

Why I Teach the Way I Do

Before we continue our study, I want to explain why I teach the way I do. Sometimes I look out and see expressions that seem to be asking, "Where is he going with this?" or "Why are we spending so much time on this?" I understand that. But there is a reason behind the approach.

My dad taught me years ago that the Word of God is all Scripture. We begin with that conviction. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable. Jesus also said that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. We often use the expression *verbal inspiration*. That phrase isn't found in the Bible, but it expresses an important truth. We believe that the very words originally written by the prophets and apostles were the words the Holy Spirit intended. If inspiration were only about general ideas, then it would not matter which words the writers chose as long as the basic thought was communicated. But Scripture is inspired in its very words.

That conviction affects the way we read and teach the Bible. Since all Scripture is inspired and all Scripture is profitable, then all Scripture deserves to be taught. Obviously none of us can cover the whole Bible quickly. John MacArthur preached through the Bible verse by verse over many years. But my preference is not simply to choose a favorite devotional thought, build a lesson around it, and leave everyone feeling encouraged. Devotionals certainly have their place, but my desire is that, as much as possible, we understand what the Scriptures themselves are saying.

Take the book of Romans, for example. It is not easy reading. Yet Paul addressed it to "the saints who are at Rome." He did not write to scholars or pastors only. He wrote to ordinary believers. The same is true of his other letters. Scripture was intended to be understood.

That is one reason I have always believed that children in Christian homes should learn to read well. Beyond all the practical reasons for literacy, God has chosen to communicate His Word to us through a written book. We do not receive ongoing voices from heaven. We receive God's revelation through Scripture, and we should be able to read and understand it.

That also explains why I sometimes ask, "What does this verse say?" Quite often someone gives theologically correct answers, but those answers actually come from somewhere else in Scripture. I want us to focus on what this particular passage says. What do these words mean? What is the author communicating here? That is why we sometimes dig deeply into a passage.

The writer of Hebrews gives us a good example. He begins discussing Melchizedek, then pauses and tells his readers that the subject is difficult because they have become dull of hearing. By this time they should have been teachers, yet they still needed instruction themselves. Some people would stop there and move on to an easier subject. The writer of Hebrews did not. After challenging them to grow, he returned to Melchizedek and continued explaining him because understanding Melchizedek as a type of Christ and understanding his priestly ministry mattered.

That is my encouragement to all of us. Sometimes we need to dig. Some passages are difficult, but that is exactly why we should think carefully about them.

There are promises connected with meditating on God's Word. Joshua was told that the Book of the Law should not depart from his mouth but that he should meditate on it day and night so that he would

observe all that was written in it. Psalm 1 says essentially the same thing. The blessed man delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night. Both passages connect success—not the world's definition of success, but God's—with meditation on Scripture.

Deuteronomy 6 also comes to mind. Many of us are beyond the years of raising children, but the principle remains the same. We are to know God's Word and teach it to our children. We are to talk about it throughout the day, when we rise up and when we lie down. Scripture is meant to saturate our lives.

That is the framework from which I teach.

I also recognize that people learn differently. I spent forty years teaching science and mathematics, and students have different learning styles. My teaching style may not always match yours, and that is understandable. I tend to think analytically. I like outlines and careful progression. Other teachers communicate differently, and that's fine. Sometimes I struggle to follow their style, and perhaps they would struggle to follow mine.

During our discussion someone pointed out that comparing several good English translations can also help us understand what a passage is saying, especially for those who do not work directly with the Greek or Hebrew text. I agree with that completely. We have wonderful resources available today. We can easily compare translations, reading a familiar translation like the King James alongside something like the New American Standard or even a simpler paraphrase to help grasp the flow of thought.

Another reminder from Deuteronomy 6 is that we cannot pass God's truth on unless we know it ourselves. As grandparents especially, we still have responsibilities. Some of us are now at the top of our family generations, with children and grandchildren beneath us. We have opportunities to help shape those who follow us.

Someone also observed that every person who comes into a Bible study arrives with different needs and experiences. The Holy Spirit often takes something different from the lesson and applies it personally. I have experienced that myself. People sometimes tell me after a message what particularly affected them, and it is not always the point that stood out most to me.

Returning to First Peter

Now we return to First Peter, even though our larger study is moving through Genesis.

Why are we in First Peter? Because of Noah.

Last week we discussed Christ proclaiming to the spirits in prison, and that led to many good conversations. We are not going back over that discussion today. Instead, we want to focus on the end of verse 20 and into verse 21.

Peter speaks about the days of Noah during the construction of the ark, when eight persons were brought safely through the water. Then he says,

"Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal of a good conscience to God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

That verse deserves careful attention.

Years ago Ruth and I attended a Church of Christ congregation for a short time. They believed in baptismal regeneration—that a person must be baptized in order to be saved. I never did understand what they did with the thief on the cross, though perhaps they allowed for exceptions.

I remember discussing this subject with someone there, telling him that baptism does not save. He immediately took me to this verse. I was caught off guard. I had grown up in a pastor's home and had been a Christian for years, yet I was not prepared to answer from this passage. I had to go home and study it carefully.

One thing impressed me, though. He was willing to open the Scriptures and discuss them. Even though I disagreed with his conclusion, there is nothing wrong with opening the Bible together and asking what the text says.

Someone immediately asked about Peter's words, "not the removal of dirt from the flesh." That observation points us toward an important distinction between water baptism and Spirit baptism.

I want to spend some time establishing why this passage refers to Spirit baptism. You may never need to explain all of the details to someone else, but it is important to understand the foundation yourself.

Different Baptisms in the New Testament

How many different baptisms are there in the New Testament?

Most people immediately think of water baptism and Spirit baptism. John's baptism also comes to mind. But is John's baptism the same as Christian baptism today? Both involve water, yet they are not identical.

My father gave me a piece of advice years ago that shaped the way I studied this subject. He said, "Keep your eyes on the prepositions." That may sound like an English grammar lesson, but it matters because we believe in verbal inspiration. We are interested in the actual words the biblical writers used.

[For the following discussion you might want to refer to the chart at the end of this article.]

In Mark 1:8 John the Baptist says,

"I baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In English both statements use the word "with," but the underlying Greek prepositions are more specific.

John baptizes **in** water.

Jesus baptizes **in** the Holy Spirit.

Those statements tell us the sphere in which each baptism takes place, but they do not yet tell us what people are baptized into.

Looking back at Mark 1:4 and other passages such as Luke 3:3, John's baptism is described as a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Other passages describe it as baptism into repentance.

So John's baptism immersed people in water with repentance and forgiveness in view.

Jesus' baptism, however, immerses people in the Holy Spirit. At this point we still have not identified what they are immersed into, but we know that it is different.

Now consider the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19.

Jesus commands His disciples to baptize believers into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is Christian baptism. It is distinct from John's baptism and distinct from Christ's baptism in the Holy Spirit.

So we now have three baptisms before us:

John's baptism **in** water **into** repentance.

Christian baptism **in** water **into** the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Christ's baptism **in** the Holy Spirit. But what is this baptism **into**?

Why the Distinction Matters

Acts 19 illustrates why these distinctions are important.

Paul met some disciples at Ephesus and asked whether they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed.

They answered that they had not even heard of the Holy Spirit.

Paul then asked an interesting question:

"Into what then were you baptized?"

That question itself tells us there are different baptisms.

They answered that they had received John's baptism.

After Paul explained further, they were baptized **into** the name of the Lord Jesus.

Notice that this corresponds with Christian baptism, which is **into** the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When we baptize believers today, the pastor says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." In English we hear the word "in," but the underlying idea is into the name.

The Only Definition of Spirit Baptism

The key passage is 1 Corinthians 12:13.

"For also by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."

This is the only passage in Scripture that actually defines Spirit baptism.

Again, the prepositions matter.

Where it says "by" one Spirit is actually **in** one Spirit **into** one body.

Which baptism on our chart fits that description?

It is Christ's baptism.

John baptized in water toward repentance.

Christian baptism is in water into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Christ baptizes in the Spirit into the body of Christ.

That is the baptism that occurs at conversion.

When a person trusts Christ, the Holy Spirit places that believer into the body of Christ.

Christian water baptism does not accomplish that. Christian baptism identifies a believer publicly with Christ. It places that person into the name, identifying him as belonging to Christ. It does not make him a Christian. It does not place him into Christ. It does not save him. It does not forgive sins. It is the outward picture of what has already happened.

Understanding Romans 6

Romans 6 ties these truths together.

Paul writes,

"Do you not know that all of us who were baptized **into** Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"

Again, the wording is important.

Which baptism puts us into Christ?

Spirit baptism.

When the Holy Spirit places us into Christ, we are also united with His death.

That is why the New Testament repeatedly speaks of believers being in Christ.

Colossians says that we have been raised with Christ.

Ephesians says we have been buried with Christ, raised with Christ, and are presently seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

How can that be?

Because if we are in Christ, then wherever Christ is, that is where we are.

That is difficult to grasp fully. I do not claim to understand every aspect of it. But it is what Scripture teaches.

Returning to First Peter, Peter says that baptism now saves us—not by washing dirt from our bodies, but through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That saving baptism is not water baptism. The only baptism that places us into Christ, into His death, burial, and resurrection, is Spirit baptism.

Water baptism identifies us publicly as Christians. It pictures what has already taken place.

Living in the Reality of Being in Christ

One observation from our discussion was that this truth gives tremendous assurance.

Jesus Himself was baptized, not because He needed cleansing, but because He identified with those He came to save.

Likewise, our confidence comes from the fact that we are truly in Christ.

When Scripture says that in Christ we have forgiveness, or in Christ we possess every spiritual blessing, those statements are not simply attached to the label "Christian." They describe an actual union with Christ.

That is where our power comes from.

Romans 6 says that we were buried with Him through baptism into death so that just as Christ was raised from the dead, we also might walk in newness of life.

It goes on to say that our old man was crucified with Him.

When Christ died, believers died with Him.

Christ died to sin once for all. Although He was never a sinner, He endured temptation before the cross. After His death and resurrection, He no longer faced those temptations.

Because we died with Him, sin no longer has dominion over us.

We often do not feel that way. We feel powerless before temptation.

But the gospel tells us otherwise.

In Christ, sin has no authority over us.

Every temptation we face can be answered with, "I refuse to do that."

If we choose to sin, it is not because sin possesses irresistible power over us. We voluntarily offer ourselves as slaves when we no longer have to..

That is why understanding these baptisms matters.

I do not expect everyone to explain all of these details to someone else. But I do want you to have a solid foundation when someone says that water baptism placed them into Christ's death.

Water baptism pictures what happened.

When the Holy Spirit came into your life, He placed you into Christ. That is when you died with Him, were buried with Him, and were raised with Him.

Baptism

(Comparison of 3 different baptisms based on the prepositions)

Look for John's, Christian, and Spirit Baptisms

<u>Reference</u>	<u>Who</u>	<u>en (in)</u>	<u>eis (into; action)</u>	<u>epi (upon)</u>	<u>Misc. message</u>
Matt 3:6	John	Jordan			repent, kingdom
Matt 3:11	John	water	repentance		
	Jesus	Holy Spirit			
Matt 28:19	command		name of father, etc.		
Mark 1:4	John		forgiveness		repent
Mark 1:5	John	Jordan			confess
Mark 1:8	John	water			
	Jesus	Holy Spirit			
Luke 3:3	John		forgiveness		repent
Luke 3:16	Jesus	H.S. and Fire			
John 1:25, 26	John	water			
John 1:33	Jesus	Spirit			
Acts 1:5	John	water			
	Jesus	Spirit			
Acts 2:38	Peter		forgiveness	Name of Jesus	repent
Acts 10:47	Cornelius	name of Jesus			
Acts 11:16	John	water			
	Jesus	Holy Spirit			
Acts 13:24	John				repentance
Acts 19:1-5	Corinthians	John's			repentance
			name of Jesus		
Romans 6:3	whoever		Jesus Christ		
			Christ's death		
I Cor. 1:13	not		name of Paul		
I Cor 10:2	Israel	cloud & sea	Moses		
I Cor 12:13		Spirit	body of Christ		
Gal 3:27	as many		Christ		