

Can Someone Be Baptized Incorrectly or for the Wrong Reason?

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Many people are baptized each year, but their baptism may not be valid. Scripture clearly shows the process that needs to be followed as well as providing examples of individuals who were baptized for the wrong reason, or incorrectly.

The process that needs to be followed in order to be baptized correctly, and for the right reason, is described in our paper entitled, "What Is the Process Leading to Baptism?"

The purpose of this current document is to review examples of individuals who were baptized for the wrong reason or did not follow the instructions correctly. In order to determine whether an individual's baptism is valid, the reason for requesting baptism has to be examined as well as the method used (see our paper entitled: Immersion, Partial Immersion, or Sprinkling).

In the 8th chapter of Acts, it is clear that someone, who already has God's Holy Spirit, should be involved when a person is planning to be baptized.

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet it had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized **in the name of the Lord Jesus**. Then they (some of the apostles) laid hands on them, and they (those who had been baptized) received the Holy Spirit (Ac. 8:14-17; *NKJV*

throughout unless noted; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

This scripture confirms that the individuals involved in baptismal counseling and the actual service must have a clear understanding of what is required on the part of the person requesting baptism. In other words, the person performing the baptism needs to ask the individual being baptized whether they have repented of their sins, which includes asking God, our Father, for forgiveness of their past transgressions (Ps. 51:4; 1Jn. 3:4). Next, the person who is being baptized needs to be asked whether they understand that Jesus Christ died in order that their sins be forgiven (Heb. 10:5-10). Finally, it needs to be explained to the person requesting baptism that they must start living a new life of obedience to God's law (Ac. 5:32; Rom. 6:1-4; 7:6; 1Jn. 5:2-3). Any sins committed after baptism will be forgiven by our heavenly Father, upon repentance, because Christ is our ongoing Mediator (1Tm. 2:5). Once the person being baptized understands and agrees to these conditions, the baptism can be completed.

Acts 8:18-23 shows that it is possible for someone to request baptism for the wrong reason. In this example, Simon, who practiced magic arts, wanted to become an apostle in order to increase his control and influence over people by performing the baptismal ceremony; especially the aspect of laying hands on an individual and requesting the holy spirit; presumably because it would impress all those in attendance and increase his status among "followers". This motive of wanting to be part of a religious system for the purpose of becoming recognized is not uncommon. Many religious leaders throughout history have been baptized with the goal of moving up in power and authority within a religious structure. At some point in the future, there will be an individual

who appears to be very righteous, but he will actually have a sinister agenda.

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day (of Christ's return) will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits in the temple (church) of God, showing that he is God (2Thes. 2:3-4; *Ed. notes in parentheses*).

In another example of being baptized for the wrong reason, the apostle Paul dealt with some members of the early church who were acting in a very carnal manner. He questioned whether they were still operating in a way that reflected the fruit of God's Holy Spirit. It is possible that some of these individuals were baptized because a friend or family member was part of the early church, and they wanted to share in that fellowship rather than be on the outside, or perhaps they felt pressured by a friend or family member.

And, I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able (no spiritual growth is evident in these members); (why?) for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men (1Cor. 3:1-3; *Ed. notes in parentheses*)?

An essential aspect of baptism involves examining our inner motives and being prepared to make whatever changes are necessary to deal with sin and weakness in our character. Even after baptism, we are reminded at least once a year that this is an ongoing process. Paul brought this up to some members of the early church as they approached the Passover season.

He pointed out the importance of examining themselves prior to partaking of the symbols of the new covenant Passover.

Therefore whoever eats this bread (representing Christ's broken body) or drinks this cup of the Lord (representing Christ's shed blood to cover our sins) in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many are dead (1Cor. 11:27-30; *Ed. note in parentheses*).

Becoming baptized requires making an agreement with the only true God (Jn. 17:3). Consequently, it is a very serious matter and should not be entered into lightly, or for the wrong reasons.

And that bondservant knowing the will of his lord (understood the conditions of the baptismal agreement) and did not prepare or do his (God's) will, will be flogged many times,⁴⁸ "But the one not having known, but having done something worthy of blows, he will be beaten few times. And from everyone to whom much was given (through receipt of God's Holy Spirit), much will be required from him, and to whom much was entrusted, they will ask all the more (Lk. 12:47-48; cf.14: 26-33; RNT; *Ed. notes in parentheses*).

Consequently, anyone considering baptism needs to examine the reason/s for making this commitment prior to any final decision.

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