

The Effectiveness of YOUR Baptism

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About five hundred years ago there were major changes going on in Europe in religion. The printing press had made bibles available to all, and many were for the first time able to freely read the Word of God. One group soon came to the conclusion that the baptisms of the Catholic Church (the sprinkling of children) was ineffective, and began to teach a proper baptism. This group was nicknamed “Anabaptists”, meaning the second baptism. Their teaching was simple: *“I have never taught Anabaptism.... But the right baptism of Christ, which is preceded by teaching and oral confession of faith, I teach, and say that infant baptism is a robbery of the right baptism of Christ”*.¹ Baptism had to be according to the bible, or it was not baptism.

Not all baptism is the baptism of Christ. Sprinkling and pouring is not immersion, and therefore is not baptism. Infants cannot be baptized, as baptism is the response of someone who hears and believes. The other baptisms mentioned in Scriptures (Baptism of John, of Moses, of the Holy Spirit) are not the same as the baptism of Christ, and are not the baptism for us today. Finally, if someone is not baptized for the remission of their sins and their salvation, baptism into Christ has not happened.

In business, there is a term called “meeting of the minds”. It is a contractual term that means both parties in a contract (any exchange) understand the deal that is being made. No one is there by accident, and both parties understand the expectations from the other. Baptism requires such a meeting of the minds; when someone is properly baptized, it requires that they understand what God has offered, and what is required of them. Baptism inaugurates a COVENANT with God, which is greater than a mere contract. Baptism should reflect an understanding; therefore, the important question any believer ought to have in self-examination is this: What should I have understood at baptism?

There is an important example for us in Acts 19:1-5. There Paul met disciples of John the Baptist. After asking them about their faith, he instructed them to be baptized (a second baptism) into Christ. Remember that they were believers in God and followers of the prophet John. Yet still they were not in Christ. When their deficiency was determined they changed as soon as possible. We need to consider this as a model: is our own baptism a baptism into Christ?

Perhaps the most straightforward answer to this question is that found in Hebrews 6:1-2: *Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.* Here are 5/6 doctrines that are labeled the fundamentals of Christ: Faith, repentance, baptism, authority (laying on of hands), resurrection, judgment. These might be seen as the minimal knowledge required at baptism.

1. At Your baptism You should have known about God’s Word: Acts 18:8, Romans 10:17. When you were baptized, you should have known that Scriptures alone teach us, and that you believe because of what they say. If you were baptized because it felt right, your baptism is ineffective.

2. At Your baptism You should have known (and professed) Faith: Acts 8:36-37, Romans 10:9-10. You needed to have known that Jesus died for your sins, and believed that God raised Him up. If you were baptized for someone else, Your baptism is ineffective.

¹ Hubmaier, Balthasar (1526)

3. At Your baptism You should have known about repentance: Acts 2:38, Romans 6:4-6. This means you should have understood the concept of the guilt of sin, knowing your sins cut you off from God. It also meant that you understood you would have to change; you can no longer walk in sin. If you intended to keep on in your old life, Your baptism is ineffective.

4. At Your baptism, You should have known why you were baptized: 1 Peter 3:21, Romans 6:23. Baptism is to have your sins washed away and to be saved. If you think you were saved before baptism, Your baptism is ineffective.

5. At Your baptism You should have known of the penalty of sin: Acts 22:7-16, Romans 6:23. You should have understood that one day you will be judged, and that if you are judged in sin you are lost. If you weren't scared of judgment before your baptism, your baptism is ineffective.

6. At Your baptism You should have known about the resurrection: Colossians 2:12, Romans 6:4-5. First, you should have knowing about how Jesus arose from the dead. Second, you need to be baptized with a hope of your own resurrection one day. If you didn't want to go to heaven when you were baptized, Your baptism is ineffective.

There are many important things that we are not expected to understand when we are baptized. We may not know the design of the church or the deep nature of God as three persons. We may be ignorant of the history of the church or the history of God's people. We probably cannot discuss the aspects of the life of Christ or the letters of the apostles. All of these things we must grow in after baptism. But the basics of baptism must be understood.

We might look at the list of the basics of baptism and cross reference that when what happened when people became Christians in the New Testament. We see that they heard and believed; they confessed Jesus as Lord; they repented of their sins, and they were immersed in water. This is the effectiveness of baptism.

A Short Summary of Salvation in the Book of Acts						
		Hear	Believe	Repent	Confess	Baptized
Day of Pentecost	Acts 2:37-41	✓	✓	✓		✓
Samaria	Acts 8:5-12	✓	✓			✓
The Eunuch	Acts 8:26-40	✓	✓		✓	✓
Saul of Tarsus	Acts 9:1-19	✓				✓
Cornelius	Acts 10:25-48	✓				✓
Lydia	Acts 16:14-15	✓	✓			✓
Philippian Jailer	Acts 16:14-15	✓	✓			✓
Corinthians	Acts 18:4-11	✓	✓			✓
SUMMARY		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓