

The Importance of Water Baptism, Part 1

Water baptism was an ordinance of the church instituted by Christ and the early apostles, which symbolizes burial and resurrection. Water baptism is far more than a ritual or religious exercise. It is intended to be an essential part of the spiritual foundation of Christians.

Jesus considered baptism so important that He was water baptized. Jesus stressed the vital importance of water baptism when He commissioned His followers to baptize all those who became Christians.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19, NKJV).

Peter and the early church leaders stressed the importance of water baptism.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38, MEV). And when the Holy Spirit fell upon new converts at Cornelius’ house in Acts 10, Peter ordered “them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48).

At the time of a believer’s baptism in water, the believer is outwardly affirming their inward commitment made to Jesus Christ as the Lord of their life. In order to understand the reason for being water baptized, we must carefully consider what the Bible says about it.

What Water Baptism Represents

Water baptism expresses our outward confession of our faith in Christ. It also represents an inward reality, affected by God's grace in power through faith. Paul states:

"I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said" (1 Cor. 15:3-4, NLT).

Christ died for our sins, was buried and was raised from the dead. This is a fact; our response now is to simply believe and to receive. When we do, the Holy Spirit baptizes us (places us) into Christ's body, the church! Again, Paul writes:

"For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we are Jews or Gentiles, whether we are slaves or free, and we have all been made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13, MEV).

Further, we are identified in Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Death to the old self is an accomplished fact because we are in Christ, and Christ died to sin.

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6:3-5, NIV).

We are baptized by the Holy Spirit into His death upon faith in Christ. Paul also states in Galatians 2:20 that we were in Christ Jesus when He died. We were buried with Him and now are raised in newness of life, with the promise of a future resurrection.

Water baptism identifies us with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection. In so doing, we are also raised and resurrected with Him—spiritually. Further, we are set free from the inclination to sin because we were in Jesus Christ when He died.

Identifying with Christ through faith and baptism does not free the believer from the possibility of sin, but it does free the believer from the obligation to sin.

Keep in mind that your identity in Christ does not define your maturity in Him. Maturity develops throughout our lives as we continue to grow in the image of Christ. This occurs by obeying His Word and following the leading of the Holy Spirit in righteous living.

We function from our identity in Christ but recognize we are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to empower us to live a godly life. We are set free from the power of sin because we were in Jesus Christ when He died.

Our old self was crucified with Him. It was not our capacity to sin that died with Christ but our old self. The capacity to sin still lives, but our old life does not. Therefore, after faith for salvation in Christ and water baptism, one must still live from relationship with Him, or from one's new life. Sin is still possible if we yield to it, but the lifestyle (old self) has been done away.

The spiritual reality: I've been crucified with Christ and baptized into His death. The cross now becomes a point of victory, a place of overcoming, new life!

Water Baptism of Jesus

Matthew 3:13-17 (MEV) says:

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. But John prohibited Him, saying, 'I need to

be baptized by You, and do You come to me?’

“But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now, for it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he permitted Him.

“And when Jesus was baptized, He came up immediately out of the water. And suddenly the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending on Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”

John tried to prevent Jesus. What was Jesus’ response? Permit it, John! It was important. Why? Jesus received baptism as a sign of repentance and faith.

In fact, John’s baptism developed out of an earlier rite that the rabbis developed to bring a pagan convert into Judaism. The washing in baptismal water symbolized a new life away from the defilements of paganism and into the righteousness of Judaism.

This means that the Holy Spirit inspired unknown rabbis of the pre-New Testament period to develop such a rite, and John adopted it for the forgiveness of sins of backslidden Jews. Jesus then carried it forth to His disciples with added graces.

What happened immediately after Jesus was baptized? The heavens were opened to Him, and the Spirit descended upon Him. God says, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Is it fair to say that if Jesus did it, and God the Father was pleased by it, that God would also be pleased with us doing it? Yes!

Is it possible that through water baptism, and the spiritual reality it represents, there is a greater grace bestowed? Yes, perhaps! The act of obedience and submission to water baptism doesn’t earn us anything; however, it is an outward sign of

our relationship to the Father as sons and daughters.

Water Baptism in the Early Church

For the early church, there was no separation between ritual and reality. Coming to Christ and being baptized were mutually inclusive (see Acts. 22:16, Mark 16:16, 1 Pet. 3:21).

Philip went to Samaria to preach the gospel. The entire city was joyful over the Good News about Jesus and witnessing the miracles of God taking place. Result:

“But when they believed Philip preaching about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized” (Acts 8:12).

Later, the Lord led Philip to a desert place between Jerusalem and Gaza, and he encountered an Ethiopian man reading from Isaiah, about the Messiah, Jesus, who would come.

Acts 8:35-38 says:

“Then Philip spoke, beginning with the same Scripture, and preached Jesus to him.

“As they went on their way, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ He answered, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ And he commanded the chariot to halt. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.”

Notice that as soon as the man believes and confesses Jesus is the Son of God, Philip invites him to be water-baptized as a confession of his faith. In early Christianity, water baptism was much more intricately linked to the initial confession of faith than is often the case today.

Again, it is the response of faith to the gospel that saves.

Baptism is an outward act of one's faith in Christ. There is no set time frame, but it is important to be water-baptized. Again, it is a spiritual reality of the truth that we are one with Christ, raised in His resurrection life.

Watch this full sermon here. For more from Dr. Bob Sawvelle, listen to *Empowered for Purpose* on the Charisma Podcast Network. {eoa}

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