

Baptism

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The word, "Baptism," comes from the Greek word, "Baptismo." It was an ordinary word meaning, "To immerse or dip," as in washing a dish.

There are four types of baptism in the New Testament. The three that have no direct relevance to Christian baptism are mentioned by John the Baptist in Matthew chapter three:

As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals, He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Matthew 3:11,12

John's Baptism or the Baptism of Repentance

John was the "Voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord.'" He baptized those who received his testimony that the coming of the Messiah was imminent and repented of their sins to be ready for Him.

Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Matthew 3:1-3

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

In Acts chapter two, the believers in Christ were baptized into one body--the church--by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. A noise like a rushing wind filled the house, and tongues of fire rested on them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, Who enabled them to speak the foreign languages of the crowd that gathered at the sound of the wind. All Christians are partakers in the baptism of the Spirit:

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body., and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

I Corinthians 12:13

The Baptism of Fire

The baptism of fire does not refer to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Gentiles experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter ten. They also were enabled to speak in unknown languages, but they did not experience the tongues of fire of Acts chapter two. Fire is a Scriptural symbol for judgement. Those who refuse repent are reserved for the baptism of fire. The Lord will eventually gather the valuable wheat into His barn, but He will burn up the worthless chaff with the unquenchable fire of hell. The Lord Himself endured something like the baptism of fire for His people:

I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished.

Luke 12:49,50

Christian Baptism

Just before the Lord ascended up from earth to heaven, he commissioned the apostles:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.
Matthew 28:19,20

Christian baptism was distinct from John's baptism. In the beginning of Acts chapter nineteen, the Apostle Paul found a group of believers at Ephesus who had been baptized into John's baptism, but had never even heard of the Holy Spirit. He told them that "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." When they heard this, they were (re)baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Peter preached the first gospel sermon in Acts chapter two. He showed the Jewish people from the Scriptures that they had crucified the Messiah they had been waiting for. When the conscience stricken multitude asked, "What shall we do?," He replied:

Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38

When the Apostle Paul repented and turned to Christ, he was told:

And now why do you delay? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.
Acts 22:16

These Scriptures intimately associate repentance and forgiveness or cleansing from sin with baptism. Yet we know that baptism is only symbolic, for many people who have been baptized never claim any repentance or show the slightest evidence of cleansing from their sins. The thief that was crucified with Jesus was promised a place with Him in paradise despite the fact that he could not be baptized. Nor is baptism mentioned in most of the scriptures that explain the way of salvation, for it is the blood of Christ that cleanses us from all sin. (I John 1:7).

First Peter chapter three shows that baptism saves us in the symbolic sense. Although it depicts the Christian's perfect standing with God as identifying himself with the resurrected Christ, it has nothing to do with the actual removal of our sins.

And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
I Peter 3:21

It's simply the Christian's appeal to God for a good conscience by his symbolic identification with the resurrected Christ. Nevertheless, baptism is the first thing enjoined on new believers in the Bible, and obedience to Christ would not put it off.

The symbolism of baptism is that the Christian's old sinful self is considered crucified with Christ, and he is considered risen with Christ in a new life that no longer wants to continue in sin.

And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through

faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Colossians 2:11-14

Circumcision--the cutting off of the flesh--was the symbolic seal of God's covenant with Abraham and his offspring. Similarly, baptism symbolizes the removal of the Christian's fleshly body of sin. He goes under the waters of baptism as associating himself with Christ in His death and burial. Likewise, the Christian comes up out of the waters of baptism symbolically associated with Christ in His resurrection. The Christian now looks back on the cross of Christ and finds the catalogue of all his sins nailed there by Christ Himself as the crimes that He was dying for.

Romans chapter six shows the significance of the Christian's association with the resurrected Christ. The Christian is to forsake his old sinful life and walk in a new life with Christ:

What shall we say then? are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.

Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so, consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Romans 6:1-13

In baptism then, the Christian symbolically identifies himself as dead to sin with the crucified Christ, and alive to God with the resurrected Christ. And he is to live as such, dead to all temptation to sin and alive to every occasion for righteousness in "Newness of life."

The desert experiences of the children of Israel were similar to what baptism symbolizes. In Exodus chapter twelve they were redeemed from the sentence of death by the application of the blood of the passover Lamb. In Exodus chapter fourteen they passed through the waters of the Red Sea on dry land as they commenced their journey from the slavery of Egypt to the blessings of the promised land. Throughout their forty years of following the cloud through the wilderness they struggled with subjecting their fleshly desires to the will of God. Finally, in Joshua chapter three they crossed the waters Jordan on dry land to possess the land God had promised them. It can all be considered one big event; entering unharmed into the waters of the Red Sea, and exiting unscathed from the waters of the Jordan with the death of everything inconsistent with their heavenly calling in between.

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things...&tc.

I Corinthians 10:1-6, &tc.

The subject of baptism is fraught with controversy:

The word literally means to immerse, so sprinkling is inappropriate unless circumstances preclude immersion.

Baptism is "Into Jesus" (Romans 6:3) "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19) The "Jesus only" idea results from misunderstanding Acts 19:5.

Baptism is not to be put off as an option of convenience or a rite reserved for those who have proved their staunchness. When the Ethiopian Eunuch was saved he was baptized on the spot. (Acts 8:36-38) The Philippian jailer was saved after midnight and baptized before morning. (Acts 16:31-35)

There is no Scriptural basis for baptizing unbelievers or the children of Christian households before they profess Christ. The only mention of any of the three households that the Apostle Paul baptized was that they believed. (Acts 16:32-34)

Baptism is presented in the Scriptures as a testimony toward God rather than to men. (Acts 22:16 & I Peter 3:21) It is simply taking the position of being a Christian before God. The Scriptures do not refer to it as being a public testimony.