

Essential Truths I: Living With God

11

Water Baptism

Just before he returned to heaven, Jesus gave explicit instructions to his disciples in **Matthew 28:19**:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”

Read Acts 2:38-41

Read Acts 8:12

The Greek word for “baptize” – *baptizo* – literally means “to dip, to be immersed,” a word which was also used by the ancient Greeks in the sense of “to sink (a ship), to sink (in the mud), to drown, to perish.”

When a person believes in Jesus as Savior and Lord, they are to be baptized or immersed in water. Why would Jesus command his believers to do such a strange thing?

Baptism is a Picture

Understanding the picture language used in water baptism is the key to a victorious Christian life. The act of going under the water and rising up from it again is a picture of what has happened to the Christian. In baptism, the four stages of Christ’s redemptive work on our behalf are enacted out:

He died...I died in Him

Romans 6:6-7 tells us:

“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”

The Word

God

Origins

Jesus

The Cross

The Blood

Resurrection

Repentance

Faith

Grace

▶ **Water Baptism** ◀

Holy Spirit

Temptation

Fellowship

Generosity

Kingdom of God

Worship

Prayer

Eternity

Second Coming

The Call

He was buried...I was buried in Him

Romans 6:4 tells us:

“...We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death...”

He rose...I rose in Him

Romans 6:4-5 tells us:

“...in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.”

He ascended...I ascended in Him

Ephesians 2:6 tells us:

“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.”

Water baptism is an outward expression of an inner reality. It is the symbolic enactment of *something that has already happened to you*. This is very important to understand. Water baptism means nothing unless God’s salvation has already been received by faith. The two aspects of that salvation – faith and repentance – lie at the core of the meaning of baptism in water.

Baptism does not *make* something happen. Baptism is because something has *already* happened. When Peter spoke to his Jewish audience on the Day of Pentecost and said: “...be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ *for the forgiveness of your sins*,” the Greek word translated “for” can also be translated as “because of.”¹ This is the essence of the meaning of baptism: It is *because* you are saved and *because* you are forgiven that you are baptized.

Total Identification with Christ

Read Romans 6:3-5

Paul asks the Roman Christians, in essence, “Don’t you know what happened when you were baptized?!” He then goes on to explain exactly what happened!

“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus 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. If we have been *united with him* like this in his death, we will certainly also be *united with him* in his resurrection.”

Baptism is the enactment of your total identification with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. It is a public declaration of this inner reality.

This means that, for you, baptism is...

Your funeral service!

A burial service is not designed to kill someone off. It is only performed when a person is *dead already*.

Read Galatians 6:14

The Bible declares that when Jesus died on the Cross, your old life was crucified in him! And so, because you have “died” in Christ, we now bury your old life in water baptism. Baptism is a declaration to God, to the world, to Satan and to yourself that the old life is dead and gone. The old you – which was an enemy of God (**Colossians 1:21**) – has been buried.

Your resurrection to new life!

But that’s not the end of the story. When you rise up out of the waters of baptism, this is a picture of your identification with the resurrection of Christ. Just as Christ rose from the dead, so you too have been raised to life as a new creation in Christ! In **Romans 6:10-11**, Paul tells us:

“The death [Christ] died, he died to sin *once for all*; but the life he lives, he lives to God. *In the same way*, count yourselves *dead to sin* but *alive to God* in Christ Jesus.”

Water baptism is all about repentance. You have turned your back on sin, the world and the devil and turned to face God. Just as Jesus used parables to illustrate spiritual truths, so water baptism is an *acted out* parable. As you are baptized, you are declaring that you are “dead to sin and alive to God”!

Read Galatians 2:20

Understanding the Nature of Baptism

Read Acts 19:1-5

During his stay in Ephesus, Paul came across a group of believers who had roots back in John’s baptism for repentance. They knew nothing of the Holy Spirit, nor did they understand Christian baptism. Paul explained to them the difference between the baptism of John and the baptism of the Christian believer.

Baptism of John

“John’s baptism,” explained Paul, “was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.”

Now true Christian baptism is also a baptism of repentance (note **Acts 2:38**), but with a difference. John’s baptism was looking *forward* to the coming of the Messiah (**John 1:23**), whereas Christian baptism looks *back* to it. John’s baptism was an act of *preparation* for the coming salvation; Christian baptism is an act of *identification* with the salvation already finished by Christ. As J. Alice Motyer put it:

“Baptism points back to the work of God, and forward to the life of faith.”²

In **John 1:31**, John himself gives the reason for his baptism:

“...the reason I came baptizing with water was that [Christ] might be revealed to Israel.”

Baptism of the Christian believer

Read **Matthew 3:13-15**

At first John refused to baptize Jesus. John’s baptism was a baptism of simple repentance, turning from sin to God. Yet Jesus had no sin to repent from, nor did he need to prepare for God’s coming kingdom. After all, Jesus was “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (**John 1:29**). He was the very one bringing the salvation of God.

But take a look at Jesus’ answer to John, for it reveals the sudden change between the baptism of John and the baptism of the Christian believer. Jesus said:

“Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this *to fulfill all righteousness.*”

Jesus was baptized in identification with us, just as we are now baptized in identification with him. And just as Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness, so we are now baptized to fulfill all righteousness. Christian baptism is the total identification of the believer with the righteousness fulfilled by Christ.

Baptisms in the Bible

The word *baptism* – “the act of being dipped or immersed” – is applied to a number of different concepts in the Bible. Apart from baptism in water, the Bible also talks about:

- Baptism in the Holy Spirit (**Acts 1:5; 8:14-17**)
- Baptism in fire (**Matthew 3:11**)
- Baptism in suffering (**Mark 10:38-39**)

In each of these verses, the meaning of baptism is immersion. We are immersed in the Holy Spirit (**Acts 4:31; Ephesians 5:18**), we are immersed in fire for cleansing (**1 Peter 1:6-7**), and we are immersed in the sufferings of Christ himself (**Philippians 3:10; 2 Corinthians 1:5**).

Two Pictures of Baptism

There are two Old Testament stories that graphically illustrate what baptism means to us:

The Exodus

Read **1 Corinthians 10:1-2,11**

For the people of Israel, the Red Sea was a barrier between the old and the new. When they passed through, they left the armies of Pharaoh drowned in the sea.

But although they came out of Egypt, God had great difficulty getting Egypt out of them (read **Exodus 16:3;17:3; Numbers 11:4-5; 14:2-4**). Baptism for us not only testifies to our personal “exodus” from the world; it also marks the taking of the world out from us!

Read again Galatians 6:14

The Flood

Read 1 Peter 3:20-22

The Flood was God’s judgment against a race of men who were beyond help. In the same way, baptism marks the cutting off of the old creation and the start of the new creation life in Christ! Just as the Flood wiped out the old creation, so the “old me” is left behind in the waters of baptism. And in the same way that God started a new lineage of humanity in Noah, so in Christ we have become part of a whole new spiritual lineage.

The Dividing Line

Baptism is the dividing line for us between the old and the new. It is a crossing over from death to life, from sin to righteousness, from the world to God.

Read Colossians 1:13

Every man and woman born into the world is born into the dominion of darkness – as slaves of Satan’s power. Jesus came into the world to destroy the devil’s work (**1 John 3:8**) and to take back what had been lost to God (**Luke 19:10**). He came to process a transfer of our lives from Satan’s dominion into God’s kingdom, and there was only one way this transfer could take place.

Death

Read Colossians 3:3

Satan would not allow you out of his realm. The dominion of darkness does not issue passports. There was only one way for you to escape Satan’s authority. And that was to die. When Christ died for you, God counted his death as your death. Your name was erased from the registry of Satan’s dominion.

Read 2 Timothy 2:11

Birth

Read 1 John 5:1

Just as there is no way out of Satan’s dominion except by *death*, so also there is no way into God’s kingdom except by *birth*. The moment you believe in Jesus, God registers your name on the citizenship registry of heaven – but not just as ordinary citizens. We are registered as God’s own children!

Read John 1:12-13

On the Cross and in the resurrection, Jesus became both our death and our new birth. This is what we declare in baptism!

A New Family Tree

Read 1 Corinthians 15:22

There are many different nations and ethnic groups on the earth, but in God's eyes there are only two races of people. Each race has a different ancestor. One ancestor is called the First Adam. The other is the Last Adam, also called the Second Man.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:45,47

The first Adam

Paul declares, in **1 Corinthians 15:22**:

“For as in Adam all die...”

Adam was a representative man. When he sinned, it was not just a personal thing between him and God. As the father of the human race, he was representing the whole of mankind and, in his rebellion, he opened the door to death and judgment for every generation to come (read **Romans 5:12-19**). Every person born into the world was born “in Adam.”

The last Adam

In **1 Corinthians 15:22**, Paul goes on to declare:

“...so in Christ all will be made alive.”

God did not try to patch up fallen humanity. Instead, he put an end to that race on the Cross and began a whole new race in Christ. Like Adam, Jesus was a representative man. He was called the “last Adam.”

Notice that Jesus is not called the second Adam, but the last Adam. If you have ever been in a race, you will know that there is a big difference between coming second and coming last. If you are last, it means that there are *none following you!* This is why Paul wrote:

“So it is written: ‘*The first man Adam became a living being*’; *the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven.*”

When Jesus died, he hung on the Cross as the *last* of Adam's race. But in his resurrection, Jesus rose not as the “last Adam” but as the “second man,” the beginning of a whole new race of humanity – the New Creation.

From God's perspective, the world has only two kinds of people – those who are “in Adam” and those who are “in Christ.” In baptism we are declaring that we are no longer part of Adam's fallen race but are a part of the New Creation in Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-17**Read Ephesians 2:10**

In **Colossians 2:11-12**, Paul sums up the wonderful truth that is symbolized by baptism in water. The Living Bible paraphrases Paul's words in this way:

“When you came to Christ, he set you free from your evil desires, not by a bodily operation of circumcision but by a spiritual operation, the baptism of your souls. For in baptism you see how your old, evil nature died with him and was buried with him; and then you came up out of death with him into a new life because you trusted the Word of the mighty God who raised Christ from the dead.”

¹ Paul P. Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press), extracted from QuickVerse 5.0.

² J. Alice Motyer, quoted by Edyth Draper, *Draper's Quotations for the Christian World* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House), extracted from QuickVerse 5.0.

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