



**“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like 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 6:4.**

## **The Gospel in a Picture**

**Lesson Aim:** To set forth the distinctive Baptist position on the subject of Christian baptism.

**L308. Date:** October 1974. **Text:** Romans 6:1-12.

**Topic:** Baptism; Church: Ordinances of.

“We believe that Christian baptism is the immersion in water of a believer, into the name of the Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost: to show forth in a solemn and beautiful emblem, our faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, with its effect, in our death to sin and resurrection to a new life; that it is prerequisite to the privileges of a church relation; and to the Lord's Supper . . .”

Baptism is important. You may become accustomed to people's trusting Jesus, making a profession of faith and being baptized. If you recognize the significance of the ordinance, it will no longer be “just another baptismal service” when you witness its administration.

Baptism was practiced long before it became a Christian ordinance. The ancient Hebrews had a ritual wherein the Levites were bathed, anointed, and admitted to religious service. Pagan religions often had some type of effusion as an initiatory rite. The Jews of New Testament days baptized Gentiles who became converts to the Jewish faith. The Essene sect practiced some type of baptism in their worship. Many practiced baptism, **but theirs was not Christian baptism.**

Baptism gained new meaning and a new sense of sanctity when Jesus adopted it as the initiatory rite of the Christian faith. He submitted to the ritual and commanded those who believed in Him to do likewise. Because of Jesus, baptism has become “Christian baptism.”

By baptism, we raise a memorial: Jesus died, was buried, and rose again from the dead. By baptism, we make a declaration: Through Jesus, we have died to sin and have been raised up to new spiritual life. By baptism, we declare a prophecy: Jesus will return to raise all Christians from death.

## I. WHY IS BAPTISM IMPORTANT?

Baptism is important because it is commanded by the Lord Jesus. He taught the importance of baptism during His personal ministry upon earth. Those who came to be His disciples declared their faith and allegiance in the act of baptism. His success in winning converts and their confessing their faith in baptism is witnessed by the Bible. “. . . **Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John,**” John 4:1.

It is evident that making disciples and baptizing them went hand in hand. There is not one instance recorded in the New Testament that a person became a disciple of Jesus and did not confess his faith in baptism. It is evident, therefore, that baptism was considered very important. Without recorded exception it accompanied faith.

Upon His ascension back to heaven, Jesus left the command, “**Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,**” Matthew 28:19. Jesus commanded each believer to be baptized. Have you obeyed His command?

Baptism is important because it is a testimony to the world. “**For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ,**” Galatians 3:27. As in regeneration, one “puts on” Christ before God; in baptism, one “puts on” Christ before men. A baptized man declares to the world that he belongs to Jesus Christ.

## II. HOW IS BAPTISM PERFORMED?

Christian baptism is performed by immersion in water of a believer in Jesus Christ. Sprinkling and pouring of water on a believer is not the method of baptism received by Jesus, nor performed by His disciples, nor commanded for our observance. New Testament baptism is by immersion.

That baptism is by immersion is evident from four lines of evidence. (1) Lexical—The Greek term, **baptizo** is always translated “baptize” in English. It means “to dip; to plunge; to submerge; to immerse.” That is its meaning in reference to the act of baptism. (2) Exegetical—The description of baptism in the New Testament pictures immersion. Acts 8:38-39 describes how Philip baptized the Secretary of the Treasury of the nation of Ethiopia: “. . .

they went down both into the water . . . and he baptized him . . . they come up out of the water . . .” (3) Logical—Romans 6:4 speaks of our being “buried with him by baptism.” Only immersion (as over against sprinkling or pouring) could properly picture a burial. (4) Historical—Every reputable church historian admits that immersion was the type of baptism practiced by Christians during the ministry of Jesus and almost three centuries following. New Testament baptism is by immersion. Any other mode misses what Jesus commanded. He commanded immersion for baptism.

Why was the method of baptism changed by some? Convenience may have had something to do with it. It is easier to sprinkle a few drops of water upon a person's head than to immerse him. Most probably, however, a rise of superstition concerning the effect of baptism and heresy concerning the result of baptism brought the doctrine of baptismal regeneration and the baptism of babies, and so sprinkling and pouring resulted. God gave no authority to anyone to change the mode of baptism.

### III. WHO IS TO BE BAPTIZED?

The only person who can properly receive New Testament baptism is one who has been saved through repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism is to be performed upon one who is already saved, not to make one saved.

Repentance is necessary before one is baptized. John the Baptist insisted, **“Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance,”** Matthew 3:8. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached, **“Repent, and be baptized every one of you . . .”** Acts 2:38. There can be no valid Christian baptism unless the one being baptized has truly repented of his sins.

Faith is necessary before one is baptized. That man of Ethiopia, with whom Philip talked at Gaza, asked, **“See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”** Philip replied, **“If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest,”**

The Ethiopian replied, **“I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”** Only then did Philip baptize him. (See Acts 8:35-39.) Only a believer may be baptized. When one has repented of his sins, and trusted Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour, he is immediately and eternally saved. To say, therefore, one must repent and trust Jesus before baptism is to say one must be saved before he is baptized. That is what the New Testament teaches.

### IV. WHAT PURPOSE IS BAPTISM?

Baptism is to declare one's faith in Jesus Christ, and new life in Him. It is for the purpose of confession, not regeneration. References in the New Testament to people's being "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5) mean that they were baptized because they believed the truth preached about the Lord Jesus.

Baptism is our public announcement that we have been joined to the Lord by faith and shall remain true to Him. It is a kind of "uniform for service" in that it identifies us as Christians. It does not make us Christians, but it classes us as such. It warns the forces of evil that we will no longer be numbered with them. The world can henceforth expect us to live like "new creatures in Christ Jesus." What a testimony! **"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin,"** Romans 6:6.

Baptism is a testimony to our spirits as well. It is, as Simon Peter expressed it, **". . . (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) . . ."** I Peter 3:21. Repentance and faith in Jesus Christ bring forgiveness and a "good conscience." Baptism is the "answer" of a good conscience. It is a testimony that we face God with a clear conscience since the guilt of sin has already been removed.

## V. WHO CAN PERFORM BAPTISM?

Baptists have traditionally held that valid baptism can be performed only by a New Testament church.

All authority resides in God. Only He, therefore, can authorize baptism in His name. The triune God, in turn, has expressed His authority in the person of Jesus Christ, Who said, **"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth,"** Matthew 28:18. Jesus, in turn, commissioned His disciples to perform the act of baptism. He said, **"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,"** Matthew 28:19. That authority is expressed through the assembly of believers, the local church.

The commission to evangelize, baptize, and instruct was given to the assembly of believers—the local church. The church is the administrator of the ordinances (I Corinthians 11:2). The church is the protector of the doctrines of Christ (I Timothy 3:15). It is not surprising, therefore, that baptism should be performed in relation to and as an act of the congregation of believers.

The church should not become proud of her authority. She should be humbled by her responsibility. She should exercise herself to make disciples,

to keep the ordinances pure in manner and meaning, and to help those who become believers to grow to spiritual maturity. It is a great privilege she has, but it is a solemn obligation as well.

Here is a rule of thumb to use in determining authority for baptism. Bible baptism must be according to the proper method (immersion), performed upon the proper person (a believer in Jesus Christ), and for the proper purpose (a profession of faith and confession of forgiveness already received). If the one performing baptism is incorrect on any one of those three points, you automatically know that baptism is not valid. If he is right on those three points, look at the doctrines he holds. In that way you can determine which baptism is valid and which is not.

Because a church has "Baptist" in her name does not mean she is a true church, nor that her ordinances are valid. In these days of apostasy, it behooves God's churches to keep a close watch upon her doctrines and practices, lest she too be led into error.

Someone may ask, "But is a mere ritual that important?" The answer must be, "Yes!" The importance does not reside in the ritual itself. There is no magic in baptism. The Lord Jesus, however, was the One who commissioned us to baptize. We are responsible to follow His exact instructions concerning who, how, why, and by whom. The ritual is important because of the Master who commanded its observance.

## WHAT PROFIT IN BAPTISM?

Is there any real benefit to be received from receiving Christian baptism? If it does not bring saving or sanctifying grace to the candidate, why be baptized? We are baptized because there is a benefit to be received in it.

Baptism is profitable because it gives the joy of obedience to the Lord. He commanded baptism. No believer can be happy when he is living in known disobedience to the Lord Jesus. Upon being baptized, a person is filled with a sense of joy and well-being because he knows he has obeyed his Lord.

Baptism is profitable because it increases our open and unhindered communion with God. When Jesus was baptized, heaven was opened unto Him (Matthew 3:16). You will not be endowed with the Holy Spirit nor hear a voice from heaven; but your act of obedience will please the Father, and you will find yourself growing in awareness of His pleasure.

Baptism is profitable because it leads to an increased understanding of God. At the baptism of Jesus was the first time the Holy Trinity was

manifested in the New Testament. The Father spoke from heaven; the Spirit descended as a dove; the Son came up out of the baptismal waters. As you obey the Lord in baptism, you will find Him revealing Himself more and more to you in spiritual things. Your act of disobedience, in refusing to be baptized, will hinder His manifestation of Himself to your spirit.

Baptism is profitable because it presents a testimony to others of the saving grace of God. If you had to make a speech telling what Jesus has done for you, you might have difficulty in finding the right words to express what is in your heart. In the beautiful ritual of baptism, you can declare exactly what Jesus has done, what has happened to you, and what your faith guarantees to be ahead for you.

Baptism has been reduced in importance in the minds of many. It has been exalted beyond what God ever intended by others. Baptism is a ritual. It is only a ritual, but it is a ritual with great meaning: Do not abuse it!

Baptism is a memorial. It declares what we know to be true concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Baptism is a testimony. It sets forth what has happened to the believer in his death to sin and resurrection to new life through faith in Jesus Christ.

Baptism is a prophecy. It announces the return of Jesus, the resurrection of the saints, and the inheritance of eternal glory in Him.

Do not hold baptism in superstitious reverence. Neither disparage baptism as an empty ritual. Look at its meaning and message. Give it the same importance which Jesus and the early disciples gave. **“Why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized . . .”** Acts 22:16.

## Questions

1. Christian baptism is important. Why?
2. What new meaning did Jesus put upon baptism?
3. How does one “put on Christ” in baptism?
4. How do we know baptism is by immersion?
5. Why do Baptists reject baptism by other denominations?
6. What does Acts 8:35-59 teach about baptism's method?
7. What does I Peter 3:21 teach about baptism's purpose?
8. Why should every Christian be baptized properly?
9. How do you know you have Scriptural baptism?
10. How has this study helped you?

