

20th Century Bible Course

LESSON TWENTY-FIVE

Dear Bible Student:

There is something in human nature that enjoys a ceremony, that appreciates ideas better when explained by symbols. Nations have flags to symbolize ideals, authority, and loyalties. A bear, a lion, an eagle, or a dragon may represent national power.

God, too, has employed useful ceremonies and symbols to help us in our relationship with Him. Israel had many, many ceremonies and ordinances, but unfortunately, they came to depend upon these rituals as if ceremony were the sum and substance of religion itself. The New Testament ceremonies commanded by Jesus are few-baptism and communion. Baptism means more than becoming a member of a church. It means to stand up and be counted for Christ, just as Jesus stood up and was counted a sinner on our behalf, so that we could be counted righteous. Baptism declares publicly on which side we have placed our loyalties.

Someone has illustrated it this way: Say that a number of students in your class have it in for Harry. You are one of them. For months you have made life miserable for him. You're not really sure why you dislike Harry. Maybe it's the way he dresses-never in the latest. Or because he doesn't laugh at smutty stories. Or because he gets top grades-making the curve just that much higher for everyone else. Harry is invariably courteous to the teacher. Harry just smiles when he is the butt of a prank. Harry is a square. A snob.

You meet him one evening in a store, learn that he works there to help support his widowed mother and three smaller sisters. Then one afternoon after class he helps you solve a geometry problem that had you stuck. You discover that Harry is painfully shy-which tells you why some have thought him snobbish. Over several months you learn that he simply is not the person you and your friends thought him to be.

One day in the hall you join a group and find they are talking about a good one they are going to pull on Harry. With sinking heart you realize what a heart-wrenching experience it will be to the boy you have come to know as he really is.

Suddenly you find yourself in the center of the circle. A voice-can that strange shaky voice be yours?-is saying, "Count me out, fellows. I've got to know Harry, and we have really misjudged him. I'm ashamed of the part I've played in hurting him, and from now on, if it comes to choosing up sides, count me in on Harry's." A bit awkwardly you explain yourself. Then, in the silence, you look around. How will they react? Are you "out"? Whatever the verdict, you know you have done the right thing. Your hands may be perspiring, but you feel at peace inside. You have stood up to be counted.

A person who faces up to a real challenge and comes through is often said to have undergone a baptism by fire. Now you have gone through yours-for Harry. You faced up to the cowardly, conforming elements in you and stared them down. You came through, somehow, different *inside*. You displayed the real you to your friends. And whatever their reaction, from that day on you're a different person. You're at peace with the finer instincts God planted in you.

Today we will study the two New Testament ceremonies-baptism and communion, and the proper preparation for each. It is my hope that it will help you to find as never before, the joy of knowing Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

Your Bible Instructor

LESSON 25: BAPTISM

SCRIPTURE READING: JOHN 13:1-17; 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-29

When the Saviour called disciples to His service, His invitation was, "Follow me." To Peter, Andrews, James and John on the shores of Galilee, to Matthew at the customs booth, to the rich young ruler who sought the way to life eternal, He gave the same invitation, "Follow me." And to all in every age who turn to Him for light and comfort and salvation, Jesus says, "If any man serve me, let him follow me" (John 12:26). Because He has personally taken every step of the path before us, we need never hesitate to accept this gracious invitation.

Part 1-- CHRIST'S EXAMPLE OF BAPTISM

The news of the wilderness prophet had spread like wildfire through all Galilee and Judea, to the smallest town and village. On those burning sands--his cathedral floor--and in the muddy Jordan--his baptistry--the great prophet could be heard proclaiming, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Then one day as John the Baptist was baptizing, a young man--tall and strong--walked down to the water's edge. All eyes turned upon Him, as without hesitation, He stepped into the water to be baptized.

1. Why was Jesus baptized? Matthew 3:13-15

Christ "did no sin," yet He identified Himself with sinners, taking the steps that we are to take as we follow Him. To "fulfill all righteousness" is to give an example of right doing.

2. Why is baptism necessary for Christ's followers? John 3:5

Our first birth occurred when we made our debut into this world. God's plan to provide a way for man to escape the servitude of Satan, centers around His magnanimous offer to adopt all who so desire into His family. He calls this being "born again," only this time it is a spiritual birth. As Christ knelt on the river bank after His baptism, the Holy Spirit rested like a dove upon Him, and a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16, 17). All who take this step are thus assured of heaven's blessing: "This is my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased."

3. Before His ascension, what directions did Jesus give the disciples? Matthew 28:19

The *American Revised Version* reads, "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." It's a happy and momentous occasion when the baptized believer is adopted into God's royal family, henceforth to bear the royal name of Christian!

Part 2-- BAPTISM--A CONFESSION AND A MEMORIAL

1. What does Christ want us to do for Him? Matthew 10:32

Just as the wedding ceremony publicly declares that two people have covenanted to unite in matrimony, so baptism openly confirms our decision to unite ourselves to Christ.

2. By what figure of speech does Paul describe baptism? Galatians 3:27

"As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have _____."

3. When Jesus was asked to perform a miracle to prove His divinity, what did He say? John 2:18-22

If one were to put in capsule form the great difference between Christianity and every other religion, he could do no better than to point to the death, burial, and resurrection of the God-man, Jesus Christ. Shrines hold the remains of the founders of every other great

religion. Christianity alone can point to an *empty tomb*.

4. What three things comprise the heart of the gospel? 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Christ's _____, _____ and _____.

5. What three experiences of Jesus does baptism commemorate? Romans 6:3-6

His _____, _____ and _____.

When a person steps into the water and holds his breath, it symbolizes death; when he is lowered beneath the water, it symbolizes burial; coming up out of the water symbolizes the resurrection. What a beautiful memorial of our Lord's death, burial and resurrection! The old life of sin is buried, for it is now dead, and a new life in Christ is begun.

Can sprinkling or pouring symbolize this miniature death, burial and resurrection experience? In no way! Only immersion conveys this beautiful concept.

Part 3--THE BIBLE METHOD OF BAPTISM

1. How many kinds of baptism does the Bible sanction? Ephesians 4:5

One baptism? Why, then, do some churches pour, some sprinkle, and some immerse? Which baptism is the Bible baptism?

The word "baptism" comes from the Greek word *baptizo*, meaning "to dip, to immerse." The Greeks used this word to describe the immersing of cloth into dye. Today the word has come to apply to such religious rites as sprinkling and pouring, but that was not its original meaning. Another example of the evolution of language is our word "holiday," which once meant a "holy day," but today is used for any day that exempts us from regular work, even though it may have no religious significance whatsoever. So whenever you see the word "baptize" in the Bible, remember that it really means "to dip or immerse."

2. Why did John baptize at Aenon? John 3:23 _____

There would be no need of "much water" if John sprinkled or poured!

3. What indicates that Christ was baptized by immersion? Matthew 3:16,17; Mark 1:10 _____

Jesus was baptized *in* the Jordan river.

4. How did Philip baptize the Ethiopian? Acts 8:36-39 "They went down both _____, [verse 38]... And when they were _____, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip."

Some years ago an old Indian chief came to a frontier mission desiring to learn about Christianity. After talking with him the minister gave him a Bible. Several months later the Indian returned and asked to be baptized. The minister questioned him regarding his faith in Christ, and then went to a cabinet to get his silver cup. The Indian took one look at it and shook his head vigorously.

"Me too big. Cup too small," he protested.

"But you don't have to get in," the minister reassured him, trying to explain that he was only going to sprinkle him with a few drops of water.

But the Indian had had his Bible too long. "If that baptism, you give Indian wrong book!"

As late as the twelfth century the Bible method of baptism was still generally practiced. Cardinal James Gibbon, in *Faith of Our Fathers*, 76th edition, page 266, writes: "For centuries after the establishment of Christianity, baptism was usually conferred by immersion: but since the twelfth century, the practice of baptism by infusion [pouring] has prevailed in the [Roman] Catholic Church, as this manner is attended with less inconvenience." Incidentally, the Greek Orthodox Church still baptizes by immersion.

While John Wesley was in America in 1737, he was tried by a jury of 34 men in a church trial for "refusing to baptize Mr. Parker's child, except by dipping." Evidently the father of Methodism recognized immersion as true baptism (Georgia court proceedings).

Many early-century churches excavated by archaeologists have baptismal pools-with steps leading down into them-in which prospective members were immersed. Thus we see that only in later centuries when the church lost its way, did sprinkling and other substitutes for true baptism (including the practice of baptizing infants) become common.

Part 4-- PREPARATION FOR BAPTISM

1. What should precede baptism? Mark 16:16 _____

2. What did Jesus tell His followers to do before baptizing people? Matthew 28:19, 20

Every candidate for baptism should understand fully what it means to become a follower of Christ. It is not enough to say, "I believe in Christ," for today that may mean almost anything. Before one can truly know whether or not he believes in Jesus, he must also know what Jesus believed and taught.

3. What else is necessary before baptism? Acts 2:38 _____

As Jesus died *for* sin, man must die *to* sin (Romans 6:6,11, 12), and be willing to live for God (verse 13). Before a burial we must have a death. Before we are buried in baptism, we die to the old life of sin by turning away from old sinful habits.

Thought question: Would you agree that these three prerequisites for baptism (belief in Jesus, repentance for sins, and being taught "all things" that Christ commanded), rule out the baptism of infants and small children? _____

Part 5-- THE COMMUNION SERVICES

1. What other memorial of his death did Jesus leave us? 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For 1500 years God's followers, through the slaying of the paschal lamb, looked forward by faith to the sacrifice of a Saviour for their sins. The ancient Passover service commemorated the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery; the Lord's Supper, which Jesus instituted on the eve of his crucifixion, is designed to keep fresh in our minds the great deliverance from sin wrought out on Calvary. Jesus was the real paschal Lamb. By presenting Himself as a sin offering, He brought an end to the system of types and ceremonies which for 4000 years had directed the attention of the worshipers to His vicarious death.

Because leaven and fermentation symbolize sin, the communion bread and wine, representing the pure, sinless Lamb of God, should be unleavened and unfermented.

2. What preparation should be made for the communion? (verse 28) _____

3. Why is it important to examine ourselves prior to partaking of the communion? (verse 29) _____

This sacred service brings our hearts and thoughts back to Calvary. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). My "words ... are spirit, and they are life" (verse 63). In partaking of these sacred symbols, we say to our fellowmen and to our Lord, "As this piece of unleavened bread and this wine now become a part of every cell in my body, so I purpose in my heart to eat and drink the words of my Saviour, so that they may permeate every thought and word and motivate all my actions."

4. What additional service of preparation did our Lord leave us? John 13:4-11

The washing of the disciples' feet was only a ceremonial washing. Jesus said to Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me" (verse 8), adding that washing the feet would clean them "every whit" (verse 10). None of this would be meaningful unless it was symbolic.

5. What command did Jesus make following this ceremony? (verses 12-17)

You can see from Christ's words that this service is as much a gospel ordinance as is the Lord's Supper, which was also ordained by Christ at this same time. Jesus did not wash the disciples' feet merely to stage a show. He wanted them to learn the spirit of heaven and to know that *no service that needs to be done is beneath the dignity of His followers*. In this act He lifted every needful and lowly service to the plane of Godlike ministry.

When we reach heaven, we shall find the Saviour still manifesting the same spirit of service that characterized His life on earth. He will "gird himself, and . . . come forth and serve them" (Luke 12:37).

6. To what do the communion services point forward? Matthew 26:29

Each communion service is a foretaste of the marriage supper of the Lamb! What joy will be Christ's to once again drink of the fruit of the vine with those He has redeemed!

AN INTERESTING STORY

The Syrian general was ill, but few knew it. The little Hebrew maid noticed his wife weeping and asked if she could help.

"No-nobody can, that's just it. He's got leprosy," the general's wife sobbed.

"There's a prophet in my country who could make him well if he'd go and see him."

"Can he heal leprosy?" Mrs. Naaman was suddenly interested.

"I'm sure he can. He even raised a boy to life not long ago," the slave girl assured her.

Naaman was willing to try anything. So, laden with gifts and a letter of introduction from the Syrian king, he and his retinue headed for Israel. When they arrived at Elisha's home, the prophet didn't even bother to come to the door, but sent his servant out with instructions for Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan river.

Naaman was furious! "Ridiculous!" he stormed. "The rivers of Syria are better than that muddy stream!" Finally, however, his servants persuaded him to go ahead. After all, what did he have to lose? Six times Naaman dipped himself in the Jordan. The leprosy was still there. But when he came up the seventh time, no trace of the disease could be found!

There were no healing substances in the water of that river. By carefully obeying God's word as directed by His prophet Elisha, Naaman demonstrated his faith in the God of Israel. It was God who cleansed and healed him.

By baptism our sins are washed away, but the water itself is not what cleanses us. It is faith in the blood of Jesus that brings spiritual healing from the leprosy of sin.

Would you like to confess your faith in Jesus by being baptized by immersion? _____