

NEW TESTAMENT BAPTISM

Matthew 3:13-17
Mark 1:9-11
Matthew 28:19-20

Of the ordinances which Christ commanded His churches to observe until He returns baptism comes first.

I. What Is The Meaning Of Baptism?

The New Testament was written in the Greek language. The word baptize, which is used in the Greek New Testament, means to dip or to immerse. It never means anything else.

Baptism is the immersion in water of a believer in Christ upon a profession of faith in Him as Saviour and Lord, upon the authority of a New Testament church and in obedience to the command of our Lord.

II. Why Was The Lord Jesus Christ Baptized?

As certainly as anything ever took place, Jesus Christ was immersed in the Jordan River by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11 and Luke 3:21-22).

When Christ requested John the Baptist to baptize Him, he shrank from administering the ordinance. He protested, saying, "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" To the objection of John the Baptist Christ made the following reply: "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." In this picture of subjection, death, burial and resurrection "it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." This righteousness was to be fulfilled by His death, burial and resurrection. In His baptism Christ could show how He would fulfill it in His death. When He was baptized at the beginning of His ministry, He showed in figure what He would do at the close of that ministry in fact. In His baptism was the form -- He was buried as dead. In the end there was the reality -- He was buried, being dead. In His baptism He rose from the emblematic grave. In His resurrection He rose from the dead. Jesus Christ was baptized in Jordan to show forth His death, His burial and His resurrection. His loving and obedient children are baptized to picture the atoning work of Christ. Anything which does not portray the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is not New Testament baptism.

When Jesus Christ was baptized, it was God's child being baptized, God's man doing the baptizing, God's method by which it was done and God's purpose for which it was done. His baptism was intended to be for all times the example and pattern of those who should become members of His churches. Christ's baptism had four characteristics:

1. He was baptized as God's child.
"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."
2. He was baptized by God's man.
"There was a man sent from God."
3. He was baptized in God's way.
"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water." "And straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him."
4. He was baptized for God's purpose.
"Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." "Thus" means in this manner. If one loves Christ as he should, he will not hesitate or refuse to obey Him.

III. Who Should Be Baptized?

On this subject the Word of God is very plain. Who is to be baptized, a believer or an unbeliever, a child of God or a follower of Satan? The answer is very plain. Any reader of the New Testament will observe that only believers in Christ are the proper subjects of baptism. Without exception the scriptural order is salvation and then baptism and church membership. The New Testament indicates that baptism was administered only to those persons who had repented of their sins and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. In order for baptism to be scriptural the candidate must be a child of God.

IV. Why Should All Believers Be Baptized?

For anybody to say that baptism is a matter of little consequence is to dispute the Word of God. No Christian should ever regard baptism as unimportant. Why, then, should all believers be baptized?

1. To do what Christ did.

That which Christ did should not be treated with indifference by anybody who pretends to be His follower. There is only one thing that a believer can do as perfectly as Christ did. He can't speak as He did for no man ever spake as our Lord. No man can live a sinless life as He lived. No man can perform the miracles which He did. But every believer can walk down into the baptismal waters and be buried in the likeness of his Lord's death and be raised in the likeness of His resurrection. Why should any believer in Christ hesitate to do what his Saviour did? His example was perfect, and therefore right for everybody whom He has saved. "And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan" (Mark 1:9).

2. To please God the Father.

"And straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:10-11). When our Saviour submitted to the beautiful ordinance of baptism, making it the initial act in His public ministry, the Heavenly Father declared His approval and expressed His pleasure. If we, who are His children, would grow in grace, and enjoy the smile of God's approval, our attitude to His Word and Will must never be that of choosing what we like and refusing what we do not like. It is wonderful to have the privilege of doing that which our Lord did and thereby please God in it. "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:16-17.

3. To obey the command of Christ.

The most solemn, comprehensive and perpetual commission ever given by the Lord Jesus Christ is that recorded in the Gospel according to Matthew, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20).

4. To confess one's faith in Christ.

Enlightened people are not baptized in order to be saved. They know that baptism does not possess any magical power to convert and to save the soul. They know that baptism does not possess any power to remit sin, to change the heart, to save the soul, or to sanctify the Spirit. They know that if baptism was essential to salvation, then the preacher would be as necessary as Christ. Intelligent and instructed people know that their salvation does not depend on water or any preacher. They know that if baptism is essential to salvation, then Jesus Christ never saved anybody directly, because He never baptized anyone. If baptism is essential to salvation, then Paul mislead the Philippian jailor, for he told him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and he would be saved. All of us know that baptism does not wash away sins, because we have known various people who were meaner after baptism than they were before. If it takes water to wash away sins, what about the sins committed between baptism and death? Isn't it strange that no one who is baptized to be saved claims to have an experience of grace or to be saved? Fortunately, many who formerly claimed that baptism is essential to salvation are now ashamed of the fact that they once believed that pernicious doctrine. At the same time they rejoice over the fact that they have come into the light and are rejoicing in God's truth. After all, if baptism is for the remission of sins, for what was Christ baptized?

5. To prove one's loyalty to Christ.

As an act of obedience to Christ, the reception of baptism brings joy, satisfaction and comfort to the soul. The believer feels that in baptism he has come out openly before the world and committed himself to Christ for definite Christian service. This gives to the spirit a moral triumph and fills it with boundless peace. Baptism is the announcement to the world that the recipient considers himself dead to his old life of sin and that henceforth he expects to live a genuine Christian life. To be baptized is to acknowledge Christ's leadership, to enter His army, to swear allegiance to Him as Lord and Master in a reverent and public manner.

No professed Christian has any right to regard baptism as unimportant. Christ explicitly declared that by baptism man should confess Him as Saviour and Lord. To indicate that this ordinance is not important is to assert that disobedience to Christ is permissible and that a witnessing faith is not essential. Our blessed Lord said, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15) "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:21). "In the keeping of His commandments there is great reward."

Baptism is a test of loyalty to Christ. Loyalty to Christ requires that we obey His commandments. This forbids our setting them aside for convenience, for personal comfort, or to please others.

A little sick child, desiring to be baptized, said, "Mother, I hope I won't die tonight." "Why?" inquired the mother. The child replied, "Because I haven't been baptized." "Do you think baptism will save you?" asked the mother. "Oh, no," said the child, "I am

already saved, for I am trusting in Jesus, but I wouldn't like to go to heaven without doing what the Lord Jesus Christ told me to do." Why should anybody want to go to heaven without doing what the Lord Jesus Christ told him or her to do?

6. To dramatize the gospel of Christ.

Our Saviour was baptized to picture His atoning work. Baptism represents Christ's death and burial for our sins, and His resurrection from the dead for our justification. The gist of the gospel of Christ is that He died for our sins, was buried and rose again. The child of God dramatizes this gospel in his baptism. Death, burial and resurrection are dramatized by the believer in his baptism. The Christian symbolizes his death to sin when he goes under the water and his rising to walk in newness of life when he comes up out of the water. Thus, we can proclaim the gospel in action as well as in speech.