

102 Water Baptism

The New Testament Christianity is not a ritualistic religion. There is no hard and fast order of worship in a Christian church service. In other words, there are no steps one, two, and three in order to have a worship experience with God. We are free to worship God anytime, in the best way that it is easiest for us and also pleases God. It is the heart of a Christian person that puts us in direct contact with God, through the Holy Spirit.

There are two ceremonies which are essential because they are divinely ordained by God.

1. **Water baptism** - the ordinance of baptism by immersion is commanded in the scriptures. All who repent and believe on Christ as Savior and Lord are to be baptized. Thus they declare to the world that they have died with Christ and that they have been raised with Him to walk in newness of life (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 10:47,48; Romans 6:4 (Tenents of Faith)

Baptism is an outward expression of an inward experience.

2. **Communion** - the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion as it is sometimes called, consisting of the elements - bread and the fruit of the vine- is the symbol expressing our sharing the divine nature of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:4); a memorial of His suffering on earth (1 Corinthians 11:26); and is enjoined on all believers "till He comes"!

These ceremonies ordained by the Lord are described as sacraments which literally means "sacred things".

Brief descriptions:

Water Baptism

1. symbolizes spiritual life begun
2. pictures faith in Christ
3. usually administered once
(one beginning spiritual life)

Lord's Supper

1. signifies spiritual life continued
2. pictures fellowship with Christ
3. administered frequently
(teaches spiritual life must be nourished)

The act of water baptism (that is, being immersed in water in response to receiving salvation) is a very important first step in the Christian life. In Matthew 3:13-17, we see the Lord Jesus Himself coming to His cousin John to be baptized, in order to "fulfill all righteousness." He then went on to establish baptism as an eternal ordinance for His church, calling every believer to follow in His footsteps.

Matthew 28:19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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In our modernized, "comfort zone Christianity," we do, sad to say, tend to take God's commandments far too lightly. It was Chuck Colson who pointed out:

*"Most Westerners take baptism for granted, but for many in the world the act requires immense courage. In countries like Nepal it once meant imprisonment. For Soviet or Chinese or Eastern bloc believers, it was like signing their own death warrant."*¹

Water Baptism is an Outward Sign

Many things in life become a symbol or an outward sign. For example, a wedding ring is an outward sign that a person is married. A military uniform is an outward sign that a person is involved in that particular branch of service. Similarly, water baptism is a symbol designed by God to identify a person as a disciple of Jesus Christ. However, I use the word "symbol" here with caution. To say that it is "just a symbol" takes away from the depth and beauty of water baptism.

Baptism is a symbol, but it is so much more than that. When we are saved, we are spiritually baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27,) and into His Body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). Baptism in water is an **outward representation of these inward realities**. In Biblical symbolism, water represents inner cleansing (Ephesians 5:26, Hebrews 10:22,) and spiritual rebirth (John 3:5,) both of which are central themes of baptism.

Water baptism is, in essence, a funeral.

It is an act of faith in which we testify, both to God and to the world, that the person we were before is dead and buried, and we are raised as a new creation in Christ. This is beautifully illustrated by these Scriptures:

Romans 6:4 For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

Colossians 2:12 For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.

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Scriptures

Matthew 28:19 **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”**

Mark 16:16 **“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”**

Acts 10:47,48 **“Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy spirit just as we have? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.”**

Romans 6:4 **“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”**

The mode (method)

The word "baptize" (in the Greek "baptizo" means to make whelmed or fully wet) means literally to dip or to immerse. Greek scholars, church historians, scholars who belong to churches which baptize by sprinkling admit that immersion was the earliest mode.

When did the practice of sprinkling or pouring take place? The church got the unscriptural idea that it was essential for regeneration to take place, so you had to be baptized immediately. It was administered to the sick and dying, since immersion was out of the question, they were sprinkled. Then of course, it became more convenient to baptize by sprinkling. There were places that had insufficient supply of water. The scriptural mode is by immersion, which is true to the symbolical meaning of baptism, namely death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:1-4)

The Formula

The formula given by Jesus in Matthew 28, **“baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”**. Sometimes I get the question, what about people who believe in a Jesus-only baptism? The Scripture they use is Acts 2:38, where Peter said, **“Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ.”** To understand that verse, Peter was speaking to Jews and he is saying you need to put your hope and confidence in the Messiah. Be baptized with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

The Trinitarian formula is used. We are to have spiritual communion with the Trinity. In 2 Corinthians 13:14 the Trinity is spoken about in a benediction, **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost is with you”**

The Recipient

Who can be baptized? The answer to that question is all who sincerely repent of their sins and exercise a living faith in the Lord Jesus. In the early church water baptism took place after some outward expressions took place such as, a profession of faith - Acts 8:37, Prayer - Acts 22:16, or a vow of consecration - I Peter 3:21

Can infants be baptized? There are some denominations and churches who baptize infants by sprinkling. Infants have no sin to repent of and cannot exercise faith, so they are logically excluded from water baptism. Infants can be dedicated to Christ in a public service (Matt. 19:13-14)

The Efficacy

The word efficacy means, the ability to produce a desired result. Does water baptism have the power to produce a final effect on a person's life? The answer to that would be "no". There is no saving power in water baptism. People are baptized not in order to be saved but because they are saved. In the church where I grew up during a water baptism service the candidate was asked to share a testimony. Invariably you have a person who understandably has just become a baby in Christ or they responded out of nervousness by stating that they were there in the water to be baptized, to get saved. That is not a correct statement because you are saved by the blood of Jesus that was given over two thousand years ago on the cross of Calvary. That is the only way to receive salvation in Jesus Christ. This ordinance then is not absolutely essential to salvation. It is essential to full obedience to Christ and His teachings.

The Meaning

There are several pictures that can be seen when someone is baptized.

Salvation - lowering the convert pictures Christ's death, burial, and resurrection

Experience - testimony stating we are fully identified with Christ

Regeneration - experiencing the new birth has been described as a "washing" (or bath) of the filth to the old life

Testimony - to man that you have "put on Christ". You have been saved. (You are "in Christ")

Being Baptized is a Command From God, Not an Option.

Baptism is an act that God requires of every believer. In fact, among Jesus' last recorded words on earth were...

Mark 16:16 Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned.

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When you read this verse it reads as if in order to be saved you must believe and be baptized. If this were so, Jesus would have included the word baptized in the second part of that verse to read, anyone who refuses to believe and be baptized will be condemned. But it's not there! Condemnation rests on disbelief, not on baptism. Baptism is merely a picture of the new life not the means of securing it. Think about that for a moment. Jesus' very call to believe on Him includes a call to be baptized. If He puts it in that category, He must see it as being something very important, wouldn't you say?

You never read of an unbaptized Christian anywhere in the Bible. In fact, baptism immediately followed a person's salvation. They didn't see it as something to be delayed or put off. Let's take a look at some of the conversions described in the Book of Acts. When the people respond to Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost, the first thing he instructs them to do is this:

Acts 2:38 Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We further read in verse 41 that they... **"gladly received his word, and were baptized...."** In the account found in Acts 8:26-40 of Phillip leading the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ, as they finish their discussion, the eunuch enthusiastically asks, **"What is hindering me from being baptized?" to which Phillip replies, "If you believe with all your heart, you may."** Then they came to a body of water, and Philip promptly baptizes him. In Acts 22:16 Paul was sharing his testimony of when he received Christ. In the testimony he shared that God spoke to him and the first thing he was told to do after his conversion was to be baptized. There are a number of other instances we could look at as well.

Acts 10:46-48 For they heard them speaking in other tongues^[a] and praising God.

Then Peter asked, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?" ⁴⁸ So he gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterward Cornelius asked him to stay with them for several days.

Acts 16:14-15 One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. ¹⁵ She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. "If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my home." And she urged us until we agreed.

Acts 16:33 Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized.

Acts 18:8 Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and everyone in his household believed in the Lord. Many others in Corinth also heard Paul, became believers, and were baptized.

Acts 19:1-5 While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions until he reached Ephesus, on the coast, where he found several believers.^[a] ² “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” he asked them.

“No,” they replied, “we haven’t even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

³ “Then what baptism did you experience?” he asked.

And they replied, “The baptism of John.”

⁴ Paul said, “John’s baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus.”

⁵ As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

When you read the scriptures concerning the early church being baptized you will notice that there is the sense of urgency that is attached to baptism. These people all responded to Jesus in simple faith. However, they didn’t see their faith as complete until they had obeyed God by being baptized. Keep in mind that faith without works (corresponding actions) is dead (James 2:17.) A living faith produces an obedient heart (Matthew 7:21; Luke 6: 46; 1 John 2:3-4) and water baptism is to be our first act of obedience.

I read something one time that was very interesting in studying this subject. Christians who do not follow Jesus in water baptism have a much higher rate of backsliding than those who do. I thought about that, after all, if our walk with God didn’t begin with the most basic act of obedience, it got off to a faulty foundation in the first place. This could make it more difficult to walk obediently in other areas of our lives.

Baptism is a Very Special Way of God Communicating His Love To Us

When we receive God’s saving grace, it is no accident that He calls us to identify with Him in a way that makes it real to us. Are you struggling with guilt over your past? I’m just wondering, maybe it’s because you haven’t yet given the person you once were a proper burial! Water baptism is a very powerful reminder of God’s wonderful grace. The person we were before is dead forever, and we are raised with Jesus as a totally new creation:

2 Corinthians 5:17 Amplified Bible - "**Therefore, if any person is (ingrafted) in Christ (the Messiah) he is a new creation (a new creature altogether); the old (previous moral and spiritual condition) has passed away. Behold, the fresh and new has come!**"

Conclusion

As you can see, you have absolutely nothing to lose, and everything to gain by following Jesus in water baptism. Ultimately, it all goes back to Jesus' statement in John 14:15. **"If you love me, keep my commandments."** Baptism is a simple, but profound act of obedience that you will carry with you for the rest of your life. If you have not yet taken this step, I strongly encourage you to do so as soon as possible.

Of course, we cannot take baptism without first embracing the reality that it represents: A living relationship with Jesus Christ. Without this, baptism is simply getting wet.

If you have not given your heart to Him, why not do it now?

Endnotes

¹ "The Body: Being Light In Darkness" by Charles Colson and Ellen Santilli Vaughn, 1992, Word Publishing, page 137