

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

66 What Is the Meaning of Water Baptism?

It is in the New Testament that we read about the worship of the primitive Christian Church. Worship was simple, humble, reverent, and characterized by thankfulness and joyfulness. Jesus and His disciples sang hymns. (Mark 14:26) The celebration of the Lord's Supper and prayers constituted the order of service. (Acts 2:42, 46, 20:7) The first day of the week was early set as the appropriate time for such gatherings of believers. (John 20:19; Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:2)

The ordinances or sacraments held an important role. The Latin word "sacramentum" was long applied by Latin Christian writers to seven practices. Five of these, we believe, have no base in Scripture or belong in a different category. Some believe there are three sacraments and include foot washing as one. This example, however, was not given as an ordinance, but as a demonstration of humility and helpful encouragement to fellow believers. (John 13:1-7; Verse 7 is the key. See also John 14:25-26, 16:12-13; Galatians 6:1)

The Reformers restricted the ordinances to those practices which had these distinguishing marks: **(1)** It must have been instituted by Christ. **(2)** It must have been enjoined by Him upon His followers. **(3)** It must have been "bound with Him in such a way as to be the expression of divine thoughts, the visible symbols of divine acts." When tested by these guidelines, only two of the sacraments came forth as ordinances; i.e. Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

I. WHAT IS CHRISTIAN BAPTISM?

Baptism is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit signifies publicly the individual believer's identification with Christ and his being a partaker of the benefits of the covenant of grace. As has often been said, "Baptism is a physical act or expression of a spiritual relationship." (Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12)

II. WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

It is your Pastor's conviction that the ordinance can only be Scripturally administered where it is preceded by faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. In

the New Testament we find that baptism was administered only to those who already had repented and believed. There is no clear case of infant baptism in the New Testament, only speculation which surrounds the homes of Cornelius, the Philippian jailor and Lydia. The Biblical order is clearly *“repent and be baptized.”* (Acts 2:38, 41; 10:47,48; 16:33-34) Infant baptism reverses the order to *“be baptized and repent”* (See also Acts 8:12; 10:48; 18:8b)

III. IS BAPTISM A CONDITION FOR SALVATION AND FORGIVENESS OF SIN?

Baptism is not a condition for salvation. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith, with no other condition. Baptismal regeneration has often been read into two difficult passages which are found in Acts 2:38 and Mark 16:16. There is one instance in the New Testament where the question is asked directly, *“What must I do to be saved?”* The answer comes back equally as clear, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”* (Acts 16:31-32)

IV. DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT DESCRIBE THE MODE OF BAPTISM?

There is no specific command as to the mode of baptism. We have already said it is a physical act with a spiritual meaning. The spiritual significance is the crowning virtue regardless of place or method. I assume we may conclude that all the water in the world will not give meaning to the act if the heart is not right to begin with. It is a spiritually significant act for spiritually minded people. It can be shown that the word *“baptizo”* used by our Lord more than 70 times in Scripture, admits to a secondary meaning and therefore does not require the action of submersion. Thus, it surrenders its distinction as to mode. On the other hand, the Scripture does portray baptism by immersion. (Acts 8:36, 38) The picture given in Romans 6:34 is most suggestive. In form the physical act wonderfully reflects an individual’s union with Christ. When a person is buried, he is completely covered. No part of him is exposed. Submersion in and emersion from the water beautifully portrays the end of self and identification with Christ in His burial and resurrection. I have satisfied my own mind with this imagery as being the mode of baptism practiced in the early Christian Church.

V. WHY SHOULD WE BE BAPTIZED?

1. Because it Is a Sign that We Are Christians:

The first reason why we should be baptized is that it is an announcement to our world, the world we live in, that we have renounced all self-effort for personal salvation and have had a change of mind about finding forgiveness.

Through an act of the mind, heart, and will we have embraced Christ as Savior. Baptism is a public declaration of personal faith which has made us Christians. It is not a sacramental means of becoming a Christian.

2. Because it Is an Act of Obedience:

(Matthew 28:18-20) When Jesus was here on earth He sanctioned marriage and instituted two ordinances. If the ordinance of baptism was important enough for Him to command, it is important enough for us to obey. Baptism was not an afterthought which has somehow emerged through church tradition. It was instituted by Christ, its origin is divine not human. Jesus further affirmed its importance by being baptized Himself and giving us an example to follow. (John 15:10)

3. Because of the Early Christian's Understanding of Baptism:

Those men who heard Jesus teach and were entrusted with the future of the church He said He would build clearly commanded believers to be baptized. (Acts 10:48) They did not feel that baptism was optional or something which was not to be taken seriously. In fact, in all of the New Testament we do not even find the idea of an unbaptized believer. Not only did the disciples command others to be baptized, but in John 4:1-3 we find they themselves were baptized and they baptized others.

4. Because it Is a Matter of Conscience:

Peter, in writing on this subject speaks of baptism as that which does not save us by the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but it is the answer of a good conscience toward God. Once and for all Peter puts an end to the notion that baptism cancels sin. It does not. I do not understand how any Christian who wants to follow his Lord in complete obedience can have a clear conscience by being disobedient on this matter. Yet, it is amazing to me how many people there are who claim to love Jesus who have never been baptized.

In conclusion, a personal question. Have you been baptized? Have you given a sign to this world that you follow Jesus unashamedly? Have you obeyed His clear command? Have you respected the best wisdom and teaching of the church Jesus established? Have you a clear conscience? Will you prayerfully consider what the Lord would have you do concerning water baptism?

Alan B. Christensen, Pastor, Hope Evangelical Free Church, Wilton, CT,
June 12, 1977

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