

Is Your Baptism Valid?

Introduction. Following His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ instructed His apostles (Matthew 28:19-20). In light of the Lord's instruction concerning baptism, notice the following excerpt from a news article published on February 15, 2022 and titled "An Arizona Priest Used One Wrong Word In Baptisms For Decades."

"A Catholic priest in Phoenix has resigned from his position after a church investigation found he had been incorrectly performing baptisms over his 20-year career — rendering the rite invalid for thousands of people, according to Bishop Thomas Olmsted of the Diocese of Phoenix. As he poured the holy water during the baptisms he performed, the Rev. Andres Arango would say, 'We baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' But Father Arango misstated one word: 'We baptize' should have been 'I baptize.' And getting that word wrong nullified all of the rituals he performed using that language. 'If you were baptized using the wrong words, that means your baptism is invalid, and you are not baptized,' Olmsted wrote in a message to parishioners. 'You will need to be baptized. The issue with using 'We' is that it is not the community that baptizes a person, rather, it is Christ, and Him alone, who presides at all of the sacraments, and so it is Christ Jesus who baptizes'" (Rachel Treisman, npr.com).

In response to this news, a biblical defense of the subject of baptism needs to be made. And I want to do so by guiding you through the following three points.

I. Christ Doesn't Do The Baptizing

- A. Catholic "Bishop" Thomas Olmsted says the baptisms performed by Arango are invalid because, "The issue with using 'We' is that it is not the community that baptizes a person, rather, it is Christ, and Him alone, who presides at all of the sacraments, and so it is Christ Jesus who baptizes."
- B. However, even while Jesus was on the earth, John points out that "Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples" (John 4:2). According to the Bible, sinners are not baptized "by" Christ, but "into" Christ (Galatians 3:27).
- C. As the gospel spread, people were baptized into Christ by men like Philip (Acts 8:38), Paul (1 Corinthians 1:14), and others. While it's by the authority of Christ that people are baptized into His body, it's not Christ who does the baptizing.

II. Baptisms Can Be Performed Incorrectly

- A. The news article reports that Mr. Arango "found he had been incorrectly performing baptisms."
 1. According to the New Testament, it is true that baptisms can be performed in such a way so as to make them incorrect and invalid.
 2. For example, when Paul explained to the men he encountered in Ephesus that they had been baptized with John's baptism instead of having been baptized into Christ, the Bible says, "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5).

- B. Romans 6:3-4 explains the subject, action, purposes, and result of baptism — it is the Great Commission baptism (water baptism), the “one baptism” commanded of us all (Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 4:5).
1. The subject of baptism is the sinner, the person who is not “in Christ” (v. 3), without the benefit of His death (v. 3), and dead in sin (v. 4). Christ’s baptism is for the lost, not the saved (such as infants).
 2. The action of baptism is immersion, a burial in water (v. 4; Colossians 2:12; Acts 8:38). Sprinkling and pouring won’t suffice.
 3. Three purposes:
 - a) The sinner is “baptized into Christ” (v. 3). Until one is in Christ, he has not “put on Christ” and is not a “new creation” (Galatians 3:27; 2 Corinthians 5:17). He is lost.
 - b) The sinner is “baptized into His death” (v. 3). Water baptism is how sinners reach the saving blood of Jesus (Ephesians 1:7; Acts 22:16).
 - c) The sinner is “buried with Him through baptism into death” (v. 4). Sin is put to death when the sinner is baptized.
 4. The result of baptism is the new birth, a resurrection from sin’s death by the power of God to newness of life in Christ (v. 4; John 3:5; Colossians 2:12; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Titus 3:5). Before baptism, the sinner remains dead in sin.
- C. Christ commanded water baptism (Mark 16:16). So did His apostles (Acts 2:38; 10:47-48). Christ saves sinners who obey Him by being baptized into Him (Acts 8:12; Hebrews 5:9; 1 Peter 3:21). By the gospel, God is calling sinners to be saved in Christ (Acts 22:16).

III. All Catholic Baptisms Are Invalid

- A. The news report states that Mr. Arango’s mistake has rendered “the rite invalid for thousands of people” who were baptized by him. However, the news article’s estimate is far too low. While Mr. Arango’s superiors are fixated on whether he should have used the words “I” or “We” when baptizing, the truth is that the Lord didn’t specify either as being vital to the correct formula for valid baptism, according to Matthew 28:18-20.
- B. This controversy over baptisms being invalid because of a misspoken formula should remind us that there isn’t a consistent formula in the New Testament:
1. Jesus told the apostles to baptize believers “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).
 2. Peter told the Jews on Pentecost to “repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).
 3. Philip had baptized the people of Samaria “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16).
 4. Peter commanded those at the house of Cornelius “to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48).
- C. While a misspoken formula shouldn’t be the cause to be rebaptized, we’ve already seen that some were rebaptized (like in Acts 19:5). The question then arises, “Who should be rebaptized?”
1. Those baptized as infants. Infants do not meet the requirements of baptism (sinning, being taught, repenting, and confessing Christ). Since an infant can

do none of these, it is impossible for him or her to be scripturally baptized. Only children who reach the point of consciousness of sin need to be baptized or rebaptized.

2. Those who have received the wrong mode of baptism (sprinkling or pouring). The correct mode of baptism is immersion. Does it make a difference to God? Did it matter to Nadab and Abihu what kind of fire they offered before the Lord (Numbers 3:4)? Did it matter to Uzzah that he listened to the specific requirements of God (2 Samuel 6:3-7)?
 3. Those baptized by the wrong authority. We cannot baptize people by the authority or in the name of a person or a church. Baptism must be administered in the name of deity (Matthew 28:18-19; Acts 2:38). Anyone baptized in the name of a person or a church (like as a sacrament in the Catholic Church) is still in need of scriptural baptism.
 4. Those baptized for the wrong reasons. Scriptural baptism involves being baptized for the reasons given in scripture. When people are baptized denying these reasons, having believed error, those baptisms are invalid. Someone may say, "My child was born in sin;" "I was already saved before baptism;" "One church is as good as another;" or, "Baptism isn't necessary in order to be saved." Unscriptural statements prove unscriptural baptism.
- D. Effectual baptism is done by the authority, or in the name of, deity (cp. Colossians 3:17). The real reason these baptisms are invalid is that, like all Roman Catholic baptisms, they are not performed by the authority of Christ.

Conclusion. The case of the counterfeit Catholic baptisms only serves to highlight the problem with man-made religion (Colossians 2:20-23). Jesus described those who impose man-made religious rules as, "Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel" (Matthew 23:24). What good is it to become fixated on particular wording that the Bible never addresses while, at the same time, practicing what completely contradicts nearly everything the Bible does teach regarding baptism? As the Lord Himself put it, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). Is your baptism valid?

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