

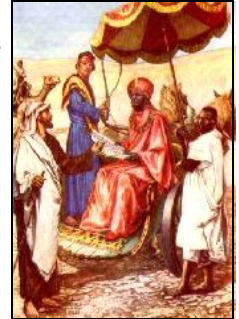
Baptism—It's Meaning and Significance

By David Burge

The English word "baptism" comes from the Greek word, "baptiso", to immerse, to dip, to submerge. It was used among the Greeks of the dying of a garment, or the drawing of wine by dipping the cup into the bowl. To baptize is to put under, or to entirely immerse.

- At His baptism, the Spirit descended upon Jesus as He was "coming up out of the water" (Mark 1:10)
- John the Baptist baptized where there was "plenty of water" (John 3:23)
- Both Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch "went down into the water" (Acts 8:38)

When one is commanded to be baptized one is commanded to be immersed in water as a sign of ones faith in God, in Christ and his message.



How Important is Baptism?

Baptism is a very important part of Christian life. Baptism by immersion was commanded by Christ, was practiced by the early church, and is taught in the New Testament. All who believe should therefore observe this ordinance.

Commanded by Christ

- At His first public appearance Jesus was baptized (Matthew 3:13-17). His last words to His disciples were a command to make disciples from among all nations, by baptizing believers and then teaching them (Matthew 28:16-20).

Practised by the Early Church

- 3000 received the Word at Pentecost and were baptized (Acts 2:41). The Ethiopian believed and was baptized (Acts 8:36-38), as was the jailer and his family who believed (Acts 16:33).

Taught in the New testament

- The New Testament assumes believers will be baptized. Baptism lies behind much of Paul's teaching on Christian living in the New Testament (Romans 6:3-4, Galatians 3:26-27, Ephesians 4:5).

Will Baptism Save Me?

1 Peter 3:21 says "*baptism ... now saves you, not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*" It is not the act of baptism that saves, but the faith of the one being baptized (Ephesians 2:8). The thief on the cross was saved though he had no chance to be baptized (Luke 23:43). We cannot however say, "*I have faith, I don't need to be baptized*". Faith is shown by obedience. Jesus said, "*If you love me you will obey what I command*" (John 14:15).



What is the Meaning of Baptism?

Purification

- John the Baptist came preaching a "*baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*" (Mark 1:4). Paul was told, "*Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name*" (Acts 22:16). Christians are cleansed by "*the washing with water through the word*" (Ephesians 5:26). Baptism is the sign and seal of the inner cleansing we experience by faith in Christ.

Incorporation

- In Greek writings the phrase "into the name of" (Matthew 28:19) was a common phrase for the transference of ownership. By baptism we become a part of the Body of Christ and "a people for His [God's] own possession" (Titus 2:14).

Identification

- Baptism pictures a Christian's union with Christ through faith. When you go into the water you identify with Jesus on the cross. When you go under the water you are identifying with His death and burial. When He died, you died to the old sin life. Coming up out of the water you identify with Jesus in His resurrection life. In baptism you acknowledge Jesus died, was buried and rose again for you. You show your intention to live a new life by the power of Christ in you (Romans 6:3-11).

Who Should be Baptized?

The Bible lays down a number of conditions for baptism:

Repentance

- *"Repent and be baptized ..."* (Acts 2:37-38).

Belief

- *"Whoever believes and is baptized"* (Mark 16:15-16).

A Good Conscience Towards God

- *"... the pledge of a good conscience..."* (1 Peter 3:21).

Desire to be a Disciple

- *"Make disciples baptizing them"* (Matthew 28:19).

An infant cannot meet any of these requirements.

An infant cannot repent.

An infant cannot believe.

An infant cannot pledge a good conscience to God.

An infant cannot desire to be a disciple.

Therefore baptism is not for infants!



Dedication

Parents who wish their children acknowledged before God should do what the mothers of Israel did. Bring the children to Jesus for His blessing. Jesus did not baptize them. He took them into His arms and prayed for them. We call this infant dedication.

When Should I be Baptized?

The New Testament knows nothing of un-baptized believers (The only exception is the thief on the cross in Luke 23:39-43, and he does not set a precedent to be followed). In the New Testament the longest recorded time between a person becoming a believer and their baptism was 3 days (Acts 9:9,17-19). If you desire to be baptized the test is not time but belief.

- *"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized"* (Acts 2:41).
- *"When they believed they were baptized"* (Acts 16:33).

If for whatever reason you have been a believer for some time but have never been baptized as a believer by immersion, then you should consider being baptized. Even Jesus who knew no sin was baptized *"to fulfill all righteousness"* (Matthew 3:15). How can his disciples do any less?

In being baptized you show your love for Christ and your desire to become His disciple. True faith involves a total commitment to Christ. A desire to follow Him, obey Him and live for Him. When you are ready to make this commitment you can and should be baptized.

