

What is Baptism? Its Meaning & Importance in Christianity



When we enter the waters of baptism, we're proclaiming the gospel message. Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and lives again. By joining in baptism, we're identifying ourselves with Him. **Romans 6:4** says we have been buried with Him through baptism into death. We're now dead to the power of sin. Being raised up out of the water expresses our new life in **Christ** and our union with Him.

Meaning and Importance of Baptism in Christianity

If the meaning of baptism could be boiled down to one word, that word would be identification. Baptism speaks primarily of a personal, public identification with Jesus Christ.

In **Romans 6:3-4** the Apostle Paul puts the matter this way:

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Notice the strength of the expressions—"baptized into Christ" and "baptized into his death" and "buried with him in baptism." Someone may suggest that the primary reference here is to Spirit baptism. That's true, but at the very least, water baptism is in the background of this passage.

How important is your baptism? It is your personal identification with the greatest act of human history—the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism doesn't save you—salvation comes by faith alone (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). Your guilt before God is removed the moment you trust in Christ. But baptism is your personal testimony to, and the inward assurance of, your passage from the old life to the new life...

How Baptism Relates to Jesus

1. It means we have turned from the old life of sin to a new life in Jesus Christ.
2. It means we are publicly identifying with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.
3. It means we are openly joining the ranks of those who believe in Christ.

When you are baptized, you are in fact visually preaching the gospel. As you stand in the water waiting to be baptized, A, you symbolize Jesus dying on the cross. As you are lowered into the water, B, you symbolize Jesus buried in the tomb. As you are raised from the water, C, you symbolize Jesus rising from the dead.

And since you personally are being baptized, you are also saying, "I died with Jesus Christ, I was buried with him and now I am raised with Christ to brand-new life."

In short, in your baptism you are preaching a sermon without using any words at all. And your sermon in your baptism will be more effective with your friends than any sermon the pastor

preaches on Sunday morning—more effective because it comes directly from you.

The Greek word translated “baptize” is the verb baptizo. According to most contemporary lexicons, the primary meaning is “to dip, plunge, immerse.” The secondary meaning is to “bring under the influence.” Dr. Merrill Tenney notes that “after making allowances for certain occasional exceptions, such as passages where washing is implied, the etymological meaning indicates that baptism was originally by immersion. (Basic Christian Doctrine, p. 257)

Baptism in the New Testament:

Baptism requires water. (**Matthew 3:11**)

Baptism required plenty of water. (**John 3:30**)

Baptism requires going down into the water. (**Acts 8:30**)

Baptism requires coming up out of the water. (**Matthew 3:16, Acts 8:39**)

Furthermore, the figures of speech used by the Apostle Paul accord well with immersion. Baptism is called a “burial” in **Romans 6:4** and **Colossians 2:12**. Baptism is “into his death” and involves being “raised to walk in newness of life.” It is difficult to see how sprinkling or pouring could convey these meanings.

Finally, the testimony of church history is that immersion was indeed the mode of baptism practiced in the early church.

Do Christians Need to Be Baptized?

Our Savior commands us to follow His example in all things, including **baptism: Matthew 28:19** says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of

the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." At the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus chose to be baptized. John the **Baptist** was calling the Jewish people to confess their sins and demonstrate repentance through immersion in the Jordan River. Sinless Jesus joined the crowd at the river and asked John to baptize Him. The Lord chose to affiliate Himself with sinful man. When we follow His example in the waters of baptism, we're publicly confessing our faith in the Savior and identifying ourselves with Him.

Baptism allows us to demonstrate our connection with Jesus and with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We're all members of one body under the authority of the same Lord. But it's important to remember that **Ephesians 2:8-9** says faith in Jesus Christ is the only requirement for salvation, not baptism. But, to fulfill His command, we're to be baptized following our decision to accept Him into our lives.

Why Is It Important for Christians to Be Baptized?

In Baptism, Jesus is speaking to the believer, to the assembled congregation, and to the watching world, identifying this person with himself in death, in burial, and in resurrection. And so in Baptism, what you have is a sign of an execution. It's a sign of a drowning. This is the reason why, when Jesus is baptized, John the Baptist can't believe it. Jesus comes to him and says, "I want to be baptized by you," and John says, "No, no, no, I need be baptized by you."

Why is John so alarmed by this? Well, it's because of what he's doing with baptism. He's saying, "You're a bunch of snakes, you need to come under the judgment of God." And in Baptism, what's happening? Well, water is scary. You go under water, you can't breathe. It's a picture of death and of the grave, and always has been, Biblically. The flood, God floods the world, that is a baptism, Peter tells us in 1st Peter, chapter 3. God sends Jonah into the deep, into the water, it is his judgment upon Jonah. God

ultimately baptizes the world with fire, and engulfs and immerses the world in fire.

So when Jesus says, "I want to be baptized," John is alarmed by this because this is the sinless son of God. And it makes no more sense than someone saying, "I really would like to be on the federal sex offender registry." You would say, "Why would you want to be on that list? Why would you want to identify yourself with these snakes who are under the judgment of God?" But of course, Jesus is doing exactly that. Not because he has sin, but because he's identifying himself with sinful people.

So, when someone is going down into the waters of baptism, first of all, that person is confessing, "I deserve death. I deserve the judgment of God." Jesus, through his church, is saying to the person, "Yeah, you're right. This is exactly what you deserve, is death and the grave." But the person is also acknowledging, "I am trusting in the power of God to raise me from death, and Jesus is affirming that in the physical act of the person being brought under water, can't breathe, death, and then being ripped out of the water by a power that doesn't belong to him. There's a power that's coming from the outside, bringing that person up.

So, that person now has identified with Jesus in his death, Romans chapter 6, in his burial, in his resurrection, the person also is acknowledging, "I was dead in trespasses and sins under the judgment of God, buried, but I am now raised to newness of life because I'm in Christ." And the person is identified with that final reality of dying and being buried and then having one's name called and being brought up out of the grave. That's a physical, visible sign of that.

And so what happens in baptism is that Jesus is claiming this person as his own through the church, and the church is announcing, "This is the boundary marker, this is one of ours. This is our brother and our sister." Which is why in the New Testament, you don't have any such thing as an unbaptized

Christian. Those who believe are baptized, and in the churches, the apostle Paul says that there's one lord, there's one faith, there's one baptism, one God and Father of all.

So baptism is extraordinarily important, this is the initial rite of the Christian's obedience, but it also is a sign that builds up the faith, not only of the person being baptized, but of the rest of the Church community, is they ... They're watching the gospel and they're hearing the gospel sloshing around in the water. Jesus has given that to us because he knows we need to see it, we need to experience it, we need to be reminded of it.

And every time we see baptism, we're reminded we're at war, and we're to take this gospel to the ends of the earth, discipling the nations and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.