

BAPTISM

Baptism in Water

Although it might appear a simple outward act or just a religious ceremony, baptism is an act of the utmost importance and significance for us. It not only speaks of what has happened to us now that we have come into Christ, but it is also designed to foster faith in us for the future, to live from now on in the full blessing of our salvation. In non-Christian lands, people don't always take a lot of notice when a person of another religion professes to believe in Christ, but when he or she follows this by being baptized, the opposition breaks out. Everybody understands that baptism is the outward sign that you mean business.

As you read the New Testament epistles, you will find that nowhere are believers exhorted to get baptized. That is because it was such a common practice that it is taken for granted that this happened when they were born again. We don't come across any unbaptized Christians in New Testament churches. If you are not yet baptized, this study will help you to see the importance of obeying this command of Christ. If you are baptized, this will help you to understand more perfectly what has happened and what should result from it.

You have probably noticed that Christians have various opinions about aspects of baptism, specifically the mode and purpose of baptism. Our desire is to follow the instructions of Scripture the best we can.

Believers

Baptism in Scripture always follows repentance and faith (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). It was after a person became a disciple that he was to be baptized (Matthew 28:19). For this reason, we practice what is called "believer's baptism" which simply means that we baptize those who have come to believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Immersion

The Greek word baptizo, translated "baptize," means literally to dip, immerse, or submerge. New Testament believers were, therefore, immersed. So John needed plenty of water to do the job (John 3:23). This is confirmed by the description of Jesus' baptism. He came "up out of the water" (Mark 1:10), just as with Philip and the eunuch (Acts 8:38-39).

What Does Baptism Mean?

- 1. It means I've been initiated.** Baptism is a ceremony of initiation (admission to membership). We are baptized "into Christ" (Romans 6:3), and thus into His body, the church.
- 2. It means I've been sealed.** It's like circumcision was to Abraham, "a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith" (Romans 4:11). It should confirm and strengthen your faith. Let's say there's a letter representing you and an envelope representing Christ. The letter is placed in the envelope, just as in conversion you are placed in Christ. Then the envelope is sealed. That's like water baptism. It makes you feel secure.
- 3. It means I've been cleansed.** Bathing the body is an essential part of hygiene. Conversion, "the washing of rebirth" (Titus 3:5b), deals with the grime of sin, and baptism reminds you that you are now to live as a cleansed person. Read Ananias' words to Paul at his baptism (Acts 22:16). They show how new birth and baptism belong together. We must not separate them. Once you're born again, you qualify for it.
- 4. It means I confess Christ.** New birth may be in the seclusion of your own room, but you can't have a "private baptism." In the New Testament, it was in rivers and city pools. It's no "hush-hush" affair. It's like an enlisted soldier putting on the uniform (Galatians 3:27). You can't wear the uniform and be a secret soldier.
- 5. It means I am united with Christ in His death and resurrection, as in our reading (Romans 6:1-11).** Think of the pool as the grace and your body as the corpse. What do you do with the corpse? Bury it. What do you do with your old life, with its sinful ways, now that you are a Christian? Bury it in the act of baptism. Christ rose again. Going under is followed by coming up. That's reassuring! United with Christ, you rise to "live a new life" (Romans 6:4). Believe for the symbolic act to be a reality in your life.

In preparation for this significant event in your life, we would encourage you to read and meditate on Romans 6:1-23.

