

BAPTISM

Baptism has an important symbolic meaning attached to it to the people of God. In this study we will be looking into the reasons for baptism and whether it is necessary. This study will not be addressing certain aspects of baptism such as repentance, the laying on of hands or the receiving of the Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament, there are texts instructing us, who believe in the Christ, to be baptized. Jesus himself gave his disciples instructions to ***“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”*** Matthew 28:19. The apostle Philip baptized the eunuch according to the book of Acts: ***“And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.”*** Acts 8:38. Those to whom Peter preached received the word and were baptized: ***“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”*** Acts 2:41. The Bible also recounts when Paul and Silas spoke the Word of God while they were in the Philippian jailer’s house and those listening accepted Jesus as their Saviour and were baptized. ***“And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.”*** Acts 16:33. All these verses we have cited describe the people as having been taught about Jesus and the Kingdom of God before being baptized.

To be baptized into Christ’s body, one must be submerged entirely under water which is a symbolic cleansing. We are also told that we must be “born again”. Note that “born again” has taken on a different interpretation than that during the time of the apostles. Many attach “born again” to those of the Pentecostal faith but that definition is not accurate. So then what is the meaning of born again according to the Scriptures? ***“There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”*** John 3:1 to 4. There is no doubt that Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was saying about being ‘born again’. Jesus was simply talking about his followers taking on a new character, that is, one in a state of sobriety, humility and innocence. In other words, transforming oneself from a child of the world into a child of God. ***“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”*** John 3:5 to 8.

The first man and woman, Adam and Eve, opened our eyes to the desires of evilness, so in a sense it is now mind over matter (ie. a person’s inner spirit fighting against the desires of the flesh). When we put aside worldliness and listen to the Word of God, we will be born again, for we will be born a new creature in mind and character. ***“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”*** II Corinthians 5:17. Let us recall that Jesus said for one to enter into the kingdom of God, one must be born of both water and of the Spirit. Some

people after having heard the Spirit turned away because they have not cleansed themselves from worldliness. Therefore, we must be cleansed by the water of baptism, cleansing not only our body, but our mind as well. Some denominations today do not see immersion by the cleansing of water as important, but only the receiving of the Holy Spirit. However, one cannot receive the Spirit unless there is repentance and a desire of servitude towards the Father through Jesus. So baptism by immersion is a saving ordinance. ***“Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.”*** Ephesians 5:25b, 26.

During the ordinance of baptism, the person is totally ‘whelmed’, that is, the body is completely buried by the water and the person has decided on entering into a new life with Jesus the Christ. Then the person arises up and out of the water newly born into the body of Christ, having cast off the old person of sin by the cleansing water of the Word (the cleansing is the forgiveness of all our past sins by the grace of God and we begin life anew). The worldliness of our flesh must die for us to be able to transform into a new creature (or person). ***“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?”*** Romans 6:1 to 3. Paul is referring to the born-again Christian of which the saying symbolizes someone who has changed their lifestyle, both physically and mentally. The change is that we no longer live in a life of sin, so that now the sins of immorality no longer control us, therefore, we are dead to sin; this is the divine grace of God’s love manifested in us. ***“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed that henceforth we should not serve sin.”*** Romans 6:4 to 6. Baptism is likened to a burial of that old person of sin. It is done in the symbolic way of washing where the whole body is submerged in water, symbolizing the old person dying and then, when we rise up out of the water, we begin living our new life in Christ.

Some denominations claim that baptism is not truly necessary, being only a symbolic ordinance. This ideology is NOT biblical and those that preach such things are misleading their followers. From the verses we have read, Jesus, Philip, Paul, Peter and others preached that Christians should be baptized. Remember that Jesus said except that we are born again, we CANNOT see the kingdom of God – see John 3:5 and mark 16:16. Baptism is symbolic, BUT is required for our salvation. It is evidence that we see and admit to our sinful nature and that we are committed to living a life after Christ.