当他接受耶稣为救主时，耶稣那顺服的生活就会归与他。我们知道，这个强盗在接受基督之后，确实没有机会接受水的洗礼——他无法从行刑的十字架上下来。但试想，

倘若他能从十字架上下来，他必会做很多事：他会转离罪恶的生活，会归还他所有偷来、抢来、讹诈来的一切，并完全按他当时所认识的真理去行……无奈，他的身体被钉\动弹不得，不可能做任何事。这正是为什么他没有受水的洗，但耶稣仍能接受他、并给了他一个救赎的荣耀保证。

耶稣所受的洗礼，已经因着强盗的信而归给了他——基督要求那个强盗所能做的，他已经全部做了一——他尽了他所能尽的诸般的义。有实事为证：他认罪了，悔过了，诚恳地服法；当众人都拒绝主时，他回转过来信了主，接受了主；当众人都羞辱主时，特别是在精神上试图摧毁主之时，他安慰了主，鼓励了主，并让主看到了劳苦的功效，看到了天父的应允和同在！（参见 路加 23:40-43）

顺便提一下，如果今天情形相似，上帝仍会给予相同的对待。假设有一天，某人来找牧师要求受洗，他的愿望如此急切强烈，并恳求牧师立即为他施洗。于是他们坐车去到附近一个方便施洗的湖泊。但在途中发生了一次可怕的车祸，这个人死于事故。想一想，他会因为还没有与他的主同受浸礼而被弃绝吗？当然不会！他早已决定顺从主，并且正是在顺从主的过程中死去。

上帝从未要求任何人去做他自己不可能完成的事。但无论如何，根据圣经中耶稣话语，任何人都能有把握地得出结论：如果一个人有机会受洗，却拒绝受洗，那人必不能进入上帝的国。

三、洗礼有多少种模式？

洗礼有多种可接受的方式吗？根据使徒保罗所说，答案是否定的。他写道：“一（位）主，一（种）信，一（样）洗。”（以弗所书 4:5）尽管有许多形形色色伪造假冒的信仰、神明和洗礼，但只有一个是真的。那么，我们怎样才能从当代宗教家的所有主张中确认真正的答案呢？

答案不在于人的主张，而在于上帝的圣言，以及洗礼的实际象征意义。换句话说，洗礼的意义决定了洗礼的方式。请仔细阅读保罗针对这一完美的礼仪、以及这一礼仪的实际象征意义所做的描述：“所以，我们藉着洗礼归入死，和祂一同埋葬，原是叫我们一举一动有新生的样式，像基督藉着父的荣耀从死里复活一样。……因为知道我们的旧人和祂同钉十字架，使罪身灭绝，叫我们不再作罪的奴仆。”（罗马书 6:4-6）

你是否理解保罗这段话的真正含义呢？我们都有一个犯罪的本性，有一个老我罪人，我们称之为“旧人”。因为“旧人”和旧的习性必须被完全除掉，所以保罗说，一个真正悔改的人，要藉着“洗礼”这一仪式，来宣告旧人已经被钉死。因此，洗礼是钉死旧人以及旧有习性之“葬礼”的预表。

通过浸入水中的方式，举行了一场灵性上的葬礼，并庆祝圣灵在受洗者里面所“生”的新生活。保罗说，我们要向上帝申请去经历耶稣的死去、埋葬和复活。对于新悔改的信徒而言，这是一种多么神圣而有意义的仪式啊！此刻，新人们正向公众见证，在他们的生命中，已经发生了内在的改变。并且，它也象征正着受洗者正在向前迈进，要进入一种因顺从并得胜罪恶而有的全新的生活。

请允许我问您：怎样的洗礼才能完美地象征这种向罪死、与耶稣同埋葬、并且复活得新生——这一系列的完整经历呢？让我们为此思考片刻。要表达每一进程，再也没有有什么样式能比这更完美了：闭上眼睛，屏住呼吸，双手合拢并从容地没入在水中……

这也正是“为什么圣经要对耶稣受洗这一细节进行详细记载”的真正原因。尽管耶稣在母腹中已经被圣灵充满，但祂仍敦促约翰，无论如何都要给祂施洗。祂说：“你暂且许我，因为我们理当这样尽诸般的义（或作：礼）。”（马太福音 3:15）

请留意当时这礼节是怎样在约旦河中进行的，“那时，耶稣从加利利的拿撒勒来，在约旦河里受了约翰的洗。祂从水里一上来，就看见天裂开了，圣灵彷彿鸽子，降在祂身上。”（马可福音 1:9-10）

这场景与好莱坞电影中所歪曲的叙述截然相反——是在约旦河里而不是在岸边。此处，一些特定词汇是意义非常的。马可是用“从水里一上来”来描述洗礼完毕。耶稣当时被完全浸入水里的目的是“尽诸般的义（或作：礼）”，同时也为了给其后追随祂的人树立一个完美的榜样。

在耶稣升天之后，门徒是否继承了这一上天命所定的方式，给那些申请洗礼者施洗呢？在使徒行传第 8 章里，我们读到，忠心的腓利怎样在旷野为埃塞俄比亚的太监施洗。一位天使命令腓利向南往迦萨的旷野去，在那里，有一位显赫的政府官员正坐在一辆马车上。腓利到了，圣灵便吩咐他贴近这位正在读以赛亚书的埃塞俄比亚大臣。当这人承认他不明白自己所读之书的意思时，腓利就开始向他传讲耶稣，并说明，耶稣正是应验羔羊所预表之救主的那位。

接着就读到了路加为我们记载的这段十分有趣的对话：“二人正往前走，到了有水的地方，太监说：‘看哪，这里有水，我受洗有什么妨碍呢？’（有古卷在此有腓利说：‘你若是一心相信，就可以。’）他回答说：‘我信耶稣基督是上帝的儿子。’）于是吩咐车站住，腓利和太监二人同下水里去，腓利就给他施洗。从水里上来，主的灵把腓利提了去，太监也不再会见了，就欢欢喜喜的走路。”（使徒行传 8:36-39）

这样看来，圣灵似乎预料到有人会对洗礼的方式感到模棱两可，因此祂就感动路加重述这些词：“腓利和太监二人同下水里去”。这里，我们有确凿的证据证实，早期教会遵循的洗礼是全身浸没水下，正像约翰和耶稣曾为他们所做的清楚示范一样。实际上，在所有圣灵启示有关使徒传道和教会活动的记述里，我们找不到任何迹象表明，这个礼节曾经与这两个表兄弟（约翰和耶稣）在约旦河所设立的模式不同。

有时，对于施洗约翰来说，要举行他那特别的侍奉（洗礼），有时很困难，因为在那个干旱的地区，十分缺水。我们得知：“约翰在靠近撒冷的哀嫩也施洗；因为那里水多，众人都去受洗。”（约翰福音 3:23）圣经再一次记载了这有趣的、受圣灵启示的信息片断，要向我们表明，洗净罪污并且进入基督的身体，只有一条正确的路径。约翰不能手持水罐洒水或者浇水来履行上帝所委派的侍奉。当时他被迫局限在约旦河边的城镇，因为那里有足够的水便于全身浸没水下。人们不得不前来就他，为要洗浸在河水之中，“埋葬”他们有罪的“旧人”。

现在让我们看一看，在这问题上有关基督所持立场的最有力的证据。在耶稣提及洗礼的每一个例子中，祂都使用希腊语单词“baptizo”来表示洗礼，今天我们所使用的英语单词“baptize”正是源于它。众多学者和语言专家已经对这个单词两千年来的运用史进行了考察。他们发现，该词在每一种使用过它的学术和交流性系统语言的分支中，都没有偏离它“埋葬”和“被全部掩盖”的基本含意。科南特博士对那些已做详尽调研之人员的结论做了总结。对于单词“baptizo”，他说：“总之，这个单词一直原原本本地保留着它地道的含意而丝毫不变。从希腊文学早期到结束，这段近两千年的时期中，我们找不到任何例子表明它还有任何其他含意。没有任何证据表明，它已被改为局部地用水来‘浇’或‘洒’；或者片面上用来表达清洗净化之含义的字面含义而仅用‘清洗’或者‘净化’代之。”

十分重要的是，我们的主耶稣，祂选择使用“baptizo”这个单词来表示洗礼。另有一些希腊语单词能被兼用来表示洒水与沉浸，但是基督并没有使用过那些词来描述洗礼。祂始终使用那个唯一的单词，这一单词全面地反映了死、埋葬和复活之庄严礼节的表号象征。

四、谁有资格受洗

按照以上的信息，我们能否确定谁才是符合基督教受洗条件的申请者呢？圣经给凡打算迈出这一步的人拟定了三重前提：

首先，耶稣说：“所以，你们要去，使（原文为：教导）万民作我的门徒，奉父、子、圣灵的名给他们施洗。凡我所吩咐你们的，都教训他们遵守，我就常与你们同在，直到世界的末了。”（马太福音 28:19,20）洗礼是悔改归主的外在见证，由此我们立即可以明白，耶稣为什么命令所有人在接受这一圣礼之前，都必须受教导。不明白救赎计划的人，就不能够享用浸礼的丰盛供给。基督规定在洗礼入水之前，每个申请洗礼的人，都应该先接受基本要道的教导，他们必须充分地明白他们所做之事的意义。

第二，基督还进一步强调了这项准备工作的紧迫性，因此祂说：“信而受洗的，必然得救。”（马可福音 16:16）对于申请受洗的人而言，若没有必备的个人信德，罪就无法蒙赦免，并且无法产生悔改的功效。而洗礼这一外在行为，也就只能是一场空洞呆板的仪式。

第三，五旬节那天，受圣灵感动的彼得支持耶稣的陈述，附上洗礼第三重前提，他说：“你们各人要悔改，奉耶稣基督的名受洗，叫你们的罪得赦。”（使徒行传 2:38）

现在答案越发明朗。任何人在预备受洗之前，必须一一向他们阐明接受耶稣并获重生的全部要素。教导、信心、悔改以及诚心归主，这一切永远都要发生在“公开表示弃绝为罪所奴役之旧生活”的象征——洗礼之前。

马上我们会明白，婴儿是没有资格领受这个独特礼仪的。对于婴儿来说，他们无法符合这些圣经所列的条件。婴儿无法受教导，并且年龄太小而无法知罪、无从悔改。因此，可以断定，所有向那些嗷嗷待哺的婴儿洒水施洗的仪式，皆是完全与圣经洗礼无关的。我们可以把极小的新生儿献给上帝，并且为他们及其父母祈祷，但是决不应该以此成为圣经中洗礼的替代品。

大多数人可能并不知道，即使在天主教中，直到第十、十一世纪，也都是按全身浸没的样式施洗的。我曾看到东部地区诸多古老的大教堂内，附设了可同时容纳多人的洗礼池。这些被用来接受家庭成员一起受洗的设施已逐渐废弃。由于将幼小的婴儿浸入水中不安全，于是起初是超快速浸水，然后是改由大量倾倒水，再后来，便是象征性地洒水，最后就发展到蘸水在眉目间一抹了事。与其它许多的神圣礼仪一样，这种礼节在文化妥协和追求便利的无情压力下，渐渐变质消亡。异教洒水施浸的风俗不仅在天主教和东正教的传统中盛行，最终也渗入到新教各宗派之中。

几年前我居住在印度的班加罗尔时，一天早晨，持久响亮的敲门声把我从床上叫起来。访客急切地请求打动了，尽管我们素不相识。他催促我赶快穿好外套。他急寻牧师，而我是他唯一能找到的一位。这是一位印度的基督教徒，夜晚他隔壁邻居刚刚失去了他们的孩子。当我们匆忙奔走在路上时，他告诉我，“现在，我邻居所在教会的牧师，已经不理这家人了，也不会为他们料理葬礼，因为他们由于某种原因未能给孩子施婴儿洒水礼，我希望您探访他们，并且提供安慰和勉励。”

我看到了恍惚茫然中几乎已被这灾难压垮的一家：父亲正试图用些粗糙的木板为孩子做个小棺材；悲痛的母亲哭泣着紧紧环抱着死去的婴儿。我帮助父亲完成手工棺材时，他详细地解释了他的牧师所告诉他有关这孩子的事。因他们以前的疏忽，没能给孩子举行正式的洗礼，这孩子恐怕注定在地狱里遭受火的刑罚，而牧师既不会为他举办葬礼，也不准许在公墓给他们一个被祝圣的地方埋葬。（译者按，根据天主教字典可知，自中世纪及至今日，“天主教”一直有这一遗传：“好人”死后要埋葬在“被祝圣的地方”才能升

天；“坏人——未受洗者，罪人未告解者”则无权做圣事——超度弥散，也没有资格入葬此地，于是无法升入天堂。）

在把小孩的尸体放在小棺材里之后，我与这家人聚成一圈，开始举行我人生中的最不寻常的一场葬礼。在分享安慰的话之后，我向他们保证，孩子的得救与否与他们疏忽施洒水礼无关。在对他们的牧师之言行的义愤中，我指出，比起那位拒绝出席的牧师，这婴儿倒是更有得救的保证！

后来我抱着小棺材，领着这家人，用我的客货车载到一块“不被祝圣的土地”，在那儿，我们埋葬了这个小孩，使他安息。人可以祝圣那起初因罪而受到上帝的咒诅之地——这是一个地道的异教概念！这些空洞的遗传，会把人拖入异端！

五、上帝特别在意形式吗？

在当今的世界上，有很多人觉得，讨论洗礼到底以“洒”、“浇”、“浸没”的哪种方式为准毫无意义。他们争辩说：“效果有什么差别吗？无论哪一种方式，都只不过是种象征而已。上帝不会那么特别在意我们所采用的方式吧。”但是，应该详细地考究这个问题，——事实上，上帝是如此特别地在意。

圣经里有许多生动的故事，证明上帝的确对祂的诫命非常在意。举个例子，当时出埃及的六十万希伯来男丁，有多少人进入了应许之地？或者，我们更应该注意他们当中有多少人没能到达目的地，——圣经告诉我们，有 599998 人死在了旷野。迦勒和约书亚是所有出埃及并在旷野艰苦跋涉的男丁中，走完全部旅程并进入迦南之地的仅存者。并且，圣经说，这只是因为“他们专心跟从耶和華。”（见：申 1:36；书 14:8-9;14）

让我们来想一想：是否因着洗礼所象征的实意，就使其形式变得无关紧要了呢？不能否认，从容沉入水下的每一过程中，均有某种深刻的属灵意义。同样，共领圣餐的饼和葡萄汁，不也是预表同一个类似的属灵真理吗？实际上，圣餐礼所指的事，与洗礼所纪念的事完全相同，都是指发生在耶稣人生中的同一事件。

然而，当一个现代派前卫教会的年轻人用可口可乐和汉堡包来代替耶稣在那个星期四傍晚给祂门徒所提供的圣餐实物时，我们中间有多少人会宽恕这样的亵渎行为呢？即使它仅仅只是象征，但我们仍然相信，采用救主设立圣餐礼时所使用的相同表号，是生死攸关、极其重要的。既然如此，我们难道不应同样认为，捍卫耶稣在约旦河中所设立的洗礼之表号也是十分紧迫的吗？

还有另外一段经文，强有力地证明了前面所提出的一系列证据。保罗写道：“你们既受洗与祂一同埋葬，也就在此与祂一同复活；都因信那叫祂从死里复活上帝的功用。”（歌罗西书 2:12）“埋葬”这个单词作为一个描述洗礼的短语，在新约圣经中的重现了洗礼的深刻象征意义。为了表明耶稣为我们所做的各个方面，洗礼必须包括死、埋葬和复活的象征。；因其都与赎罪密切相关，并且除了浸没式洗礼，没有任何其它的洗礼方式能够清楚的表达这些必备要素。

耶稣已亲自示范了这一仪式，作为完全的榜样，谁还能拒绝这唯一包含救赎计划每个特征的洗礼方式呢？必须再次强调，接受洗礼的瞬间，人的生命并不会产生神秘的或者奇迹般的变化。罪的旧人之死必须发生在葬礼和埋葬之前。即使举行圣礼的形式完全适当、无可挑剔，也不能确保申请受洗者此刻会在生命上有丝毫变化。这种变化必须发生在洗礼的见证得到真实表达之前。罪大恶极的人，可能被强迫进入洗礼池浸没 50 次，却恶性仍在，毫无功效。他入水时是罪人，出水时依然如此，不过是干爽与湿漉之别。遗憾的是，长久以来，宗教领袖和牧师们已经“活葬”了许多尚未满足向罪死这一条件的人。

有时人们会问，全身浸没的洗礼会不会减免撒但的攻击，并且使他们的日常生活会更愉快、更舒适？我也希望它可以保证除去障碍并解决全部问题，但那不是圣经所教导的。耶稣受洗之后，立即被催逼到旷野，经历了与撒但可怕的交锋。很可能每位新近受洗的基督徒，不得不与黑暗权势进行类似的搏斗。因为所有选择受洗之人都大大激怒了魔鬼撒但。

知道专心跟从耶稣就会面对更多麻烦和攻击是否会令人恐惧不安？实在地告诉大家，对于个人来说，这其实并没有什么可怕，因为属灵的特殊才智会赋予每位接受洗礼的人。每位走出水墓的受洗者，都会凭信心从崭新关系中得到一种力量，并藉以抵御仇敌的一切攻击。这种只存在于应许之中的力量，开始流入到这些新生基督徒每日的生活经验中。保罗写道：“你们所遇见的试探，无非是人所能受的。上帝是信实的，必不叫你们受试探过于所能受的；在受试探的时候，总要给你们开一条出路，叫你们能忍受得住。”（哥林多前书 10:13）

多么美好的应许和保证啊！上帝的孩子中，没有一个会被落下，单独作战。撒但的全部同盟，可能会列阵一起攻击我们，但是他们无法把我们与奉差遣来保护我们的天使军团分开。上帝向我们保证，祂会承担起“开辟一条出路”的重任，以便我们能躲避撒但所能设下的最诡诈的圈套。

六、是否需要重新受洗？

我们必须考查“洗礼”的另一主题，它与再洗礼有关。如果一个人决定第二次或更多次进入水中受洗，是不是说明他背离了从前的承诺？如果是由于某种原因，人背叛了受洗之时的与基督所立的约，那么，再次受洗是不是必须的呢？圣经是否对这一问题提供了答案？是的。

在早期的使徒教会，显然也出现过完全相同的质疑。使徒行传 19:1-5 节记述了保罗在以弗所是怎样处理这个问题的。“亚波罗在哥林多的时候，保罗经过了上边一带地方，就来到以弗所，遇见几个门徒；问他们说：‘你们信的时候受了圣灵没有？’他们回答说：‘没有，也未曾听见有圣灵赐下来。’保罗说：‘这样，你们受的是什么洗呢？’他们说：‘是约翰的洗。’保罗说：‘约翰所行的是悔改的洗，告诉百姓当信那在他以后要来的，就是耶稣。’他们听见这话，就奉主耶稣的名受洗。”

仔细观察，约翰早就给这些以弗所的基督徒施洗了。不仅洗礼合法，而且他们也已从约翰的谆谆教导中接受基督为弥赛亚。但是在保罗询问下，他们承认缺乏有关圣灵的知识。在这个问题上，保罗分享给他们的信息，有某种独特的意义，以至于他们感到有必要再次受洗。根据前面所列的圣经例子，让我们考虑现代门徒立志再次受洗的可能原因。

显而易见，如果一个人发现，他的第一次受洗与耶稣的榜样不协调一致，他必须为了尽“诸般的义”而顺从那正确的洗礼方式。拿滴水礼为例，它虽然以洗礼名义执行，但决不能满足象征死亡和埋葬的要求。这就意味着，不管父母或者教父、教母是多么的虔诚，婴儿必须被视为无资格受洗的，直到他们达到可以承担责任的年龄，拥有属灵悟性之时。有时对于受过滴水礼的成年人，很难接受自己从未真正受过洗、并且应该尽快安排一次真正的浸没式洗礼的观点。（译者注：“教父、教母”本是天主教的传统。教父教母都是儿童在受点水洗礼时担保的人，他们有可能是德高望重的人。但后来，教父教母的制度日趋世俗化，甚至在今日的新教教会中也流行起来。）

我曾经问一个人是否受过洗，他说：“我不知道，但我会去问我的母亲再告诉你”。不管他母亲作何回答，毫无疑问，此人需要再次受洗。有时人们告诉我，他们在年少、还未进入新生经历之前就受了洗。因此，他们的洗礼仅仅是为了取悦一些朋友或者家庭成员而举行的形式化宗教仪式。对于这些人，在他们的内心发生真实的转变，悔改归向基督之后，必须紧接着为纪念向生命中的罪死去而领受这意味深长的埋葬

式浸礼。

对于那些偏离信仰重回到以前罪恶生活中的基督徒，该怎么办呢？毫无疑问，公开背道，也就是公然违背上帝律法的罪，必须借着重新受洗的经历，公开断绝上述罪恶。转变生活方式的个人见证，是受洗的重要意义之一。

另一个使某些人感到可能需要再次受洗的因素，与以弗所信徒的经历有关。显然他们相信保罗分享给他们的更加辉煌的真理亮光，具有一种改变生命的特质，以至于感到有必要再次受洗。许多人，当他们认识到新的圣经教训时，也许感到有必要改革自己相信和崇拜上帝的方式。一些人的确发现，在他们以前所行基督徒的路程中，虽然真诚，但实际上却是一直违犯圣经中的一些非常重要的原则。他们选择通过经历重新受洗，洗涤过去而洁净，没有一个人会认为他们这样做是在否定先前的经历。

一个严肃的问题是，既然有了这一系列使人下定决心受洗、并成为教友的不可辩驳的原因，那么，为何还有许多人踌躇不前、迟疑不决呢？多年来，我一直听到种种为自己辩解，声称无法与耶稣同行、特别是无法经历受洗并降服于主的藉口。最常用的说辞之一是：“我怕自己无法坚持，并且我不想做一名虚伪的人”等等。十分肯定的是，对于那些已经满足信仰、悔改和诚心归主之先决条件的人，这不能算作一个正当的借口。提出借口的人非常清楚，肉体的软弱借着人的力量是不可能达到上帝的标准的，诸事都取决于祷告、并不断与耶稣保持亲密的关系。

受洗之后可能会有软弱的时候，也可能遇到操练灵性的试探。但就因为这些“可能”，我们便失去了在洗礼中献上自己生命的信心吗？只有在我们自私地为自己设计生活时，才会害怕立下那永远忠诚的神圣洗礼的誓言。

你还在犹豫什么？请藉着信心切实坦然地接受洗礼，并向公众宣告你的选择，以此来鼓励其它人一起来全然信靠上帝的大能吧！虽然在日渐茁壮的成长过程中，有可能会跌倒，但我们知道，如果自己犯了错，那位爱的耶稣必会当场扶你起来，赦免你，拥抱并鼓励你！那些过分担忧没有信心去开始基督徒之旅程的人，只是在承认自己没有为受洗做灵性准备。就让他们等待吧，直到他们的信心更坚定地立足于耶稣而非自己！

人们如何才能确知自己已为受洗作好准备了呢？难道必须等到他们感觉可以确信自己永不再犯错为止吗？当然不是。实际上，人的感觉与预备的状态无关。但人必须确定基督已住进自己的灵魂深处，并在其生命中施行了重生的神迹。他们必须能惬意地将他们自己的名字写到以赛亚书第 53 章的有关弥赛亚的美丽的应许中。每个适合的洗礼申请者，必须能这样读以赛亚书 53:5 节“哪知祂为我们的过犯受害，为我们的罪孽压伤。因祂受的刑罚，我们得平安；因祂受的鞭伤，我们得医治。”

有些人久久徘徊，尚未决心跟从耶稣步入洗礼池——这一水做的“坟墓”，也许读完上述内容，就会立即行动。难道你还担心因一些可能发生的失足或失败而令你的救主失望吗？请在此刻，转离那毫无根据、以自我为中心的担心害怕吧！

与基督同行，并不是依靠自己的能力去战胜试探和人性的弱点。如果一直思考自己靠什么才能够得胜，你就会永远待在那犹豫不决的朦胧状态。必须聚精会神地思想那位全能者的力量和大能，祂一直邀请你成为祂永远的朋友。正是祂永不落空的应许，带给你完全的信心去过基督化的人生！

甚至连腓利比的狱卒，也大大地被悔罪觉悟和对上帝之信所驱动，坚决要求自己与全家在半夜里马上受洗。保罗虽然自己身为一名囚犯，也为那些热切的新悔改归主之人施洗。

从前亚拿尼亚也表达出同样的急切之情，敦促当时刚刚悔改归主的保罗，他说：“现在你为什么耽延呢？起来，求告祂的名受洗，洗去你的罪。”（使徒行传 22:16）

难道这不是呼求圣灵烙印你心的时刻吗？你爱主，并且承认祂已经为你的罪而死。借着信心，你已经接受祂为你付出死的赎价。耶稣成为人子的恩典，已经第一次将平安和应许带入你的人生。如果所有这一切都是真实的，你必须做出人生中最重要决定，圣灵在究问：“你为什么耽延呢？起来受洗吧！”

Baptism - Is it Really Necessary?

By Joe Crews

Introduction

Suppose you could survey the people who live in the hundred homes nearest to your own house on the subject of Christian baptism. What kind of answer would you get in response to this question: “How should a person be baptized in order to meet the Bible requirements of salvation?”

It is likely that you would get a dozen different answers, and possibly even a hundred. Some would say that they don't believe it is necessary to be baptized at all to be saved. Others would answer that true baptism is to go forward three times completely under the water. Some would contend that a few drops of sprinkled water on the head would constitute a valid baptism, while others would insist on pouring the water over the candidate. A few would strongly hold that a proper baptism consists of a single immersion backwards into the water. Somehow, the subject of baptism has spawned a plethora of ideas on how it should be administered, and to whom. Yet, all believe that their method is based on the one book of authority—the Bible. How could this confusion of conviction result from reading the same book?

One man in Hollywood, California, insisted on being immersed in a huge tank full of rose petals. And if you think that's bizarre, consider the two latest incidents involving men of the cloth. One preacher gathered his new converts in a Baltimore Street and turned the fire hose on them, declaring them now baptized. Another minister met a lady in the grocery store who wanted to be baptized, and he sprinkled her right there on the spot—with a bottle of Coca-Cola.

In spite of all claims to the contrary, it is obvious that all of these people had made a very shallow study of the Word of God concerning this subject. Their radical modes of seeking salvation were based largely on pagan tradition or ignorance of the Scriptures. We, however, are not interested in such human inventions. It is in the testimony of the Bible alone that we find the real truth about the meaning and method of true baptism.

Two Requirements for Heaven

We first turn to the teaching of the Master Himself as He defined the terms for entrance into His Kingdom. “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” John 3:5. This statement is probably the most definitive and assertive that Christ ever made on any subject. His words are too clear to be misunderstood—that there are two absolute requirements for entrance into heaven. Every one of us must pass through these two experiences in order to be saved.

But what did Jesus mean by that statement to Nicodemus? What does it mean to be born of the Spirit? And what does it mean to be born of the water? The context of the conversation with the rich Pharisee leaves no doubt as to what the Master meant by those words. In verse 3 He described the spiritual birth in a very simple way: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” So to be

“born of the Spirit” clearly refers to conversion. Then Jesus continued in verses 7 and 8 to describe the mysterious, silent work of the Spirit in its transforming mission.

Now we will show that being born of water refers to baptism. These two things are often closely tied together in the Scriptures. Conversion is the powerful inward change, and baptism is the outward physical sign that the change has taken place. Notice how Christ repeated the two conditions for salvation on another occasion, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Mark 16:16.

This believing unto salvation is the equivalent of being born of the Spirit, and it is coupled with baptism in the same way Jesus did it while talking to Nicodemus. It is faith in the saving merits of the cross that produces the miraculous change that baptism by water symbolizes.

Someone, at this point, might argue that because of the thief on the cross, baptism could not be one of the strict requirements of salvation laid down by our Lord. Did Jesus not promise that vile criminal a place in the kingdom? And he was certainly not baptized!

It's true that we have no record of the thief being baptized, for he certainly had no opportunity to do so after accepting Jesus as his Lord and Saviour. He could not come down from the cross where he was being executed by the Roman authorities. Had he been able to descend from that cross, he would have done many things. He would have turned from his life of crime, made restitution for all he had stolen, and walked in full conformity to truth he now understood. But since it was physically impossible to do any of those things, the obedient life of Jesus was imputed to him. That is why God could accept him and Jesus could give him such a glorious assurance of salvation. The baptism of Jesus was credited to him—an act that would have been required of the thief had he been able to fulfill it.

By the way, the same transaction would take place today if the circumstances were similar. Suppose a man should approach me this very day, requesting baptism. His desire is so urgent and compelling that he begs me to do it immediately. We get in my car to drive to a nearby lake where there is a convenient place to conduct the service. But on the way to the lake, there is a terrible accident. My passenger is killed in that accident. Would he be lost because he had not yet been immersed with his Lord? Of course not. He had made the decision and was in the process of obeying the Lord when he died. God never requires the impossible from anyone. However, based on what we have learned from the lips of Jesus, one can confidently conclude that if a person has the opportunity to be baptized and refuses to be, that man cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

How Many Modes of Baptism?

Are there many acceptable modes of being baptized? Not according to the apostle Paul. He wrote: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” Ephesians 4:5. Even though there are numerous counterfeit faiths, gods, and baptisms, there is only one that is true. How can we determine the genuine amidst all the claims of modern religionists?

The answer lies in the Word of God, and in the actual symbolism of the act. In other words, the mode of

baptism is dictated by the meaning of baptism. Look carefully at Paul's description of the beautiful ceremony and what it actually represents: "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...knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Romans 6:4-6.

Do you understand the significance of what Paul is saying? There has been a death of the old life of sin, which is identified as the "old man." Now that body of evil must be properly disposed of, and Paul says baptism is the occasion for "burying" that crucified nature. By going into the water to conduct a spiritual funeral and to celebrate the new life which has been begotten in the candidate through the Holy Spirit, Paul says we are also memorializing the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Himself. What a meaningful act on the part of newly converted believers! They are giving public witness to the inward transformation that has taken place in their life and are symbolically walking forth into the joys of a new life of obedience and victory.

Let me ask you something. How could one ideally symbolize this entire experience of death to sin, burial with Jesus, and rising to a new life? Think about it for a moment. There is no more perfect way to represent all those steps than to have the eyes closed, breath suspended, hands folded, and to be lowered gently beneath the water.

Does this not also explain the reason for such a finely detailed account of the baptism of Jesus? Even though He had been filled with the Spirit while still in His mother's womb, Jesus urged John to baptize Him anyway. He said: "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." Matthew 3:15.

Notice how the ceremony was carried out there in the Jordan River. "And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in the Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him." Mark 1:9,10.

Contrary to the distorted depictions of the Hollywood movie version, the scene unfolded in the Jordan River and not nearby on the bank. The specific words are very important here. Mark describes their "coming up out of the water" after the baptism. Jesus was totally immersed in the water in order to "fulfill all righteousness" and to set a perfect example for His followers ever afterward.

Did His disciples continue this heaven-appointed way of baptizing their candidates after Jesus went back to heaven? In Acts 8, we read how the faithful Philip dealt with the Ethiopian eunuch in the desert. An angel commanded Philip to travel south into the Gaza desert, where the prominent government leader was sitting in a chariot. There the Spirit told Philip to join the Ethiopian treasurer, who was reading from the book of Isaiah. When the man confessed that he did not understand what he was reading, Philip began to preach to him about Jesus, who fulfilled the messianic prophecy of the submissive Lamb.

Then we have this interesting conversation, recorded for us by Luke. "And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus

Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still; and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.” Acts 8:36-39.

It almost seems that the Spirit of God anticipated the uncertainty that some would feel about the manner of baptism, and therefore He moved upon Luke to repeat the words: “they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch.” Here we have positive evidence that the early church practiced total immersion, just as John and Jesus had so clearly demonstrated for them. In fact, in all the inspired accounts of apostolic evangelism and church activities, we have no indication that this practice ever varied from the pattern established by the two cousins at the Jordan.

Sometimes it was difficult for John the Baptist to carry out his special ministry because of the scarcity of water in that dry area. We are told that “John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.” John 3:23. Again, the Bible includes this interesting bit of inspired information to show us that there is only one proper way to wash away sin and enter the body of Christ. John could not take a jug of water and fulfill his appointed ministry by sprinkling or pouring. He was compelled to remain in cities along the Jordan River where there was sufficient water for total immersion. The people had to come to him in order to have their old sinful lives “buried” in the waters of baptism.

But now let’s look at the strongest possible evidence of Christ’s position on this subject. In every instance where Jesus referred to baptism, He used the Greek word “baptizo” from which we derive our English word. Scholars and language experts have traced the history of that word through two thousand years of usage. They discovered that every possible branch of learning and communication has used it, and never once deviated from its original root meaning of burial or being totally covered up. Dr. Conant summarizes the conclusions of the researchers who did the exhaustive study. Concerning the word “baptizo,” he said: “In all, the word has retained its ground meaning without change. From the earliest age of Greek literature down to its close, a period of nearly 2,000 years, not an example has been found in which the word has any other meaning. There is no instance in which it signifies making a partial application of water by affusion or sprinkling, or to cleanse or purify, apart from the literal act of immersion as a means of cleansing or purifying.”

It is extremely significant that our Lord chose to use that word “baptizo” for baptize. There were other Greek words that could have been used which signify either sprinkling or immersion, but Christ did not ever employ such terms in describing baptism. He always used the only word which reflected the full symbolism of that solemn ceremony—death, burial, and resurrection.

Who Qualifies for Baptism?

In the light of this information, can we now determine who is an eligible candidate for Christian baptism? The Bible lays down three pre-conditions for anyone contemplating this step. Jesus said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:19, 20.

Since baptism is the outward witness of conversion, it is immediately clear why Jesus commanded that all should be taught before qualifying for that sacred rite. Without an understanding of the plan of salvation, none could participate in its bountiful provisions. Christ stipulated that every candidate should be instructed in His basic doctrines before entering the water of baptism. They would need to fully understand the meaning of what they were doing.

He further emphasized the urgency of this preparation work when He said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” Mark 16:16. No sins could be forgiven and no conversion effected without personal faith on the part of the candidate. Otherwise the physical act of baptism would be an empty mechanical ritual. The inspired Peter, on the day of Pentecost, gave support to the words of Jesus by adding a third prerequisite for baptism. He said, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” Acts 2:38.

Now the picture is pulling into sharp focus. All the elements of accepting Jesus and being born again must be present before any person is spiritually prepared for baptism. Instruction, faith, repentance, and true conversion will always precede the public renouncing of the old life of sinful bondage.

Immediately we can see that infants do not qualify for this unique ceremony. It is impossible for a baby to meet the conditions laid down in these Scriptures. An infant cannot be taught and it is too young to be aware of sin or to repent. Therefore, we must conclude that all the ritualistic sprinkling of water on gurgling infants at christening ceremonies has absolutely nothing to do with Bible baptism. We can dedicate tiny newborns to God and pray for them and for their parents, but it should never be a substitute for Bible baptism.

Most people do not realize that even the Catholic Church baptized by immersion until the tenth or eleventh century. I've seen the ancient cathedrals in the East with large baptistries to accommodate several people at the same time. Those facilities gradually fell into disuse as the shift was made to receive every member of the family into fellowship of the church. Because tiny babies could not safely be put under the water, they were exposed first to maximum dousing, then ample pouring, then liberal sprinkling, and finally a touch of wetness between the eyes. Like many other divine ordinances, this one suffered and died slowly under the relentless pressures of cultural compromise and convenience. The pagan custom of sprinkling not only pervaded the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, but passed finally into the various Protestant persuasions as well.

Several years ago while living in Bangalore, India, I was aroused from my bed early one morning by a loud and persistent knock on my door. My caller that day was a stranger to me, but his urgent appeal arrested my attention and sent me scurrying to get dressed. He desperately needed a minister, and I was the only one he could locate. He was an Indian Christian whose next-door neighbors had lost their little baby during the night. “Now” he told me, as we hurried to his house, “the pastor of my neighbor’s church will not have anything to do with the family or the funeral arrangements, because for some reason they had failed to have the baby sprinkled as an infant. I want you to visit them and offer comfort and encouragement.”

I found the devastated family almost in a daze. The father was trying to construct a casket for the child from

some rough boards. The grieving mother was weeping as she clutched the dead baby in her arms. As I helped the father finish the handmade coffin, he explained in more detail what his own pastor had told him about the baby. Because they had neglected to have an official baptism for their child, it was now supposedly doomed to a fiery punishment in hell, and the pastor would neither officiate at the funeral nor grant them a consecrated place of burial in the cemetery.

After we had placed the little body in the box, I gathered the family in a circle and conducted the most unusual funeral service of my life. After sharing words of comfort, I assured them that their failure to have a few drops of water sprinkled on their baby would have nothing to do with its salvation. In my outrage at the actions of their pastor, I made the statement that the little infant had much more assurance of salvation than the priest who had refused to be present that day.

Afterwards I took the box and the family in my van to a spot of “unconsecrated ground” where we laid the little baby to rest. What a pagan concept it is that man can sanctify the very ground that God cursed in the beginning because of sin! Such are the extremes to which empty traditions will carry people.

Is God Particular About the Mode?

There are many in the world today that sincerely feel that it is a moot point as to whether one is sprinkled, poured, or immersed in baptism. “What difference does it make? It’s only symbolic anyway,” they contend. “God is not that particular about the way we do it.” But we should carefully consider the question of how particular God really is. There are many dramatic stories in the Bible that prove that God is indeed very particular about His commandments. Consider, for example, how many of the 600,000 Hebrews who left Egypt actually entered the Promised Land. Or perhaps we should note how many did not reach their destination. The Bible reveals that 599,998 died before they could cross the river into their promised possession. Caleb and Joshua were the only survivors of the wilderness trek to complete the total journey from Egypt to Canaan, and the Scriptures say that it was only because “they followed the Lord fully.”

But let’s consider for a moment whether the symbolic nature of the practice makes the mode of baptism irrelevant. We cannot deny that there is a deep spiritual meaning attached to each stage of the physical event of being gently lowered beneath the water. But is there not a similar foreshadowing of spiritual truth in the communion bread and wine? In fact, that service points to the very same events in the life of Jesus that baptism commemorates. Yet how many of us would condone the blasphemy being practiced by a contemporary underground church of young people who have substituted Coca-Cola and hamburger for the elements Jesus offered His disciples on that Thursday night? No matter that it all merely represented something; we believe it is vitally important to utilize the very same symbols that our Lord used when He introduced the service. Then why should we not feel the urgency to maintain the same symbolic form that Jesus used when He introduced baptism at the Jordan River long, long ago?

There is yet another text of the Bible which lends powerful support to the chain of evidence already presented. Paul wrote, “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” Colossians 2:12. The recurrence of that word “buried” is a striking

common denominator among the descriptive phrases about baptism in the New Testament. In order to represent the various aspects of what Jesus did for us, baptism must include a symbol of death, burial, and resurrection. Those are the major events connected with the atonement, and not one mode of baptism except immersion even approaches the required symbolic elements.

Why should anyone reject the only form of baptism that incorporates every feature of the plan of salvation, when Jesus Himself gave a practical demonstration of it as our perfect example? It must be emphasized again that there is no magical or miraculous change in the life of a person at the moment of baptism. The death of that old man of sin must precede the funeral service and burial. Even the proper form of administering the ordinance does not guarantee the slightest change in the life of the candidate. That change must take place before the testimony of it can be truthfully expressed. The very worst sinner could be coerced into the baptistry and immersed 50 times with absolutely no effect. He would go down a dry sinner and come up a wet sinner. Unfortunately, religious leaders and pastors long have buried large numbers of people alive before they had met the requirements of being dead to sin.

Sometimes people ask if being immersed in baptism will bring them relief from satanic attack and make their daily life more pleasant and comfortable. I wish it were possible to give assurance that it would remove obstacles and resolve all problems, but that is not what the Bible portrays. Immediately after His baptism Jesus was driven into the wilderness where He experienced the awful encounter with Satan. It may well be that every newly baptized Christian will have to suffer similar struggles with the powers of darkness. The devil is enraged by the total commitment of those who choose to be baptized.

Is it intimidating to know that these harassing attacks may increase upon those who follow Jesus fully? Indeed, it should not be a frightening prospect to a single person, because special spiritual resources are bestowed upon each one who accepts the covenant of baptism. Every candidate walks out of the water in the strength of a new relationship that guarantees protection against all attacks of the enemy. The power that existed only in promises begins to flow into the daily life experience of these fresh young Christians. Paul wrote: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 1 Corinthians 10:13. What an amazing assurance we have in that promise! No child of God will be left to fight the battle alone. All the confederacies of Satan may be arrayed against us, but they cannot contrive a strategy that will separate us from the angelic legions that are assigned to defend us. God assumes the responsibility for creating an escape route by which we can elude the cleverest snare that Satan can design.

Is Rebaptism Ever Right?

There is another aspect of this subject that should be explored, and it has to do with rebaptism. Is it a denial of the original commitment if a person chooses to enter the water of baptism a second time, or perhaps even more? For what reason, if any, would it be important or even necessary to be baptized again? Does the Bible provide an answer to these questions? It does indeed. The very same inquiries apparently were raised in the early apostolic church, and Acts 19:1-5 explains how Paul dealt with it in Ephesus. "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding

certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Observe carefully that John had already baptized these Christians at Ephesus. Not only was it a legitimate baptism, but also they had accepted Christ as the Messiah from John's careful instruction. But under Paul's questioning, they confessed to a lack of knowledge regarding the Holy Spirit. The message that Paul shared with them on this subject was of such a nature that they felt it necessary to be baptized again. With this Bible example before us, let's consider possible reasons for modern disciples choosing to be baptized again. Obviously if one discovers that his first baptism was not in harmony with the example of Jesus, he should submit to the proper form in order to fulfill "all righteousness". Sprinkling, for example, although performed under the name of baptism, could never meet the required symbolism of death and burial. This means that babies, regardless of the sincerity of their parents or godparents, must be considered unbaptized until they take the step after their own spiritual awakening at a responsible age. Sometimes it is difficult for sprinkled adults to grasp the idea that they have never really been baptized at all and should arrange for a true immersion baptism as soon as possible.

I once asked a man if he had ever been baptized. His reply was, "I don't know, but I'll ask my mother and let you know." There can be no doubt that this man needed to be baptized again, regardless of what his mother said. Sometimes people tell me that they were baptized in their early years before they had really entered into the new birth experience. Thus, it had been merely a formal ritual done to please some friend or family member. Such persons, after entering a true conversion, should follow the meaningful burial-baptism to commemorate the death of sin in their lives.

What about the Christian who slips away from the faith and reverts to his former life of sin? It is without question that public apostasy, marked by open disobedience to God's law, should be just as openly renounced by a renewal of the baptism experience. The personal witness of a turning around in the lifestyle is one of the important aspects of being baptized.

Another reason that some might feel the need for rebaptism is related to the experience of the Ephesian believers. Apparently they believed that the greater light of truth shared with them by Paul was of such a life-changing nature that they felt it necessary to be baptized again. Many may feel the same today as they learn new biblical teachings that revolutionize their way of believing and worshiping God. Some indeed discover that their previous Christian walk, though sincere, was actually violating some very important principles of Scripture. None should feel that they are denying their earlier experience by choosing to wash the past clean through a renewing of the baptismal experience.

With such an irrefutable array of reasons for making the decision for baptism and church membership, why do so many people hold back and procrastinate in taking the step? For many years, I have listened to excuses offered for not going all the way with Jesus, and particularly for not yielding the life in baptism. One of the

most common expressions I've heard is this: "I'm afraid I can't hold out, and I don't want to be a hypocrite." Surely, this cannot be a valid argument for anyone who has met the prerequisites of faith, repentance, and conversion. Such a person is very aware of the weakness of the flesh and the impossibility of measuring up to God's standard in human strength. Everything depends upon prayer and a constant, intimate relationship with Jesus.

Is it possible for that prayer and faith life to weaken, plunging us into defeat? Of course, we can choose to neglect those spiritual exercises at any or every moment of our lives. Should that possibility discourage us from dedicating our lives in baptism? Not at all. Only if we are making plans to live for self would we be fearful of making those solemn baptismal vows of eternal faithfulness. But the truly con-veiled step out by faith in that public commitment, trusting fully in God's power to uphold them. They recognize the possibility of stumbling as they grow stronger day by day, but they know the loving Jesus will be there to pick them up, forgive, and surround them with encouragement if they make a mistake. Those who are too fearful and faithless to begin the Christian journey are simply confirming their spiritual unpreparedness for the baptism experience. Let them wait until their faith is more firmly fixed upon Jesus than upon self.

How then can people really be sure that they are ready for baptism? Should they wait until they feel absolutely certain they will never make a mistake? Definitely not. In fact, feeling has nothing to do with their readiness. But they must be perfectly settled in their innermost soul that Christ has performed the new birth miracle in their lives. They must be able to comfortably put their own name into the beautiful messianic promise of Isaiah 53. Each proper candidate for baptism should be able to read verse 5 like this: But he was wounded for my transgressions, he was bruised for my iniquities: the chastisement of my peace was upon him, and with his stripes, I am healed.

Some may be reading these words right now who have been lingering long over the decision to follow Jesus into the watery grave of baptism. Have you been afraid of disappointing your Saviour by some possible misstep or failure? Turn this very moment from such groundless, self-centered fears. Your walk with Jesus does not depend on your ability to overcome temptation and human weakness. If you think in terms of what you are able to do, you may remain in the twilight zone of indecision forever. You must focus every thought upon the strength and power of the One who invites you to be His friend forever. It is the unfailing nature of His promises that can give you perfect trust in living the Christian life.

Even the Philippian jailer was so moved by conviction and faith in God that he insisted on being baptized in the middle of the night with all his family. Paul, though a prisoner himself, performed the baptism for the eager new converts.

Ananias expressed the same urgency in his appeal to the newly converted Saul. He said, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Acts 22:16.

Is that the appeal that the Holy Spirit is pressing upon your heart this very moment? You love the Lord, and recognize that He has died for your sins. By faith, you have accepted His atoning death in your behalf. The transforming grace of Jesus has brought peace and assurance into your life for the first time. If all this is true,

you need to make the most important decision of your life. The Spirit inquires, “Why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized.”