

WATER BAPTISM

Congratulations on beginning your new life in Christ. You are now a child of God (John 1:12), your sins are forgiven and you have the Holy Spirit dwelling within: 1 Corinthians 6:19. You have already taken the most important step in life, but it is important that you follow up on this step with a commitment to seek the Word of God diligently and to obey all that it commands in the power of His grace. One of the commands which is necessary to our obedience to Christ is that of water baptism. Let's explore this intriguing subject, even if only briefly at this point, so that we may know and understand its purpose in the life of the Christian.

WATER BAPTISM IN THE SCRIPTURES

Water baptism is not a new thing for its origin dates back well beyond the birth of Christ. However, John the Baptist was the first to use water baptism as a symbol of repentance: Matt.3:6. This element remains foundational to water baptism today, although there are other truths which are also expressed through the medium of water baptism.

Jesus Himself chose this action as the means by which Believers would demonstrate to the world that they had become Christians. He set the example for us to follow when He was baptized by John in the River Jordan. We know that Jesus was perfect and without sin, and had no need to be baptized in regard to repentance. He did so, however, in order "*to fulfill all righteousness*": Matt.3:15. In being baptized, Jesus was identifying with man and demonstrating to all subsequent Believers the pathway they were to take: 1 Peter 2:21.

The disciples of Jesus continued to baptize, and Jesus commanded water baptism in the Great Commission which He gave to the disciples before He ascended into heaven.

MATTHEW 28:18 *And Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.*

MATTHEW 28:19 *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:*

MATTHEW 28:20 *Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world. Amen."*

The Apostles then practised water baptism in obedience to the Lord's command. We see in the book of Acts, numerous accounts of Believers, who, after receiving Christ, were baptized in water: Acts 2:38,41; Acts 8:16; 36-39; Acts 10:46-47; Acts 16:29-33; Acts 19:1-5. Note that the Apostles in the Book of Acts baptized people immediately after they received salvation. In other words they were prompt in their obedience to the Lord's command to be baptized. Thus we see that water baptism was not to be regarded as an afterthought, but was a vital accompaniment to conversion.

Having established that water baptism is a valid New Testament experience, given as a commandment by Jesus to the Body of Christ, we will now go on to explore its purpose in the life of the Christian.

THE PURPOSE OF WATER BAPTISM

Water baptism can be compared to a burial service. And a burial service is conducted only for someone who is already dead - in this case, dead to sin. When we go down into the waters of baptism, we are publicly expressing that we were in Christ when He was buried in the tomb and we are dead to all forms of sin, including the sin nature.

Thus the water which covers us is a “grave” or a “tomb” which symbolizes that we were “buried” with Christ. In this way we show that we are identified with Him in His death.

ROM 6:3 Know you not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?

We turned our backs on sin through repentance when we were saved, both mortal (death penalty) sin and other forms of sin. Thus in being water-baptized, we are both reminding ourselves and making a public declaration that we are dead to:

- (a) **The state of death** (which means separation from God), brought about by imputed “original sin” (Adam’s sin).
- (b) **The sin nature**, e.g. Romans 6:7.
- (c) **Death penalty sins**, e.g. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Revelation 21:8.
- (d) **Other sin**, e.g. Ephesians 4:25-32; 1 Corinthians 3:3.

However we are also identifying with Christ in His resurrection, for in coming up out of the water, we are saying, symbolically, that we have died to our past life and have been resurrected to “*walk in newness of life*” by the power of the Divine Nature at work in us.

ROM 6:4 Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that just as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

ROM 6:5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection

By the action of water baptism, we as Christians declare to ourselves, the world and the devil that we have “died” to the old life of sin through repentance: 1 John 1:9. We are publicly proclaiming our faith in, and our obedience to Christ and we are saying by this action that we are no longer our own, for we belong to Christ, for eternity.

Water baptism is like a wedding ceremony in which you confess again your commitment to Christ through vows made in public. You made this commitment by faith at salvation, but by God’s grace, water baptism becomes the formal and outward expression of your marriage to Christ. It is really a declaration of that which has already taken place. Soon we will complete our wedding ceremony when we come around the Lord in heaven to enjoy *“the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.”*

So water baptism not only symbolizes our escape from sin’s tyranny, it is also a demonstration of our commitment to Christ, through Whom we have been given new life: John 5:24; John 10:10. Water baptism is thus not just symbolic, but should represent the beginning of a journey of faith, a journey to which one is henceforth committed.

HOW ARE WE TO BE BAPTIZED ?

1. We are to be baptized by full immersion. The Greek word for baptize in the New Testament is “baptidzo” which means “to dip” or “to immerse.” There is no question that this was the baptism practised by John and the early Church, e.g. Acts 8:38-39, Mark 1:8-9.

It is also evident that only immersion caters for the symbolism that is involved in water baptism, for only through immersion can we signify that *“we are buried with Him by baptism into death”*: Romans 6:4.

Note: The practice of so-called “infant baptism” is not scriptural and if you were sprinkled on the head with water as a baby, you have not been baptized according to God’s Word. This is merely a man-made religious ritual, for baptism represents a confession of faith in Christ and this is not possible for a baby. It can be particularly damaging in that some people come to believe that they have rightstanding with God, based on the fact that they were sprinkled on the head with water as a baby. This is a deception which springs from false doctrine, one that promotes unbelief and keeps people imprisoned in their state of spiritual death.

2. We are to be baptized “*in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 28:19), as Jesus commanded. This is the authority by which we are to be baptized. In doing so, we are recognizing the triune government of God, the three Persons in the Holy Trinity. By the individual work and through the perfect unity of the three Persons in the Godhead, the wonderful work of redemption has been completed.

IS WATER BAPTISM ESSENTIAL FOR SALVATION ?

The Great Commission given by Jesus to the Church is outlined in the gospel of Mark as well as the gospel of Matthew. Part of this is recorded as follows:

MAR 16:15 And He said unto them, “Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.

MAR 16:16 He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned.”

While some take these verses to mean that one must be baptized in order to be saved, this interpretation would contradict the teaching of Romans 10:9 and 10 which declares:

ROM 10:9 That if you shall confess with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.

ROM 10:10 For with the heart, faith is exercised, resulting in righteousness (rightstanding with God); and with the mouth, open acknowledgement is made of your salvation (action with your faith).

Salvation is therefore not dependent upon water baptism but upon personal faith in the finished work of Christ, and one's confession of such. Therefore water baptism is not essential to salvation.

CONCLUSION

While water baptism is not essential for salvation, it is essential to our obedience to Christ. This is because water baptism has been commanded by our Lord, being therefore by no means an optional extra which can be added, if we so choose, to our Christian life.

The Word of God teaches that as we obey the Lord, we will please Him and be blessed of Him. So respond from the heart today to His command to be water-baptized, and take this step of faith which is set before you. Once knowing that water baptism is an important part of God's will for your life, you can say, as the Ethiopian did to Phillip, *"Look, water! What prevents me from being baptized?"* Acts 8:36. This he did, and *"went on his way rejoicing"*: Acts 8:39.

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