

Baptism

Introduction

The final instructions which Jesus left with His apostles before ascending to heaven can be summarized in the command “make disciples”) Matt. 28:19-20. The means by which disciples “disciples” are made is described by Jesus in Matthew 28: 19-20 as “baptizing” & “teaching.” The importance of baptism as part of this command by our Lord is underscored by the stress given to it in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:33; 18:8; 19:5.) Such an important ceremony as baptism is worthy of both our obedience & our understanding.

What is It’s Meaning?

Identification With Christ

In the New Testament, new believers were baptized “in the name of” Jesus Christ and were thereby identified with Him (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27-29.) Baptism, then, serves as an initiation ceremony identifying a believer as a disciple of Christ. Because of the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:9; 15:26.) Identification with Jesus Christ is in essence identification with all three persons of the Godhead (Matt. 28:19 “baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”).

Identification With Christ’s Saving Work

Baptism symbolizes the saving work of Christ which has taken place in the life of a believer. Even as a believer is identified with the person of Christ, he is also in union with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-11; Col. 2:12). Before the time one believes in Christ, he is living under the penalty and bondage of sin (the “old man,” Rom. 6:6). At the moment that person trusts Christ for his salvation, he is united with Christ, who died to take the penalty of sin under the wrath of God. The believer is therefore freed from the penalty of sin. The believer is also freed from bondage to sin. Even as Christ was raised from the dead with a glorified body, the believer undergoes a change in anticipation of receiving his glorified body in the kingdom—he received the Holy Spirit who leads the believer in a life which is pleasing to God (Rom. 8:1-25). This is the “newness of life” to which the believer is raised with Christ (Rom. 6:4). It is not that the sin nature has been done away and the believer cannot sin; rather, the believer has the Spirit leading him so that he does not have to sin. The believer is no longer the “old man” who is under the penalty and bondage of sin, but he is a new man who is able by the Spirit to live pleasing God. This is what is symbolized by baptism—immersion in water (death and burial) and raising up out of the water (resurrection to new life).

Who May Be Baptized?

Believers are the only proper candidates for baptism. Jesus’ command to baptize assumes believing subjects, as can be seen from Mark’s version of the Great Commission (Mk. 16:16). The New Testament practice was exclusively baptism of believers.

Acts	2:41	“those who receive His word were baptized”
Acts	8:12	“when they believed...they were baptized”
Acts	9:18	“Paul was baptized as a believer (cf. Acts 22:16)
Acts	10:47	baptism cannot be refused those who had received the Spirit (necessitates faith)
Acts	19:4	some disciples of John the Baptist were re-baptized after believing in the name of Jesus

Baptism continued. . .

The household baptisms which can be found in the New Testament do not necessarily imply that infants were baptized. The Philippian jailor's household believed with him (Acts 16:34). The same is true of the household of Crispus (Acts 18:8). Stephanas' household (1 Cor. 1:16) is later described in such a way as to imply they were all believers since they had received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-48; 11:14)/ The nature of Lydia's household is not indicated, but there is no reason to expect that they are an exception.

The reason infants or young children who have not believed the gospel are not baptized is due to the nature of the meaning of baptism. Baptism is a public testimony, an outward symbol, of a spiritual reality which has taken place in the life of the one being baptized. Such a testimony and symbol is empty if the one receiving baptism is not a believer.

What is the Mode of Baptism?

Evidence indicates that immersion (in contrast to sprinkling) was the practice for baptism in the New Testament. The Greek word translated "to baptize" (baptize) means literally "to dip." This in itself is not conclusive since the meaning of the word is derived from usage in context. However, the lack of New Testament usage to the contrary leads to the conclusion that the standard definition for baptize, "to dip," appropriately describes the ceremony of Christian baptism.

The examples of baptism in the New Testament strongly imply that baptism was by immersion. John's baptism was probably by immersion since he administered it where there was much water (Jn. 3:23). The Ethiopian eunuch was probably immersed since they waited until they came upon "a certain water" rather than sprinkle or pour using water carried by the caravan (Acts 8:36). The text states that they went down into the water, which would be necessary only if they needed to find a depth adequate for complete immersion (compare also the need for Jesus to come up out of the water during His baptism by John in Matt. 3:16). The practice of baptism by immersion in the church seems to be carried over from the Jewish custom at that to baptize proselytes by immersion.

Immersion into the water and coming back up best pictures the union with Christ's death, burial and resurrection which is symbolized by baptism (Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:4).

Baptism Symbolizes or Expresses:

- A step of obedience. Jesus told us to.
- We belong to Christ.
- Submission or commitment to Jesus. Jesus is Lord. A willingness to live God=s way.
- Being born again (rebirth) into a new life in Jesus Christ.
- To show your sins were washed away when you believed in Jesus.
- Outward expression of an inward act. Outward action of an inward faith.
- Reenacts or pictures our identification with the death, burial, resurrection of Christ.
- I have become a part of the body of Christ. I identify with and commit myself to other Christians.
- Galatians 3:26-28, Acts 2:38, Acts 2:41 (3000 were baptized)