

Meaning of Baptism

- The meaning of baptism as set forth in the New Testament also supports immersion as the proper manner of administering this rite.
- Several meanings are ascribed to baptism in the New Testament.
- As baptism is in “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19), this act associates the new Christian with the triune God.
 - This is perhaps overlooked in our churches, but in a growing pluralistic society, baptism into the name of the triune God will have more and more significance.



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- Baptism by immersion vividly portrays identification with the major events—the death, burial, and resurrection—of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:3-5; cf. Gal. 3:26-28).
 - When the person is lowered into the water, there is portrayal of death and burial, and when they come up out of the water, it pictures resurrection. The other modes cannot portray this meaning of baptism.
 - Romans 6:3-5—Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection.
 - Gal 3:27 – For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.



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- Another meaning of baptism is cleansing from sin (Acts 22:16; 2:38)
 - Acts 22:16 – And now, why are you delaying? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.
 - Here it is associated with the washing away of sins.
 - Acts 2:38 – Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Escape from divine judgment is another meaning of baptism (1 Pet. 3:20-21).
 - 1 Pet 3:20-21 – who in the past were disobedient, when God patiently waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared. In it a few—that is, eight people—were saved through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not as the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
 - Baptism by immersion shows escape from divine judgment. Those on the ark were brought safely through water.



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A final meaning of baptism follows not from any specific passage of the New Testament but from a theological consideration: as one of the two signs of the new covenant (the other being the Lord's Supper), baptism symbolized incorporation into the new covenant community, the church.

- The church is the church of the New Covenant, which has two signs. The first is the initiatory rite, which is baptism.

So immersion is the proper mode and these five meanings help us understand what baptism is all about.

Necessity of Baptism

- Baptism is not necessary for salvation; its non-necessity does not however render it unimportant .
 - There is nothing that baptism adds to the finished work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection. It adds nothing to the accomplishment of our salvation.
 - But at the same time it is far too important to ignore it.
- Biblically, this view makes the best sense of several passages of Scripture (1 Cor. 1:13-17) : if Christ did not send Paul to baptize but to preach the gospel, this affirmation would seem unconscionable if baptism were necessary for salvation.
- This position of the non-necessity of baptism also makes sense of the discussion of salvation and its means of appropriation at the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15).
 - They argued that people are saved by faith. The council did not add baptism to this.



Luther's Helpful Position

- Baptism's non-necessity does not render it unimportant; indeed, Martin Luther is a reliable guide on striking the balance between avoiding the two extremes of insisting on baptism because it is necessary for salvation and minimizing the importance of the rite because it is not necessary.
 - When he faced RCC on the necessity of baptism for regeneration and salvation, he said, no it does not save you.
 - But when faced with the mystics and fanatics that said you don't need anything tangible like baptism, Luther would tell them they must be baptized.
- Following Luther's lead, the church, while avoiding the error of insisting that baptism is necessary for salvation, must obey the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) by teaching and urging new converts to be baptized (e.g., Acts 2:38).



Necessity of Baptism

- That is what Peter did. So baptism is not part of the accomplishment of salvation, but it is part of the appropriation of salvation.
 - In terms of appropriating it, Peter says repent and be baptized. There is repentance, faith, and baptism. This is the biblical pattern.
 - It doesn't mean someone is unsaved if they are unbaptized, but we must follow the biblical pattern. There is no category in Scripture of an unbaptized Christian. All Christians by definition are baptized, not because it adds to the accomplishment of salvation, but because it is part of the appropriation of it.



Necessity of Baptism

- Is there a necessary qualification of the baptizer?
- Some believe any saved believer could do it. Others argue that it has to be an ordained pastor.
 - The Bible does not specify who is supposed to do it, but it is something that the church does.
 - So no one should be doing this apart from the local church (missionary contexts would be the exception).
 - Thus, pastors and elders should supervise and teach on baptism. A person who is not a pastor could actually do the baptism as long as the pastors supervised it.
 - Sometimes people want to be baptized by the person who led them to the Lord.
 - For those who disagree and insist it must be a pastor, I simply exhort them to watch out for creeping sacramentalism and sacerdotalism.

