

The Four P's of New Testament Baptism

After Jesus had been crucified, resurrected, and spent forty days instructing His apostles, and just before He ascended back into heaven, He gave them this charge, “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned,*” Mark 16:15-16. With this simple commission, they were sent forth and the world was forever changed. The formula for salvation is put forth in its simplest terms: Belief + Baptism = Salvation. However, although few argue for salvation without faith, many seem to doubt or understand the importance of baptism. Let’s use the *divine commentary* of other NT passages to see if we can provide some clarity to half of what Jesus said produced salvation. For the sake of simplicity and hopefully help us remember the **prerequisites** and **purpose** of baptism, let’s use **four P’s**...

1. Precept. A **precept** is a **principle** or **teaching**. How is this vital to proper baptism? Let’s face it: There are a lot of *unscriptural*, and thus *improper*, motivations for baptism. Some are baptized because they think they’ve already been saved, and it will add them to a local church. But 1Peter 3:21 clearly states, “*baptism now saves you.*” Saul of Tarsus had *seen* and *spoken* to the Lord, *obeyed* Him by going into Damascus as instructed by Him, and spent three days *fasting* and *praying*, but was nonetheless afterwards told by the Lord’s prophet Ananias to “*And why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name,*” Acts 22:16. Baptism is **unto** salvation, **not** because of it. Others are baptized simply because their friends are doing it and they don’t want to be left out. Still others do so because they think it will please someone else- their parents or spouse perhaps. None of these motivations are the reason set forth in the NT for baptism. Instead, candidates for baptism were *convicted* of their sins and told of the need for *repentance* through *precepts* of the gospel, cf. Acts 2:36-38a, and then were *instructed* to be “*baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins,*” Acts 2:28b. Thus, proper baptism is preceded by the teaching of the **precepts** of the gospel: faith in Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen Son of God, conviction of sin and therefore the need of salvation, and belief in Christ and baptism for the remission of sins. This is exactly what Jesus said in the Great Commission: Belief + Baptism = Salvation.

2. Person. Given the information above, this element of baptism now becomes easy to see. The proper **person** for baptism is the **penitent believer**. Notice that those who **believed** Jesus was the Christ, manifested **repentance** for their sins (Acts 2:36-37), and were properly **instructed** on what to do to have their sins remitted, “**received his word and were baptized,**” Acts 2:41a. They were then (by God) “**added**” to “*those who were being saved,*” Acts 2:41b,47. Babies can’t comprehend these things, or choose to obey them, and thus should not be baptized. Adults who **don’t receive** or **accept** proper teaching regarding Jesus Christ, or how sins are remitted through Him, should likewise not be baptized. People of any age who are desiring baptism without true knowledge of and faith in Jesus, or understanding of the place of baptism in the process of the remission of sins, should not be baptized. The proper candidate for baptism is the **person** who **knows** who Jesus Christ is, is willing to **repent** and **follow** Him, and **understands** why baptism is an essential part of salvation.

3. Practice. By *practice*, **application** is intended rather than *repetition*. In other words, baptism has to be **properly administered** to be scriptural. None in the NT was “sprinkled” or had water “poured” on them to be baptized. The reason is simple: baptism was and is a “burial” through “immersion” in water. Colossians 2:12, “*having been buried with Him in*

baptism in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” Note specifically that baptism is a **burial**, that *by faith* it is done **with Christ**, and from it **God raises** one from the **deadness of sin**. Sprinkling or pouring is **not** a *burial* from which one is *raised*. For baptism to be scriptural, it must be **immersion/burial** in water, cf. Acts 8:38.

4. Purpose. The blood of Jesus is the **redemptive price** of salvation, Ephesians 1:7. We are “*released from our sins by His blood,*” Revelation 1:5. But how do we *contact* and have that blood *applied* to us to accomplish this remission of sin? Note carefully Romans 6:3-4, “*Do you not know that all of us who have been **baptized into Christ** have been baptized **into His death**? Therefore we have been buried with Him **through baptism into death**....*” When was Jesus atoning blood shed? When He *died* on the cross for our sins. How do we contact/appropriate that atoning blood? Through **faith and baptism**- “*buried with Him **through baptism into death,***” just as Romans 6:4 says.

For baptism to be scriptural, and thus accomplish its goal, it must be based on the right **precepts**, have a penitent believer as the **person** to be immersed, be **practiced** as a burial in water, for the **purpose** of contacting the redeeming blood of Jesus- the **4 P’s** of baptism.

(Philip C. Strong; Viking Drive Church of Christ; 3791 Viking Drive, Bossier City, LA; online at vikingdrivechurchofchrist.com; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)