

The Requirement of Baptism

What is baptism? What does it mean? Is water baptism really required? In the simplest of terms, baptism is an outward sign of inward commitment. It's not a "magic" ceremony. It's not a process, or ritual, that has to be done just right, saying all the right words, making all the right gestures, for it to "work." Yet, there *are* things we must do. Baptism is a basic doctrine, but very much confused in traditional Christianity. Different denominations baptize different ways. People of different ages are baptized, depending on the groups particular belief. Which, or who is "right?" If any? How can we know?

Begin at the beginning

Using *God's word* as our basis, lets start with some basic scriptures, ignoring *man's* teaching. We will start where all the basics are listed.

Hebrews 6:1-2 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

Here we have the foundational doctrines, in sequence: repentance, faith, and baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. Baptism is a major teaching of the true church of God.

But do we *have* to do it?

Yes. It is *commanded* in several places! Let's look at what was said at the very start of the new testament church. What were people supposed to do?

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

That is about as *PLAIN* a statement as can be said, and it says it all! The proper steps of conversion are: first repent, then be baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit. Baptism is so important that Jesus Christ specifically set the example for us to follow.

Matthew 3:13-16 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.

John didn't want to do it! He felt inferior. He needed to do it, not Jesus. When explained to him John saw the need to set the right example. It is a step toward the righteousness of Christ. Then, symbolically, the Spirit shown to come. Christ was sinless, but it has to do with sin. If Jesus Christ set the example for the people then, how much more important is it for us today? And how exactly should it be done? By which "method?"

Do we have to be immersed?

John 3:23 Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.

Complete immersion, not sprinkle on, not poured over the head, nor done to children or infants. The Greek word *means* immersion. [baptizo, bap-tid'-zo, from a derivative of bapto; to immerse, submerge; to make whelmed (i.e. fully wet)] Notice why John was at the particular place he was, because it takes "much water." Baptize means to put completely under water. The ceremony is very symbolic. It is a somewhat peculiar ceremony to us. Many professing Christians don't feel the need to do it as an adult. But is that what the *Bible* says?

What does it depict?

Romans 6:3-4 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

It pictures *death*, and *burial*. Like Christ died and was buried. Taking part in this symbolic ceremonial "death" and "burial" connects us to him. Symbolically you bury the person we used to be. The one you have determined to change and not be like any more (repentance.) We give up that old life, are buried (in a watery "grave,") and come up symbolically a new person, a new life. We go down with sins, and come up with the sin gone; we are spiritually and symbolically washed, made clean and alive again.

Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified [impaled] with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

We are symbolically impaled on the stake with Christ; we now live by faith, with Christ in us. God uses physical symbols for a reason, to teach us spiritual things. We are to live by every word of God. When He says to do something, we need to do it. Even if we don't fully understand why.

Can we be freed from sin this way?

Yes! We can be released from the slavery which sin brings.

Romans 6:5-7 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified [impaled] with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.

This is the way God set it up to do it. Freed from sin this way, by undergoing this ceremony, understanding what it pictures, and what it means. What we did before, the deeds of the “old man,” we are no longer accountable for. We have a new clean start.

But is there even more to it?

Yes. There are levels of meaning in baptism.

Ephesians 5:26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

Baptism is also how Jesus brings his wife (Verse 25,) the ‘called out ones’ (church members,) to Him. He starts with washing, so our sins can be forgiven. It isn’t just a dunk in the nearest pool. It’s much more than just certain words we say that will “work.” Yet, there are certain requirements. What are they?

What are the prerequisites?

We are all familiar with prerequisites; factors that must be in place before things can proceed. Baptism is a prerequisite to salvation. So what are the pre-requisites to baptism? The person desiring baptism must be a fully responsible *adult*, either man or woman.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

Notice it does NOT say “children,” though often they are mentioned other places. Surely if they could have been, they would have been here. None were baptized. Thus, child, or infant baptism, is not supported. Israel passed through, and was in type “baptized” in the Red Sea. All over the age of twenty were accountable. Those under that age were not accountable. (See Numbers 14:29, Numbers 26:4, and Numbers 32:11) Still, it varies. Some older people are still children in maturity, and vice versa. It seems many today are not growing up! But some mature sufficiently before age twenty. What is required is that they understand fully what it means, their accountability, and realize what they are doing. This is very important, because we only get one chance once we are in. Children cannot make these sorts of decisions.

What is repentance?

You must have repented first, that is absolutely necessary. Knowing what repentance truly means, that it's not simply being sorry. You must know what you are repenting of. In Acts, the Jews already understood a great deal. They had been hearing the scriptures their whole lives, so they grasped what Peter said quickly in Acts 2. But, there are sometimes those who just want to *look* good, and be *seen* as the "righteous."

Luke 3:7-14 Then he [John the baptist] said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?" He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you." Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."

They came to be baptized, but they were refused. Why? Because there was NO evidence of commitment and change (repentance.) They just wanted to be *seen* as doing something good. When confronted about it, they fell back on their genetics! *You* as an individual must repent, and show evidence. Who and what your ancestors did has no bearing. *You* must *do* something. Change your life and start on the right path. Stop doing and being what you used to be, a person doing the wrong. Wrong, being in opposition to what God says is *right*. You must also have faith and belief.

What are we to believe?

Mark 16:15-16 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

You *must* believe, and be baptized, to be saved. Believe WHAT? The gospel! That was Jesus message right from the start. (Gospel = Middle English go(od)spell, Old English gōdspell; translation of Greek euangélion good news;)

Mark 1:14-15 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

It's not just "I believe." The demons believe! They just won't *do* what is right. They won't repent. We are to believe the *gospel of Christ*, the one *he preached*. It's not a

gospel *about* Christ per se. What did he preach? The gospel of the kingdom of God, not just an alleged “gospel,” many churches teach, a gospel of their own definition, one *about* Jesus. It means believing the whole truth of God. It means believing the Bible that explains the good news (gospel) of the kingdom of God. Then, upon baptism, there is a promise that we will be saved (given eternal life at the resurrection.) But we must do these things. It *is* a requirement. We have to *show* and *do* works, show faith by action.

James 2:18-20 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

Who can believe this, an infant? Not possible! How can they show works for repentance when they can't crawl, or even control their own bodily functions? It's foolishness! We must believe Christ, and do what that requires. It's far more than believing “in” him.

Older versions of the Bible use the word “on.” As in, “Believe *on* Jesus.” While this sounds odd in modern English, it is a little more accurate translation of the concept conveyed in the original Greek, which means: to or into, indicating the point reached or entered of place, time, or purpose. In other words more like, “all the purpose of.” It isn't just believing there was a person named Jesus.

John 3:36 "He who believes in [and all the purpose of] the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

The Muslims believe in Jesus, yes they do! They believe he lived, and that he was a great prophet. You must believe he is the Son of God. That he was, and *what he said*, along with all of he says we are to *do*.

Isn't faith alone enough?

Matthew 4:4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

Obedience to that word has to follow, not just a saying or repeating words someone tells you to say, or that you read in some religious publication or tract. Nor is it “faith alone,” as some believe. You *live* by it.

James 2:24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. (RSV)

This is plain language from God's word, “not by faith alone.” (Or "faith only" in other translations.) There is a requirement to *DO*, not just *have* faith. If Jesus does something, it is for our example. Doing what he says, this is “accepting” Christ, *doing* as he would.

What name are we baptized into?

Baptism must be done into the *name* of Jesus Christ. Peter told the Jews to do it in Acts 2:38. And he told the Gentiles (non-Israelites) the same thing.

Acts 10:48 And he commanded [enjoined] them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

That's what they were *told* to do. We will want to do it, if we believe Jesus Christ. And we want to do it the right way, in His name.

Acts 8:14-17 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He [it] had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

“...in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Not into an organization, denomination, church, or another man's name, but the name of the Lord Jesus. These people heard God's word and *did* something about it. What? They were baptized into Jesus name. Then they received the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands (the next step.) There is an order.

Acts 4:12 "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

It's the only way, the only name. We take his name on us when we do what he would have us do.

1 Corinthians 6:20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

We were bought by the forfeiture of the life of the Son of God. All this must be understood before baptism. You must be baptized before you receive the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38) If you think you have the Holy Spirit, but haven't been baptized, think again! You have to be (properly) baptized first. (Acts 8:15-17.) That is the example of the Bible. Then, what's next?

The next step

Next is laying on of hands to receive the Holy Spirit, after repentance, and baptism. Without the Holy Spirit you are not part of God's family, his sons and daughters. You will not be resurrected to eternal life. Let's look at more of the scriptures that apply.

Romans 8:9-14 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if

Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors--not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

You must *have* the Holy Spirit. But that alone is *not enough!* You must be *led* by the Holy Spirit, and follow it by practicing what Jesus taught and did! To receive the Holy Spirit you must have repented, been properly baptized, and have hands laid on.

Romans 11:8 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

The Spirit confers life, to be resurrected to eternal life! That is why this is *so* important.

Matthew 10:37-39 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. "And he who does not take his cross [stake or post] and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

We need to count the cost. (Infants and children cannot do this.) It *will* cost you. There will be things you must give up, habits changed, lifestyle altered. And the decision you make has eternal consequences! Note well what Jesus is asking of us.

Luke 14:25-33 Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate [love less] his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. "And whoever does not bear his cross [stake or post] and come after Me cannot be My disciple. "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it -- "lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, "saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' "Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? "Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

The rewards are well worth it, but we may have to go through a lot. "...forsake all that he has?" That's what it says! *That's* the cost. You need to have hands laid upon you, by a true minister of God, and receive the Holy Spirit. (Acts 19:6) What are the rewards?

There are promised rewards beyond our imagination!

Luke 6:23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.

Matthew 19:29 "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.

Romans 6:23 the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Psalms 16:11 You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

It's hard to imagine, but these are *some* of the things promised us!

1 Corinthians 2:9 But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

That is actually a quote from Isaiah 64:4. So, how do you claim all this?

Romans 10:14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

You have now heard. You have been shown what the word of God says. You have read the words of Jesus Christ, and the apostles. What will you do about it? Will you "call on Him?" Don't rush into it, but don't delay either. Count the cost, then do as you decide. May God guide you.