

Biblical Baptism

The word “baptize” is translated from the Greek word baptizō and its meaning is “to dip or immerse”. In the New Testament, when a person was baptized, they were temporarily immersed in a large volume of water. Jesus, as well as countless others, were baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River (**Matt. 3:5,15**). When the Ethiopian eunuch was ready to be baptized in Acts 8, both he and Philip went down into the water together (**v. 38**).

Baptism, however, is more than just getting wet. It embodies the powerful message of the cross. As a person is submerged under the water, they are portraying the death and burial of Christ; as they are being lifted up out of the water, they are portraying the resurrection of Christ and His victory over death (**Col. 2:12, Rom. 6:3-4**).

The ordinance of baptism serves many purposes. For the one being baptized, it is an opportunity to express a good conscience toward God (**I Pet.2:21**). It must be noted that baptism is not a means by which to obtain a good conscience toward God, nor does it have any saving merit. If one examines the above mentioned verse in I Peter 2 carefully, they will see that the baptism which now saves us is referring not to the physical cleansing of the body by water, but the spiritual baptism which takes place beforehand “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (**v.21**). Baptism is the “answer” of a good conscience toward God, implying that it ought to be one of the first acts of obedience for the new believer (**v. 21**).

As well as an expression of good conscience toward God, baptism is also a depiction of the reason one has a good conscience toward God, which is unity with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. The apostle Paul gives us one of the most explicit explanations of this concept in the sixth chapter of his epistle to the saints in Rome. When a person is baptized into Christ, he or she is baptized into His death (**v. 3, 4**). This death in baptism symbolizes one’s death to sin and the old self (**v. 2, 6**). As a person is raised up from under the water, he or she affirms his or her unity with Christ in His subsequent resurrection and victory over sin and death. This raising in baptism symbolizes rebirth into a new life of faith in Christ (**v. 5, 8-11**).

Baptism is a way of making this answer of good conscience toward God and identification with His death, burial, and resurrection for one’s own sin public. Christ only confesses before His Father, those who confess Him before men (**Matt. 10:32**). It is a wonderful opportunity to make known to peers and to fellow believers, one’s own turning from sin and commitment to follow Christ by grace through faith. It is an outstanding moment in the life of a believer and greatly increases the realization of salvation as a point of no return. Identity with Christ has been made public and the public is now watching to see the fruit of this rebirth. Especially in areas that are resistant or hostile toward Christians, baptism is a powerful challenge to take on the name of Christ and likely be the object of much persecution.

Based on the points discussed above, we may conclude that baptism should only occur in the life of one who has turned from sin in repentance, putting off the old man, and has trusted in Christ for new life. As baptism is an answer of a good conscience toward God, one must first have a good conscience toward God before being baptized. Having good conscience toward God is impossible without being born again by the Spirit of God and coming into right relationship with Him.

-all Bible verses in NKJV unless otherwise specified