

# *Truth for Today*

## **The Bible Explained**

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## **Getting the Fundamentals Right Baptism**

*[Please note: New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Welcome to our latest talk in the series “Getting the Fundamentals Right.” Today we are going to take a look at Baptism.

Hebrews 6 vv. 1-2 (NKJV),

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.

We find in these verses in Hebrews some of the fundamental doctrines, the first being repentance towards God, the second is faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The third is doctrine or teachings of baptisms. The writer of the Hebrews was telling them that they should be moving on to more advanced subjects and for them to grow in their spiritual lives. Some of those basic truths have over the centuries become clouded and altered by human ideas. It is with this in mind that we want to refresh our understanding of the fundamentals of baptism. There are many different views and opinions related to this subject which over the last 2000 years have led to things being added to and things taken away from the truth of baptism, which has even caused major splits amongst believers. The point of the message today is to try and bring before us what the Bible has to say in regard to this subject.

You will notice that the word baptism is plural in Hebrews 6 v. 2. There are three baptisms mentioned in the New Testament. The baptism of John the Baptist, Christian Baptism and Baptism in the Holy Spirit. But what exactly does the word Baptism mean? It is a Greek word “Baptizo” that is used and not an English word. The meaning of the word Baptizo is to immerse. To immerse something or someone, you put it or them under the water or cover the whole thing in water. It is a transition from one thing into another, not a part of it, but the whole that is affected by baptism.

The word baptism is always used in Scripture with three different propositions. It is used with “into”, “unto” or just “to.” As we look at the detail later on, we will explain what these mean. But when you consider baptism, you need to ask two questions - what is it in and what is it unto? Christian baptism is a commitment and an identification with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection.

There are two physical things that a Christian is asked to do which pertains to our life while here on earth. One is the partaking of the bread and wine in remembrance of the death of the Lord Jesus at the Lord’s Supper and the other is to be baptised.

We do not read about baptism in the Old Testament, but we will see later that there are types which point to baptism referenced there. The first mention of baptism is found in Matthew's Gospel chapter 3 and in Luke chapter 3, in connection with John the Baptist. The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance. John preached of judgment to come upon the Jewish nation and when the Pharisees and the Sadducees came to his baptism, we read in Matthew 3 vv. 7-8,

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance;

and in verses 10 and 11,

And even now the axe 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. I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I.

The people asked, "What shall we do?" (Luke 3 v. 10). They were told to confess their sins in baptism (Matthew 3:6). They were baptised first, then their lives were to bear fruit in light of the coming of the Lord Jesus. John the Baptist was preparing the way of the Lord Jesus. The people were baptised, and, in that act, they professed to accept the judgement of God upon their sinful life and as they came up out of the river Jordan they were required to live a new life in view of the coming Messiah. It is clear that anyone was able to come and be baptised, but it was unto repentance.

We will see that John's baptism differs from Believers baptism, but that there are fundamentals that are the same. There was total immersion in water, and they were baptised unto or in view of repentance. When John the Baptist came in the way of righteousness, he called on men to confess their sinfulness and their just desert of death by baptism, and so we read in Luke 7:29 that the publicans and sinners "justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John." There was no merit in this kind of baptism. It was the divinely appointed way of them acknowledging their sinfulness and need of a Saviour. Therefore, it is called a "baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins." (Mark 1:4 ASV). They were like men and women who had a debt, and their baptism was like an IOU to the Lord Jesus. An IOU does not pay a debt, but it is an acknowledgement of indebtedness. Christ's baptism was simply His endorsement of all of these debts.

As Matthew records in 3:14-15,

And John tried to prevent Him, saying, I need to be baptised 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 fulfil all righteousness. Then [John] allowed [Jesus] to be baptised.

The Lord Jesus came to die on the cross so that He could fulfil every righteous demand to justify God on behalf of sinners. And this is surely what He had in mind when, three years later, He exclaimed,

But I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished! (Luke 12:50).

On the cross He met the claims of righteousness and thus fulfilled the meaning of His baptism.

In the book of Acts we read of those who trusted in the Lord Jesus and repented of their sins. There were the 3000 souls at Pentecost, the Ethiopian eunuch, the Philippian jailor, and Lydia to mention a few. They all had this in common that the moment they were saved they were baptised without delay. We can recall the words of the eunuch,

See, here is water, what hinders me from being baptised? (Acts 8:36).

As we take a look at Christian baptism may it encourage any believer who has not yet entered the waters of baptism to consider what the bible teaches and is obedient to what is required.

We find that the teaching for water baptism for the church period for the day in which we live is spoken of in the New Testament epistles. In Romans chapter 6 we find the apostle Paul lays out the truth of what our baptism is. Romans 6 vv. 1-7,

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised 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. 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 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.

Paul uses this phrase "Do you not know" on a few occasions and it usually means that as believers we need to be reminded about the truth of something. Here he says that we are baptised into Christ and into His death. It is important that we understand this, as we said earlier that baptism is about going from one thing into another. We are identified and united with Christ in His death, and in His burial. But baptism doesn't end there because we are also raised with Him from the dead to now walk in newness of life.

The Apostle does not say that you die the day you believed, and your baptism is an outward demonstration of it. Verses 3 and 4 clearly tell us that we are identified with Christ in His death and His burial. Thankfully the passage doesn't end there. Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Verses 10 and 11 give us a further explanation of the force of baptism.

For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As believers we are to reckon this fact for ourselves that because Christ died to sin, so do we and because He lives unto God, then we also should live our lives as being alive unto God. We are baptised with a view to walking in newness of life. It means that we are to be like the Lord Jesus in our daily walk. Dead with Christ is one point of baptism, alive unto God is the other point. There are many who can have their sins forgiven but continue on sinning day after day. Matthew 16:24,

Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

To be a follower of Jesus we have to let self go and be obedient to Him. In those days anyone who was carrying a cross meant that everyone around knew that that person was about to die. So it

should be in the life of a believer that we have died to self so that we might be able to follow Jesus as a new creation, and one who now lives a fruitful life which is well pleasing to the Lord Jesus. Colossians 2 vv. 11-12 gives further guidance for baptism:

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

The law for the Jewish men was to cut off a small piece of their flesh but for the believer today we have to submit the whole of our sinful nature, our whole body. When a person's body has died, we then bury it, and similarly when we go down into the waters of baptism, our sinful nature is put to death. Coming out of the water shows that we are now raised with Him in newness of life which is the pattern for every believer. We also see in this Scripture that you must believe first. It is through our faith in what God will do that we are raised.

You might ask the question, "Do I need to be baptised to be a member of a church?" If we look at Galatians 3:27,

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Which tells us that we are baptised into Christ and not a church, a sect or any denomination but it is "into Christ." So if a believer has been baptised once and as we have read that it is "unto Christ", how can it be that some churches ask that a believer has to be baptised again? This is not according to scripture.

We have two scriptures in the New Testament that use Old Testament illustrations to explain what baptism is. In 1 Peter 3 vv. 18-22,

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an anti-type which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

We see in these verses that the anti-type to Noah's ark is baptism and water. The story of Noah tells us that judgement was coming upon the earth because of the sinful nature of mankind and that there was only one way of escape and that was to be in the ark. The ark is a picture of Jesus Christ, and the flood represented God's judgement. Within the ark there was safety while all outside perished. In the ark they passed through the water safely and came out the other side into a new life. The ark saved Noah and his family, and this relates to ourselves having faith and trusting in Jesus. But here in Peter there is also the thought of them being saved by water. The water destroyed the old world, that which was full of sin and to which Noah and his family were connected but the water also brought them into a new world. Our baptism saves us in the same way. This present world has already been judged because of their rejection of Christ. By baptism we leave our current way of life dead and buried in the waters through Christ's death but when we emerge from the waters, just as Christ rose from the dead, we are identified with the new world

that Peter brings before us in verse 22. Our baptism says that we know this present world is under judgement and we look to another world where all is according to God.

The second illustration is found in 1 Corinthians 10 vv. 1-2,

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

Paul says in verse 6 that these things happened as were patterns that we should learn from. The Israelites were under the cloud, and all passed through the Red Sea. They were baptised in the cloud which covered them completely and they went into the sea and came through the water and out on the other side. They were baptised in the sea. They left their old life in Egypt behind and started a new life under the leadership of Moses, with new laws. It is important to realise that they were saved by faith in the blood of the lamb in Egypt, but they were still under the bondage of the Egyptians. It was the water of the Red Sea that separated them and so too with our baptism it is that which cuts us off from our past and sets us on a new way of life. They were baptised unto Moses, but we have seen already that we are baptised unto Christ. The Lord Jesus becomes our Leader. Hebrews 11:29,

By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

It is only by faith that we can go down into the waters of baptism and come out under new leadership. The Egyptians went into the Red Sea and perished. If an unbeliever goes into the waters of baptism, then they simply come back out as a wet sinner. Nothing avails for them without faith.

Now just a short note on Baptism with the Holy Spirit. We read in the Gospels that John the Baptist spoke of One that would come after him and would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Before the Lord ascended to heaven the last words He spoke recorded in Acts ch. 1 were that the disciples would be baptised with the Holy Spirit after "not many days." We read that 10 days later at Pentecost, when they were all altogether, the Holy Spirit descended upon them. The Baptism with the Spirit occurred only once at the formation of the church, but everyone who believes thereafter is filled with the Holy Spirit and thus forms part of the body of Christ. We can indeed say that we are all included in the baptism with the Spirit but there is no thought of a second experience being required. 1 Corinthians 12 vv. 12-13,

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit."

This Scripture tells us that individual believers are baptised into the one body forming one complete body united to Christ the Head and with each other and again, we see that it is a baptism from one thing into something else.

To summarise some of these facts of baptism. Baptism is an identification with Christ and with His death and resurrection. It is important that one must repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Once we trust in the Saviour we are saved for time and for eternity. We read in Scripture that baptism should follow after repentance. It does not require knowledge or a time span to show out works of faith, but it shows that a believer has finished with their past sinful life and that they are now a new creation, obedient to the Lord Jesus and their walk is according to God's word. We are

in Christ, and we live unto Him. Baptism does not result in forgiveness of sins and does not affect our place in eternity. A believer does not need to be baptised, but the question would be “why not” when Scripture clearly points that we should. It affects our position on earth in that we are associated with Christ and those who follow Him. It brings us into the house or sphere of Christian confession. It brings about a change of position that is from being either a Jew or a Gentile to now being a Christian.

Finally, how should it be conducted? It should be full immersion in water of one who has a faith, and we are to be baptised in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As believers there really is no excuse for us not to be baptised but for those who have not yet taken this step, it is their decision before the Lord.

In the fundamentals of our Christian faith, we should at all times be earnest in being obedient to the word of God.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on Baptism in the series “Getting the Fundamentals Right”, talk number T1423.

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