



Fundamentos

LESSON 41

Foundations Curriculum

Baptism in Christ

By Mário Fagundes

Introduction

Baptism in Christ

In this forty-first lesson of the Foundations Curriculum, we will speak about baptism in Christ, its meaning in the light of the Scriptures. We will also clarify the misunderstandings that some Christian groups have about it. In addition, we will teach how Jesus determined that it should be done (and at what point) and how the apostles applied it. What is baptism? What does it mean? What is it not? How did the apostles understand and practice it? This teaching is part of the cycle Jesus Is the Door of the Kingdom!

1) The Baptism That Unites Us to Christ: Its Meaning (and Misunderstandings)

Many Christian groups, perhaps most, make five mistaken statements about baptism:

What are they?

- 01 Baptism is a step of obedience;
- 02 Baptism is an outward expression of what has already happened in the heart;
- 03 Baptism is a public declaration of faith;
- 04 The water is nothing, no more than a symbol;
- 05 Baptism does not save.

Such statements are made in almost every baptism ceremony. We call them ceremonies because that is how they carry out baptism: as a symbolic act. And often there is an entire ritual and preparation for that moment.

Why do we affirm that they are mistaken in these understandings, and that baptism is more than a symbolic act?

The answer is found in the Scriptures. They tell us what Jesus and the Apostles said and did.

Let us see what Jesus said:

Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18–20 (NKJV)

Notice that, first, Jesus makes a tremendous declaration: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth," and only then does He command what He wants His disciples to do.

And what is it? "Go, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."

Unfortunately, some groups have exchanged (modified) the Lord's command to baptize for raising a hand and coming forward at the moment in the service when the final appeal of the sermon is made. This change is grave and very serious, since we have no authority whatsoever to change what the Lord established!

Let us see what Jesus said in Mark 16:16: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (NKJV).

It is possible to be struck by the precision of the text in the Scriptures. Look at the sequence established by the Lord:

"He who believes and is baptized will be saved." An instruction that is more than clear!

But how has this been practiced by those called Christians today?

Catholics practice it this way: whoever is baptized will be saved and will one day believe (that is why they baptize children who do not yet have any awareness of faith or sin).

Evangelicals practice it this way: whoever believes will be saved and will one day be baptized (that is why they delay baptizing new converts).

But the Lord Jesus said: he who believes and is baptized will be saved.

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Acts 2:38 (NKJV)

Here is the statement of one of the apostles who walked with the Lord. He makes clear two elements for the remission of sins:

01 Repentance;

02 And baptism;

He does not present baptism as a confirmation of salvation already received by grace, through faith; rather, he presents it as an indispensable element for salvation.

The text of Romans 6:3–4 also helps to clarify:

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:3–4 (NKJV)

Here the apostle makes clear that we were baptized into Christ, and that by having been baptized into Him, we are partakers of His death and resurrection. We are enabled to walk in newness of life!

That is what happens in baptism! Hallelujah!

Let us see what Paul, one of the apostles, said in Galatians 3:27: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (NKJV).

The apostles did not see merely a baptism in water, but a baptism in Christ. It was more than a symbol, because the one who was baptized, by faith, was united to Christ, immersed in Christ, grafted into Christ, and clothed with Christ. The person, when baptized, receives the power to be holy and to live in holiness!

That is why we can declare: “Christ in you, the hope of glory!”

2) Baptism Is More Than a Symbol

In baptism, the disciple is united to Christ and to His body, which is the church. When this happens, we become part of the family of God, of the body of Christ, and of the temple of the Holy Spirit! We are no longer merely creatures of God, but His children!

Notice that this is so real that, when Saul was persecuting the church (recorded in Acts chapter 9) and Jesus spoke to him, what did Jesus say? “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” But Saul was not persecuting Jesus; he was persecuting the church, the Christians of that time.

Through this passage it is possible to perceive that, in fact, we become one with Him! I am my beloved's and He is mine! And it is important to understand that this happens in baptism! Hallelujah!

Let us see what is written in 1 Peter 3:21:

There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

1 Peter 3:21 (NKJV)

What shall we say about this? “...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ... There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism.”

What a tremendous truth declared by one of the Lord's apostles! Let us see Paul's own testimony about his baptism:

Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him. Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

Acts 22:12–16 (NKJV)

This is the testimony given by the apostle himself concerning his own baptism.

Notice Ananias's question: "And now why are you waiting?" This proves that it is far more than a symbol! It was a command of the Lord, and therefore so important to be obeyed.

The Lord is committed to everything He has determined, but only to what He has determined! He is not committed to water in cups, anointed utensils, or anything else of that kind!

To the water in baptism, to the oil for anointing, to the laying on of hands, to the elements of the Lord's Supper — to these He is committed!

3) The Early Church Baptized Immediately, Obeying the Command of Jesus

Let us see the account of Pentecost:

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

Acts 2:38–41 (NKJV)

Nearly three thousand people were baptized on the same day! How long did that take? Why the hurry, if it was only a symbol? Why not leave it for another day?

It was not a symbol for the apostles!

They took the Lord's command seriously and fulfilled it completely; they knew that baptism was the means the Lord established for us to become partakers of His death and resurrection!

Another example is the Samaritans:

But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

Acts 8:12 (NKJV)

Notice: they were being baptized, but only those who had believed what was preached!

The Ethiopian eunuch is another example of immediate baptism:

Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" [Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."] So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

Acts 8:36–38 (NKJV)

How did the eunuch know about baptism, and that it was by means of water?

An observation is worth making here: the word baptism was transliterated from the Greek, not translated! The Greek word baptisimos means: immersion, dipping.

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

Acts 9:17–18 (NKJV)

Notice, and be struck by, the immediacy of the action toward the one who came to understand that he should be baptized. As we see how the apostles and disciples treated this matter of baptism, it is possible to conclude that this attitude/practice was of the utmost importance in entering the kingdom of God!

Another interesting account is that of Cornelius and his family:

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

Acts 10:44–48 (NKJV)

Notice that there was a reversal of the pattern stated by Peter himself in Acts 2:38.

The Lord had to intervene in the process and pour out the Holy Spirit before baptism, for it seems to us that, judging by Peter's question ("Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"), we believe he would not have taken the initiative to baptize them.

It is important to point out that God can change the order of things, because God is God — and vice versa — but we must follow what He has established as principle and rule!

Let us see what happened with Lydia and her family:

And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

Acts 16:13–15 (NKJV)

Notice the richness of the text: "The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul..." Then the next step was to be baptized, she and her household!

The jailer and his family:

And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

Acts 16:30–34 (NKJV)

Again the immediacy of the action ("the same hour of the night"). There is something in baptism that is far more than a symbol!

Crispus and others:

Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

Acts 18:8 (NKJV)

The sequence is the same, and immediate!

The twelve at Ephesus:

he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism." Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 19:2–5 (NKJV)

This text gives us cause to think: how much apostolic concern there was for baptism and its implications.

John's baptism was for repentance, but they had to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus in order to receive the Holy Spirit. Baptism was far more than a symbol!

Some expressions that precede the act of baptizing:

Acts 2:41 “Then those who gladly received his word”

Acts 8:12 “But when they believed Philip”

Acts 8:37 “If you believe with all your heart, you may”

Acts 16:14 “The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul”

Acts 16:32 “Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house”

Acts 18:8 “hearing, believed and were baptized”

Acts 19:5 “When they heard this, they were baptized”

Baptism will always be immediately after they hear the word and believe it!

4) Final Considerations:

01 Faith and repentance are indispensable conditions for baptism. We find this in Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38. This should be enough reason not to baptize children.

02 If someone asks how the thief on the cross was saved without being baptized, the answer is simple: God can make exceptions (all authority and decision belong to Him), but we do not have that authority.

03 If you find a brother in your city who believes or practices differently regarding baptism, you should relate to him as a brother. What he does, he does according to his own conscience and according to the teaching that was passed on to him. It is a matter of conscience, not of conduct or of sin. But with people who do not gather in the same place, we should relate to them first and reach conclusions afterward!

04 No one can have been baptized in Christ without first having believed in Him and repented of their sins. Therefore, if your experience took place when you were a child, or even as an adult without having given credence to the Word of the Kingdom, your baptism was not valid. You were not baptized — you were made wet. You must, therefore, be baptized, for there is no such thing as “being baptized again.”

05 If someone says: “But I know of cases of people who were not baptized and who live in holiness.” Our answer must be that we cannot be guided by the experience of men, but by the word of God.

May the Lord establish the truth in our minds and hearts, as it is written in Ephesians 4:14.

that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

Ephesians 4:14 (NKJV)

May God continue pouring out abundant grace upon all of us!

CONCLUSION

In this forty-first lesson of the Foundations Curriculum, we clarified the five misunderstandings that Christian religions have about water baptism. We saw that baptism is not merely a public symbol; it means union with Christ, that we are grafted into our Lord. We learned that baptism is

to take place immediately after faith in Christ and declared repentance. It should not be delayed for months, and it should not be performed on children or on those who have not believed.

CONSIDER CAREFULLY

- 01 Why do we affirm that baptism is more than a symbolic act?
- 02 What happens in baptism in Christ?
- 03 What led the apostles to baptize immediately?

*having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.*

Ephesians 2:20 (NKJV)

Foundations Curriculum — Lesson 41
contato@fundamentos.me | fundamentos.me