

Water Baptism

A careful reading of the New Testament shows the importance of baptism. In Christ's commission to His disciples, subsequent to His resurrection, He instructed them to baptize those who became disciples. The history of Acts records the obedience to this command. Baptism is an important step for the person who wants to obey Christ

Who is to be baptized?

Baptism is only for believers (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 9:18; 10:47 cf. 11:17; 16:14, 15, 31-34; 18:8). These verses show clearly that after a person believed he was baptized. The New Testament does not teach infant baptism or that this rite is necessary for salvation.

What does baptism mean?

First, baptism is an outward sign of one's belief in Christ and of his association with Christ (Acts 2:38). Peter was speaking to Jews, part of a generation that had rejected identification with Christ. By this act they openly acknowledged their belief in Christ as Messiah. This verse has perplexed many and, due to misunderstanding, it is used to teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. This teaching cannot be supported by the New Testament. Forgiveness of sins is based on faith alone (Jn 3:16; Rom 3:22-26; 4:1-17; 11:6; Gal 3:8, 9; Eph 2:8, 9).

To make forgiveness dependent on a physical rite one undermines the death of Christ and distorts the gospel. The explanation for this verse must in no way teach baptismal regeneration. A possible explanation is suggested here:

“Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for (‘because of’ or ‘on the basis of’) the remission of sins.” This explanation makes forgiveness dependent on repentance, and baptism the proper response because of already being forgiven.

Second, baptism signifies the death and rejection of the old way of life. When a person was converted to Judaism he was baptized. By this, he repudiated his old way of life. Acts 22:16 is an illustration. Saul had been closely associated with the persecution of the church (Acts 8:3; 9:1, 2, 21; 22:4; 26:9-11; Phil 3:6; 1 Tim 1:12, 13). By baptism he disassociated himself from those sins. He repudiated his pre-conversion life. In this sense “he washed away his sins.”

Third, baptism (by immersion) symbolizes a spiritual act when a person places his trust in Christ for salvation (Rom 6:3-5; Col 2:12).

How should one be baptized?

Baptism is by immersion. First, the word means to ‘dip’ or ‘immerse.’ ‘Sprinkling’ is never used in the New Testament in conjunction with water (Heb 9:13, 19; 1 Pt 1:2).

Second, the examples of baptism and the language used demonstrates this mode (Mt 3:16; Mk 1:9, 10; Jn 3:23; Acts 8:36-38).

Third, the symbolism seems to require immersion (Rom 6:3-5).

Summary

Baptism is a voluntary act (Mt 3:5, 6, 13; Acts 3:38-41; 8:36). Baptism should be taught to new converts and believers should obey, but it should be the personal choice of the individual (Mt 3:8).