

# *Water Baptism*

I am so glad that the Christian life is not a rulebook of “don’ts” but instead is a glorious relationship with the one true Living God, giving the believer a life full of “Do’s”. In fact, there are so many positive “Do’s” in the Christian life, that if we practice the positives we will not have time to worry about the negatives.

One of the many highlights and adventures in our Christian experience is that of water baptism. What the bible makes plain and simple, however, man tends to complicate and confuse. It will be worth your time and effort to read and study this little pamphlet in order that the simple truth of water baptism might become plain to you. If you have Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you have been forgiven of your sins and have the assurance of eternal life, therefore water baptism is an important “Do” for you.

When I became a Christian, one of the things that excited me the most was following God and not man. I said to myself, “If God said it, that settles it; I’ll do it!” Some things I found to be easier to do than others, however, my spirit is willing, but my flesh is often weak. But water baptism was a joy and glorious experience in my Christian life, and has become a benchmark which I can look back at and be encouraged.

Jesus made a point of recognizing water baptism as an important aspect of the Christian experience. He said, Go therefore, and make disciples (disciplined one) of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 28:19) Here we have somewhat of a formula for the manner in which baptism is to be performed, coming from the very mouth of Jesus.

First of all, it is required that one be a disciple, meaning “a follower of Christ.” This is not merely a mental assent that Jesus is “a nice guy...a good, moral teach,” but it is recognizing that Jesus is God come in the flesh, who died for your sins. It’s believing that the only way to be right with God is to confess that you are a sinner, and that the shed blood of Jesus is the only way of forgiveness. Anything less is not enough. You must willfully believe in Jesus, receive Him as the Lord and Savior of your life, and follow Him. This is what it means to be a disciple.

Another aspect of water baptism, as it relates to the disciple, is repentance. As the Apostle Peter said: “Repent and let each of you be baptized...” (Acts 2:38) The term repent conveys a change of direction. It means turning away from sin and turning toward God. Now if you are a disciple of Christ and the direction of your life is heading toward God and away from sin (this does not mean that you are perfect—none of us are—but you are seeking God’s plan for your life instead of sin’s plan), you are a candidate for water baptism.

## *INFANT BAPTISM*

This brings up the important subject of infant baptism and baptism for the dead. Without going into a long theological dissertation, but rather, very simply stated: if the person who is to be baptized is not volitionally making that decision for themselves, the baptism is invalid. Discipleship and repentance are willful, personal matters entered into by the individual consciously, and at an age of accountability (somewhere between 12-20 as debated by scholars).

### *SPRINKLE, SPRAY OR SPLASH?*

Next in Matthew 28, Jesus used the term baptizing, indicating the relationship between the water and the disciple. Literally *baptizo* in the Greek, means “to dip,” the word was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment or the drawing of water by dipping one vessel into another; and consists of the process of immersion, submersion and emergence.<sup>1</sup>

Consider Paul’s words in Romans 6:3-4: “All of us who have been baptized into Jesus Christ have been baptized into His death. So we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” Therefore, baptism is the symbolic rite of death, burial and resurrection.

Let me comment on that for a moment. When I die, do not sprinkle me with dirt, and do not just pour a cupful of soil on me. Dig a hole, put me into it, and fully cover me with earth! I am mystified by those who teach that water baptism is anything less than full burial of the body by total immersion in water, because herein is our body’s relationship to the water—we are buried.

Baptism also symbolizes resurrection, and a walk characterized by “newness of life.” It is an outward expression of an inward work. Since we have become a new creation in Christ, we celebrate by showing forth, through baptism, the work of Christ in our lives. He died for our sins and we recognized our old nature as “dead with Christ”: “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.” (Romans 6:6) As Christ was buried in His flesh, we bury, through baptism, our old nature. And as Christ was raised from the dead in a glorious resurrected body—never to die again, having conquered sin and death—we come forth out of the water having buried the old self and now coming up in newness of life, a life in the Spirit.

### *FATHER, SON & HOLY SPIRIT*

Lastly, as we immerse the individual we baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—the Trinity—who are co-equal, co-eternal, and co-existent.

It is interesting how God separates the wheat from the chaff by the simple, yet mysterious doctrine of the Trinity. “Great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, beheld by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.” (1Tim. 3:16) Cults kick against the goad of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit being three persons comprising the single Godhead. The Old Testament refers to God as a compound unity (Deut. 6:4) My own five fingers go into making one fist. That is a compound unity. So it is with the one true Living God: He is a compound unity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—comprising the one Godhead.

### *DOES BAPTISM SAVE?*

Unfortunately, we have with us in the church today many of the same problems that were inherent in the first Century church. One of these is “works righteousness.” The Apostle Paul went to great lengths to quiet the salvation heresies which prevailed in his day, such as:

- salvation through Christ *plus* circumcision;
- salvation through Christ *plus* Sabbath-keeping; and so on.

Whenever a teaching comes on the scene which bases salvation on Christ plus some work that you need to do, it is a false teaching. Salvation is a free gift based upon what God has done, not man. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.” (Eph. 2:8-9) We do not deserve it; we cannot earn it. We simply believe and receive the free gift of God: “Whoever believes may in Him have eternal life...But as many as receive Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name...”(John 3:15; John: 1-12)

Baptismal regeneration is one such false teaching, which says that a person must be baptized to be saved. The proponents of this teaching base their belief on Christ’s statement: “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved...” (Mark 16:16) Unfortunately those who adhere to this teaching isolated certain scriptures and ignore other. We need the full counsel of God in order to establish sound doctrine.

Just as we stated earlier, if salvation is based upon some work that I must do, it is no longer a free gift of God, but now is something that I have had a part in earning. In Titus 3:5 the Bible says, “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done...” Jesus’ words in Matthew 16:16—believe and be baptized—are not a formula for salvation, but rather, are a two-fold statement of salvation and identification. We believe for salvation; we are baptized for identification.

Baptism is the identification of the saved believer with the work of Christ—His death, burial and resurrection. It is also a statement to the world of his new allegiance to his risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Think of the inexcusable negligence of the Apostle Paul if baptism was truly necessary for salvation. In 1Corinthians 1:17 he says, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” Would not Jesus Himself be guilty of preaching a half-gospel by not mentioning baptism when He said to Mary and Martha, “I am the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.” (John 11:25-26) Think of the thief on the cross. There was not time for him to be baptized after he believed in Jesus, but in His final dying moments Jesus said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

We are told in 1Peter 3:21 that baptism is not the process of removing the filth from the flesh (in other words, the work of baptism does not make a sinner clean—If he goes down a dry sinner, he’ll come up a wet one), but rather it is an appeal to God for a clear conscience, by the identification with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. Therefore we can say that baptism is an outward expression of an inward work. Since you are already saved through belief in Jesus Christ, now in obedience you submit to baptism and in doing so you identify with Christ’s death, burial and resurrection—which made your salvation possible.

If we can help you further or answer any questions, don’t hesitate to give us a call. May the Lord bless you at your baptism and make it a very special event.

If you are planning on being baptized, here’s what you need to do:

Read through this pamphlet carefully, and also read through Romans chapter six.  
Sign up on the Water Baptism sheet in the foyer  
Please dress modestly for the baptism—remember, you're going to be immersed in water.  
We suggest dark shorts and a shirt, a swim suit with a t-shirt covering, or the like.

*<sup>1</sup>From Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*

*By Pastor Bill Stonebraker  
Calvary Chapel Honolulu*