



Baptism has been the pathway to new life in Christ ever since Christianity began on the day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:38). While the act of baptism did not originate on the day of Pentecost, it did take on a new and greater meaning that still carries significance today.

Conscious Immersion

The English word “baptism” is a transliteration of the Greek word “baptizo,” which simply means “to immerse.” The same word was also used to speak of sunken ships, which were “baptized” in water. Ancient uses of the word refer to complete submersion, and the examples of baptism in the New Testament imply or illustrate this (Acts 8:35-39; Rom. 6:4).

It’s also evident from the New Testament texts that a person must make a conscious decision to be “born again” through immersion. This means that one must be old enough to understand what they’re doing. Everyone baptized in the New Testament was able to understand what they were doing. If baptism required no conscious decision, we could simply go around dunking people in water and “saving” them without their knowledge or commitment to discipleship. Clearly the act must be consented to and understood for it to have any meaning in the life of the person.

One Act

“I know baptism is in the Bible” one might reply, “but don’t I need to just believe in order to be saved?” (Rom.10:9). Yes, you certainly need to believe, and baptism is a statement of your belief. It is a statement that you trust God to bring you through death and into new life.

Belief in Christ, confession of his name, repentance, and baptism are all part of the same act. Throughout the years many people have separated these in an attempt to analyze what it takes to be saved. Such micro-analysis has left the impression that each of these acts are separate from one another, but they are actually intended to be all of one piece. A person isn’t supposed to be baptized without believing, or to confess without being baptized, or to believe without repenting. It’s all part of the same act of transformation (Acts 8:35-39).

The act of immersion is often seen as an afterthought because we believe the intellectual assent or emotional feeling is the “real” point of conversion. It’s certainly true that the mental assent and zeal of conversion should exist, but there’s no reason to discount the act of baptism which integrates the intellectual and emotional with the physical. We are not giving only our minds or hearts to God, but our entire person, which includes our bodies. When God comes to resurrect us, he will not resurrect only our minds and hearts, but our bodies, and the physical act of baptism represents our faith in the salvation of our entire person (1 Cor. 15:42-44).

“Baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:21)

Resurrection

Baptism is such a rich and deep symbol that it represents many things, but the most prominent meaning is that of resurrection. While our bodies will be resurrected when Christ comes again, our spirit is resurrected now. Paul makes this connection to the Romans: *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life”* (Rom. 6:3-4). Our new life means we have a new spirit (Rom. 8:9-11).

The immersion of our bodies through baptism also represents the extent of our commitment to Christ. Jesus does not call us to dip our toe into the Christian “lifestyle” and check things out. We are to completely leave behind the life we’ve led and commit to him fully (Lk. 9:57-62). Baptism is such a serious commitment that it is referred to as a death.

Our trust in God, exemplified through baptism will be rewarded by his loyalty to his word. God has proven that he will resurrect his children when Jesus comes again by showing us the resurrection of Christ.

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