

Why Were You Baptized? (Reason #5)

So many different 'churches' claiming Christianity; so many different teachings and practices associated with baptism; it is all very confusing. Today's article addresses:

Reason #5: The Sacrament of Baptism

The Roman Catholic Church and other religious groups teach a system of sacraments. Baptism is the first of seven sacraments which are, in the broadest sense, "external signs of the action of God's grace."¹ Distinguished from lesser signs called *sacramentals*, "a sacrament imparts grace in virtue of the rite itself."²

According to sacramental theology, when baptism is administered in the correct way, with the correct water, with the correct words, by the correct person, the one being baptized receives God's grace in the forgiveness of sins. Since parents make baptismal vows/promises *for* infants, the Holy Spirit is not received until the rite of the sacrament of Confirmation is administered by a Bishop when a child is older.

Does all this make sense according to the Bible?

Let's make a couple of observations from the *Catholic Encyclopedia* compared to Scripture.

First, "in the early Church, it was difficult to distinguish between the sacraments of Initiation," including baptism and confirmation. One reason is that in the early church only adults were baptized.³ So, originally forgiveness of sins and the receipt of the Holy Spirit occurred at baptism, just as Peter instructed those who heard the gospel when it was first preached:

Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter *said* to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your

sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. — Acts 2:37-38

So, the separation of forgiveness of sins (at Baptism) and a later receipt of the Holy Spirit (at Confirmation) was an invention of the Roman Catholic Church which did not follow Scripture and the practice of the first century Christians. (The practice of separating the two seems to coincide with the increased practice of baptizing infants during the 4th and 5th centuries.⁴)

Second, as a sacrament, the ritual of baptism "imparts grace in virtue of the rite itself."⁵ This suggests that the ritual itself, if done correctly with all the right ingredients will, in and of itself, bring about an expected effect. This would further suggest that the ritual itself is used to invoke the power and/or activity of God.

However...

Reflecting on Peter's answer in Acts 2, the people were instructed to "*repent* and be baptized." Repentance involves an active response of the mind of the one being baptized. Later, in 1 Peter 3:21 Peter wrote that baptism is "an appeal for a good conscience." 'Ritual' baptism would be incomplete without a proper response of the mind of the one being baptized. So, 'ritual baptism' without *repentance* and without an *appeal of the mind* cannot possibly "impart grace in virtue of the rite itself."

Anyone who has only *received baptism* as a sacrament is urged to consider the historical development of such a practice in light of Scripture and to follow Scripture instead of tradition.

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¹*Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia*, 'Sacraments, Seven,' p. 849.

²*Catholic Encyclopedia*, 'Sacramental,' p. 848.

³*Catholic Encyclopedia*, 'Confirmation,' p. 246.

⁴*Catholic Encyclopedia*, 'Confirmation,' p. 246.

⁵*Catholic Encyclopedia*, 'Sacramental,' p. 848.