

# BAPTISM?

Water baptism might seem like a strange event for those who are unsure of its meaning. But once understood Christian baptism is rich in symbolism and precious in the eyes of the Lord.

## What Is Baptism?

Baptism is some times referred to as an 'ordinance' of the church. This is just a way of saying that it is a special command from the Lord to be observed. The Lord gave the ordinance of baptism to the church as a kind of wonderful 'word picture'.

They say, "A picture is worth a thousand words". If this is true, then Christian baptism says a lot! Let's look a little closer at what Christian baptism has to say.

***Christian baptism is the immersion in water of a new believer in Christ as a public testimony of their faith in Christ and their intention to live for Him. As a ceremony, it identifies the person with Christ and with His church.***

### 1). Baptism is an initial act of faith in obedience to Christ. (Matthew 28:19,20)

The Christian life is a journey, "following Jesus". Baptism is a special way of saying, "I have decided to follow Jesus". Baptism is for new believers. Sometimes people think they need to wait until they are mature in their faith before being baptized. This is not what baptism is for. Baptism does not say, "I have arrived". It says, "I have begun"!

### 2). Baptism is a dramatic public statement of our intention to live for Christ. (Acts 9:18-20)

A person's decision to accept Christ as Saviour and to follow Him as Lord has got to be very personal or else it is not real. But that does not make it private. Once this decision has been made in a person's heart, their faith becomes a very public thing. Baptism is a public event which speaks of a personal faith in Christ.

### 3). Baptism is a sacred symbol identifying us with Christ and His church. (Rom 6:3,4)

Baptism tells, by way of illustration, the story of Christ's death and resurrection. In so doing, it identifies us with the crucified and risen Lord, and with all of those who identify with Him. In this sense, baptism serves as an 'initiation' into the local church. This was clearly part of the New Testament understanding and practice. Just as the spiritual baptism (placing into) of the Spirit places us into the spiritual body of Christ (the universal church), [see **1Cor 12:13**] so physical baptism (with water) is our introduction into the local church (the local body of Christ). This is why Baptists have always insisted on baptism preceding official church membership.

When we understand baptism as a picture of death and resurrection, then we can appreciate the reason why sprinkling, pouring or washing does not work. Only immersion serves as a fitting picture of death and resurrection.

It is also important to know that the word 'baptism' is a transliteration of the Greek word 'baptizo' used consistently throughout the New Testament. It always means to 'dip' or 'immerse'.

Furthermore, in each instance in which a person was baptized in the New Testament record, it was clearly by having their bodies dipped or submerged into the water and brought back up again. This is how Jesus himself was baptized. (**Matt 3:16**) (see also **Acts 8:38,39**)

## Why Be Baptized?

In saying that baptism is for believers, it should be evident that baptism does not make a person a Christian. Nor does it have any direct bearing on a person's standing before God. The Bible makes it clear that our relationship with God, and the salvation of our souls, depends solely upon our faith in Christ. **(Eph 2:8,9)** It is helpful to note that the thief on the cross was not baptized and yet Christ assured him of heaven.

One might reasonably ask then, "If baptism doesn't make me a Christian or win me favor with God, then why be baptized?" And the biblical answer is - as an act of faith in obedience to Christ to identify with the crucified and risen Lord and with His church, and as a statement of our sincere desire to live a new life for Him.

## Who Should Be Baptized?

Remember, baptism is an initial act of faith in obedience to Christ. This has several implications with regard to who should be baptized. Baptism is to be preceded by faith in Christ and so baptism is for believers. This excludes those who have yet to repent of their sin and put their faith in Christ for salvation. It also excludes those who are too young to understand and exercise this kind of faith. The fact that Baptism is a statement of our intentions to follow Christ also excludes any who are not serious about their commitment to really live for Christ.

If YOU have sincerely accepted Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour, but have not been baptized as a believer, then you should be baptized according to His command, because **baptism says a lot.**