

WATER
BAPTISM

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Bracketed comments following some scriptures assist the reader in understanding the intended meaning of these verses

We acknowledge the additional works of the various Scholars and Bible Commentaries used in conjunction with the College material. This is not to say that we agree with all their theology, but we certainly value their contribution to the Body of Christ.

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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.

Note: You may have been a Christian for some time. Know that the truths of water baptism apply to you also and are important to your spiritual growth and your walk with the Lord.

For the Christian, water baptism is like a wedding ceremony in which one pronounces one's vows, speaking them forth before a public gathering which is present to witness the event. Water baptism performs the same function before God, and represents a vow presented to the world, to oneself, to the enemy and to the sin nature - a vow of commitment. It is also a symbolic demonstration of death to the old man (the old unregenerate self) and life to the new man, raised in "*newness of life*" (Romans 6:4.) All this is symbolized as we go down into the water and are then brought up out of it. In this way we demonstrate that we have died to what we were, and now have new life through God's saving presence surrounding our spirit, a cleansed spirit and the impartation of the Divine Nature through Divine connection in Christ. As a new creature in Christ, through the action of water baptism we are also making a public declaration of our commitment to Him.

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.

WATER BAPTISM IN THE SCRIPTURES

Water baptism is not a new thing. Its origin goes back beyond the birth of Christ, for it was the outward ceremony which demonstrated that a Gentile had accepted Judaism as his religion.

John the Baptist was the first to use water baptism as a symbol of repentance (Matthew 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*” (Matthew 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 For even to this were you called - it is inseparable from your vocation. For Christ also suffered for you, leaving you [His personal] example, so that you should follow on in His footsteps. (Amp.)

The Disciples of Jesus continued to baptize (to demonstrate repentance: John 4:1-2), 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 (all authority) is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.

MATTHEW 28:19 *Go ye therefore (this means all Believers from all ages), and teach all nations (every tribe, every tongue: e.g. Revelation 7:9), baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:*

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 (age). 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 (the state of sin – spiritual death). 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.

Note: Of course to walk in this experientially, we need to have a heart attitude to journey with God, relying on His empowering

graces to do so, according to the Word.

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.

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

We are therefore demonstrating through this action of water baptism that we are dead to the power and effects of sin - for these have been legally annulled. (But while we have already been set free legally, we still need to walk in this freedom experientially.)

Thus, in being baptized in water, we are both reminding ourselves and making a public declaration that we are dead to:

1. **The state of death** (separation from God), brought about by imputed “original sin” (Adam’s sin).
2. **Sin itself**, e.g. Ephesians 2:1-7, 4:25-32; 1 Corinthians 3:3.
3. **The sin nature**, e.g. Romans 6:7.

The power and effects of sin have been legally broken in the lives of Christians. We are now under no obligation to sin. In other words, we are to consider ourselves as dead to sin and alive to righteousness (Romans 6:11).

Therefore when we are baptized in water, we are making a public declaration that we, because of the finished work of Christ on the Cross, are dead, in a spiritual sense, to sin in all its forms - and that this is our ongoing commitment.

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.

ROMANS 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.

ROMANS 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 highlights, through symbolism, what happened at regeneration, enabling us to focus on the importance of spiritual events which occurred then, i.e. we became identified with Christ’s death and His Resurrection, we died to sin and were raised to live a new life of faith in Him through the grace of the Divine Nature within. Water baptism thus represents the removal of the sin nature from our spirit. This means that it represents, in a broader sense, the death of the old man at the Cross, the old man being that person the Believer was before he or she was saved - totally depraved, unregenerate and lacking the life of God (1 John 5:12), self-centred and self-ruled, dominated by the sin nature. Via the symbolism of water baptism, we can thus gain a greater awareness of who we are in Christ, and the benefits that are to be appropriated through our spiritual position as sons of God. With this awareness, we may also

gain greater trust in God and His Word.

However, once faith is applied to the deliverance aspect that water baptism represents, this action can be used in a mighty way against the enemy, cutting off any remaining legal or illegal ground which he may have in our lives. Through this means his influence can be totally severed from our minds and our bodies and remain as such, as we continue to live according to God's Word and give the enemy no legal ground to return. When we walk with God, the enemy cannot walk with us. If we seek, find and embrace the Light of God's Word, no darkness can enter concerning the areas we have embraced.

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.

WHEN ARE WE TO BE BAPTIZED ?

In the New Testament record, we find that those who came to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ were baptized almost immediately. 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. For example, the Ethiopian eunuch, on gaining a heart understanding of the scriptures, asked Phillip to baptize him without delay (Acts 8:36). Likewise, the Philippian jailer and his family, upon believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, were baptized immediately (Acts 16:30-33).

If you have already been water-baptized by full immersion, you can now apply your faith concerning these truths of God's Word to that action and all that it represents, having already obeyed God in this area. You can focus your faith retrospectively on your action of water baptism and all it represents for the cleansing of all unrighteousness. Some even choose to be re-baptized for this purpose, although the decision is very much an individual one.

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:

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

MARK 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:

ROMANS 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.

ROMANS 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.

IS WATER BAPTISM NECESSARY OR OPTIONAL ?

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. Remember Jesus' words in the gospel of John:

JOHN 14:15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.

JOHN 14:21 He who has My commandments, and keeps (obeys) them, he it is who loves Me: and he who

loves Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest (reveal) Myself to him.

We cannot profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ (at any great depth) if we do not follow Him, if we do not obey Him. Indeed the scriptures tell us that our willing obedience is the measure of our love for Him.

Also, if we hear spiritual truth and then fail to put it into practice, we will be leaving ourselves open to attacks from the enemy and allow the sin nature to become enthroned. This is because we will have given him or the sin nature legal ground to afflict us in some way because of our disobedience. The scriptural principle which relates to this situation is found in Luke 12:48 which tells us that *“unto whomsoever much (spiritual truth etc.) is given, of him shall much be required.”*

WHY DO WE NEED TO BE WATER-BAPTIZED ?

The main reason we should be water-baptized is because God has commanded us to do so - for Jesus said:

MATTHEW 28:19 Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

We should obey God in this and every other area because He is our Heavenly Father and is looking after our well-being by commanding us to do what is right. God loves us and wants us to be free from any bondage with which the enemy may have ensnared us. After salvation, however, the consequences of our past sins may still remain. Water baptism is a tool God has provided to deal with these bondages in an easy and effective manner.

When the spiritual truths of that which water baptism represents are fully understood, Christians should be able to apply their faith in this area in an effective way. In other words, they should be able to focus their faith in a simple way on the deliverance aspect that water

baptism represents - for through the Cross and the Resurrection we can be delivered from all bondage. By this means, they, the captives with all their complexities, can be set free by the power of God through the Blood of Jesus.

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING GOD'S TEACHING ON WATER BAPTISM

People are not aware of the fact that water baptism (with repentance) can help set in force a spiritual law (God's protective covering) which can completely block the enemy from interfering in their lives. Again it is not the water baptism itself but what it represents, and our faith in the finished work of the Cross (us in Christ and being dead to the old man) that can block the enemy's interference.

People need to know the reasons for being baptized in water. They need to know that it is not to be done just as a religious ordinance, but to be used as a solid platform from which, with the help of the Holy Spirit, a greater acceptance of the truths concerning our salvation can be established - with spiritual consequences. Many have been deceived and blinded from the truth in this area.

At regeneration, God's saving presence came to surround our spirit, and death (including the sin nature) was expelled from our spirit. This cut the enemy's ties to our spirit, resulting in us becoming sons of God whereby we can cry "*Abba Father*" (Romans 8:15). Spiritual regeneration thus severs all Satan's legal rights to a person's spirit and Satan is no longer able to maintain his position (on behalf of the Kingdom of Darkness) as that person's legal spiritual father (John 8:44).

While water baptism symbolizes this event, it does not actually do anything in regard to our spiritual position with God. However it can be a door which allows God, by His grace, to do much in our lives.

It is not denied that after regeneration and before water baptism, a person can be totally set free from bondages through faith in, or

openness towards, God's Word. You may then ask, "Why be baptized if a person can be set free without it?"

Unfortunately, in most cases, Christians do not realize when, let alone how, the enemy is at work in their lives, even after they have been Christians for many years. And water baptism provides an effective way for problems to be dealt with by the Lord, even when these are not understood or remain to a large extent unrecognized.

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).

May you have the victory in Christ.

For further information or teaching material to help you grow in the Christian faith, please write to:

*CROSSROADS INTERNATIONAL
FULL GOSPEL MINISTRIES
10681 Princes Highway
Warrnambool 3280 Vic.
Australia*

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