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Water baptism



Introduction

Water baptism is a fundamental practise of Christianity, yet many Christians have not been baptised and do not understand the significance of it. This study will cover the topic of water baptism, and will answer many of the commonly asked questions concerning this highly important practise of the Christian Church.

What is water baptism?

The word “Baptise” comes from the Greek word “Baptizo” which means: to immerse or submerge. That is precisely what water baptism is... being submerged in water, symbolising death to the old life, and coming up out of the water, symbolising the start of a new life in Jesus Christ.

The practice of water baptism originated from the symbolic cleansing in water by the Levites in the Old Testament before performing their priestly duties. It was modified by John the Baptist for the purpose of publicly declaring repentance for the forgiveness of sin.

*⁴This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. **Mark 1:4 (NLT)***

What does water baptism symbolise?

When a believer is water baptised, he publicly declares that the old sinful life is finished and that he will live for Jesus Christ from that day forward.

*¹Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? ²Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? ³Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? ⁴For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. ⁵Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. **Romans 6:1-5 (NLT)***

Water baptism symbolises burial (going down under the water) and resurrection (coming up out of the water). Death and resurrection. Death to (choosing to forsake) our old life, our sinful ways and weakness to sin. Resurrection, because there is a new life, a new beginning as a new creation, as a child of God leaving the old ways behind for good.

Water baptism symbolises allegiance to Jesus Christ. When we are water baptised, we identify with what Jesus did for us. When Jesus died, our old sinful life died with Him. When Jesus was buried, our old sinful life was buried with Him. When Jesus rose again, we were resurrected with a new life in Him!

*¹²For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. **Colossians 2:12 (NLT)***

Water baptism also symbolises the washing away of sins.

*¹⁶What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.' **Acts 22:16 (NLT)***

Is water baptism essential for salvation?

Some Christians believe that water baptism is essential for salvation. Scripture proves this is not true.

*⁸God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. **Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)***

⁹If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. **Romans 10:9-10 (NLT)**

³⁹One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you're at it!"

⁴⁰But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? ⁴¹We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." ⁴²Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

⁴³And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise." **Luke 23:39-43 (NLT)**

It was physically impossible for the repentant thief to be water baptised, and yet he was still assured salvation. There are some Christians who stubbornly refuse to be water baptised, and they use this account of the thief on the cross as their defence. The problem with this example is that the thief couldn't be water baptised, even if he desperately wanted to be, as his circumstances made it impossible for him to do so. It is usually not circumstances that stop people being water baptised, it is usually their stubborn will.

What's the big deal about water baptism?

Even though water baptism is not essential for Salvation, it is extremely important to be baptised for the following reasons...

- **Jesus was water baptised**
- **We are commanded to be water baptised**
- **Water baptism has great spiritual significance**

1. Jesus was water baptised

The fact that Jesus was water baptised is a very compelling reason why we should be!

¹³Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. ¹⁴But John tried to talk him out of it. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?"

¹⁵But Jesus said, "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires." So John agreed to baptize him.

¹⁶After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy." **Matthew 3:13-17 (NLT)**

This one account alone gives more than enough incentive for believers to be water baptised. Every Believer should pattern his/her life on the life of Jesus. We are called to be His disciples, (followers and imitators of Him). Jesus was sinless and yet He saw it necessary to be water baptised. Jesus was baptised to show us, by example, that we should follow Him and be baptised also. Note, that as Jesus was baptised, God was very pleased with Him.

¹Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. ²Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. **Ephesians 5:1-2a (NLT)**

²¹For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered* for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. **1 Peter 2:21 (NLT)**

2. We are commanded to be water baptised

¹⁹Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." **Matthew 28:19-20 (NLT)**

If Jesus commands us to 'go and make disciples... baptising them', it goes without saying that we should be baptised first, before we baptise others.

Jesus commands us to be water baptised and His commands are never optional. How can we say that we truly love Him, if we are disobedient to Him?

¹⁵If you love me, obey my commandments." **John 14:15 (NLT)**

Water baptism was a definite part of Jesus' earthy ministry. Although Jesus Himself did not water baptise, His disciples did.

*¹Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John ²(though Jesus himself didn't baptize them—his disciples did). ³So he left Judea and returned to Galilee. **John 4:1-2(NLT)***

The early Christians were commanded to be water baptised.

*⁴⁸So he gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. **Acts 10:48a (NLT)***

*³⁸Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. **Acts 2:38a (NLT)***

3. Water baptism has great spiritual significance

Water baptism is far more than a ritual or religious exercise. It is intended to be an essential part of the spiritual foundation for all new Christians.

Some people claim that water baptism is only symbolic of what happens when one is born again, and that the practise is not necessary for today. If that were true, if water baptism is just a powerless ritual, if the act of being water baptised has no spiritual significance, then one could confidently say that nothing supernatural would happen at the baptism. On the contrary, the overwhelming evidence proves beyond any doubt that the act of being water baptised has great spiritual significance! Consider the following examples...

- There are accounts of people speaking in an unlearned language when they have been water baptised.
- There are accounts of people being supernaturally healed when they have been water baptised.
- There are accounts of people being delivered of demons when they have been water baptised.
- Many people are given words of prophecy and visions when they are water baptised. God is pleased when His children are water baptised.
- Great spiritual strength comes from being water baptised. Many people once being baptised, find new passion has come into their lives, they feel closer to God and are more willing to do His will. Church statistics all over the world show that believers who refuse to be water baptised have a much greater backsliding rate than those who do.
- In many countries it is acceptable to add Jesus to the many other gods worshipped in that culture. But the act of water baptism shows that the old way of life and gods are done away with, and Jesus is the only Lord! Many people in these countries are disowned by their families, excommunicated from their culture, imprisoned and even killed, simply for being water baptised and demonstrating their obedience to Jesus and forsaking all others.

Water Baptism may be a symbolic act, but it has a very real spiritual significance and supernatural power!

Is being sprinkled really water baptism?

Some religious denominations sprinkle water on the person and call it water baptism. This is not what the Bible calls being water baptised. Remember the Greek word 'Baptizo' means to submerge (not sprinkle).

What about baby baptism?

Again in certain denominations, infant baptism is practised. There are no Bible accounts of babies being water baptised. Infants have no comprehension of what baptism signifies, and they really have no say in the matter... their parents do. I believe when a person, young or old, understands what water baptism is, what it means, and is by his/her own decision wanting to be baptised, then that is the right time for them.

Baptised into what?

The Bible teaches that when a new believer was water baptised, he/she was baptised in/into the name of the Lord Jesus or in/into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

⁵As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
Acts 19:5 (NLT)

¹⁹Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Matthew 28:19 (NLT)**

The exact phrasing isn't important, as we see in the Bible the wording is not identical in every account. It is the meaning of the words which are important.

Having said that, any church that baptises people in, or into the name of anything, or anyone else but the pattern shown to us in the Bible, is in extreme error and must be avoided at all costs.

When should a person be water baptised?

³⁸Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. **Acts 2:38a (NLT)**

The Bible teaches that believing in Jesus Christ comes first, then repentance, and then water baptism.

It is Scriptural to be water baptised as soon as possible after becoming a Christian, but one must understand that water baptism signifies a complete and total forsaking of the old life, and to everything that is not pleasing to God, and a new life living for Jesus alone! Water baptism shows God that you are serious with your decision to forsake all and follow him alone with no turning back!

³³Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized. **Acts 16:33 (NLT)**

²²'What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.' **Acts 22:16 (NLT)**

A new believer won't be able to understand the full significance of water baptism, but that should not stop them from following the Biblical pattern. As a believer grows in the Lord, spiritual things will become easier to understand. Remember water baptism is an act of faith and obedience.

Who should do the water baptising?

The New Testament shows that someone in a position of leadership in the church baptised people. Although the Bible does not say that any believer cannot baptise, I believe it is unwise to encourage everyone to, because this gives the liberty for people to baptise without being accountable to any spiritual leadership. Also, a person in a position of leadership has the blessing of the church and is accountable and responsible for their actions.

Can a person be water baptised more than once?

Should a previously baptised Believer, who turns away from God but repents and is restored be water baptised again? There are no accounts in the Bible of anyone was water baptised more than once. But, if a person has been baptised in any way that is unscriptural, (for example, sprinkled, baptised as a baby, baptised into the name of a church) I strongly recommend being baptised again in the Biblical way.

Where should a person be water baptised?

³⁶As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look! There's some water! Why can't I be baptized?" ³⁸He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. Acts 8:36-38 (NLT)

Anywhere there is water! It is wise though, to have a group of believers present to support and encourage the one being baptised. Also, it is an awesome testimony to any friends and family who are unbelievers.

Conclusion

If you are a believer, and are still adamant that you don't need to be water baptised, what is stopping you? Jesus was water baptised; we are commanded to be water baptised by Scripture; and water baptism has great spiritual significance!

As a challenge to all of us who have already been water baptised, Jesus lived His life as an example of the way we should be living ours. His water baptism was just the beginning of a pure and holy life. Are you following Jesus' example?

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