

New Testament Conversions – No. 10

The Twice-Baptized Ephesians

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When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he discovered some disciples (about 12 men, Acts 19:7). He quickly realized through conversation with these men that their baptism was irregular, not according to the Gospel. They had not heard that the Holy Spirit was given, which was impossible if they had been properly baptized, for Jesus' baptism was into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mat. 28:19). When they told Paul they had been baptized into John's baptism (perhaps at the preaching of Apollos, Acts 18:25). Paul informed them of the preparatory purpose of that baptism and of its obsolescence (Acts 19:3–4). Upon learning this, they were baptized, apparently at once, into Jesus' baptism, which was and is unto the remission of sins (Acts 19:5; 2:38).

Please observe some practical applications of this incident:

1. The term "believe" is used by Paul to include their complete obedience to the Gospel terms of pardon, including baptism, as is often the case in the New Testament (John 3:16; Acts; 16:33–34; 19:2, etc.).
2. The purpose of baptism is just as important as the action of baptism. The Scriptural action of baptism is immersion, and these Ephesians had been immersed. However, the purpose of John's baptism to which they had submitted was to prepare a group of followers for Christ, telling them to repent and believe on Jesus who would come after him (Acts 19:4). But the purpose of Jesus' baptism was to serve as the final step in one's conversion, bringing salvation through Christ's blood and entrance into the kingdom, the church of Christ (Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38, 41, 47, etc.). The case of the Ephesians shows that unless **both** action and purpose are Scriptural, the person has not been Scripturally baptized. Paul's action in this case shows what his action would be if he were here on earth today.

It is popularly taught that baptism is merely an act upon which one is allowed membership in some denomination, **after** one has already been saved at the point of only believing in Jesus. This doctrine of "baptism **because** one is saved" is directly opposed to the stated purpose of Jesus' baptism, which is **in order to** be saved. It thus advocates the **wrong purpose** for baptism. All such improperly baptized persons would need to be baptized again by the apostle to complete the prerequisites to salvation through Christ's blood and membership in His church, as these Ephesians did.

3. A person cannot be taught incorrectly and baptized correctly. The reason these men in Ephesus were baptized improperly is because they were improperly taught. It is impossible for one to be taught the wrong purpose of baptism and be baptized under such instruction and be properly and Scripturally baptized. What a powerful example of open-mindedness to the Truth is seen in these Ephesians who immediately corrected their baptism when they were correctly taught. May the Lord help us all to be so open to His Truth!
4. This case completely exposes the sinful super-tolerance that presently grips the minds of men. Most modern preachers would not even inquire about a person's baptism if he claimed to be a disciple. In fact, most preachers openly advocate that one does not have to be baptized at all. Not only did the inspired Paul inquire about the baptism of these Ephesians – necessarily implying that there was no way to conceive of discipleship and true belief in Christ apart from it – he made certain they received the only baptism that would help them (Eph. 4:5). So will we if we are true to the Lord.

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