

Christian Baptism

Acts 2:38 *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

The word “baptism” comes from the Greek word BAPTIZO which means “to dip or to immerse”. Unfortunately, the word “baptize” is not a translation, but a “transliteration”. This means that the word “baptize” is simply a Telugu pronunciation of the original Greek word. Because of this, the real meaning of the word is lost. So, in Acts 2:38, Peter actually told them to “*Repent, and be immersed every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...*”

Since the original meaning of word “baptize” has been lost, some people think that “baptism” can be performed by other methods such as the "sprinkling" or "pouring" of water. However, the original meaning is that a person should be completely immersed in water. But, baptism isn't just about being immersed in water. Immersion is just a symbol of the real meaning of baptism.

Baptism is a very important thing that people do when they become Christians. It is a physical ceremony that has a genuine spiritual effect in the eyes of God. In some ways, it is like a marriage ceremony. When a man and woman are married, their relationship changes in the eyes of God. As a married couple they begin a new life together and take on new responsibilities before God and man. The real meaning of baptism is very similar.

Like marriage, baptism represents a major transition in life. It represents that your old life is dead and that you will live a new life with God. It is true that baptism “washes away” our sins, but baptism is more than that. Baptism is where you bury your old life of sin and vow to live a new life for God. It is a symbol of death, burial and resurrection. The Apostle Paul described this in Romans 6:3-5:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 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:

SHADOWS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament has imagery that indicates this process. One example is the Israelites passing through the Red Sea. They were slaves in Egypt (an image of the bondage of sin). Then, they were saved from death by the power of the blood of the lamb at Passover (an image of the sacrifice of Jesus). But, they were not completely free of their old life until they passed out of Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 the apostle Paul says that the passage through the Red Sea represents baptism.

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

These types of representations we call “shadows” because they have the image or form of something yet to come. Just as the Old Testament shadows teach us about the passing from death to life, they also teach us about the importance of God's covenant with his people. Genesis 17:9, 10, 14 says,

And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. ...And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.

In the Old Testament, God used circumcision as a sign of His covenant with His people. It was a sign that the individual was in covenant with God and in right standing with Him. But it is important to recognize that this “sign” of circumcision was not optional. God said that if someone didn't have this sign of the covenant, then they “*shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant*”. Without the sign, there was no covenant.

In Colossians 2:10-12, the apostle Paul says that in the New Testament, baptism performs the same function as circumcision did in the Old Testament.

...In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

So, for Christians, baptism is the “*circumcision made without hands*”. Baptism is the “sign” of the New Covenant. Without the sign, there is no covenant.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

The Old Testament foreshadowed the coming of baptism and demonstrates its nature and importance. In the New Testament, we find that baptism is something that Jesus commanded. We are called not just to go out and preach, but to also to baptize. After His resurrection Jesus said the following to the apostles in Matthew 28:19,

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

The commandment was to make disciples and to baptize them. This baptism was to be done “*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*”. Some say we should use the words “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” when baptizing. But this is a serious misunderstanding that is not supported by the rest of scripture. Jesus said that baptism should be performed in “the name”, not “the names”. “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” are not names. They are titles that refer to different ways God has manifest Himself. They are not His Name. The scriptures reveal that this one name is “JESUS”. And, the power in baptism is in His Name. Acts 4:12 says,

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Before Jesus ascended into Heaven, He taught the Apostles what they were to do. In Luke 24:45, Jesus “*opened ... their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures*”. The Apostles understood exactly how to baptize new Christians and they obeyed Jesus' words exactly. Ten days after Jesus ascended into Heaven, Peter gave the first instructions about how people are to be saved. Acts 2:38 reads,

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The book of the Acts of the Apostles is the beginning of the history of the people of the New Covenant. It shows us what the Apostles taught and practiced. Throughout this book, believers were baptized and their baptism was always done in the Name of Jesus. Not once was anyone baptized in the titles “Father, Son and Holy Ghost”. Here are some examples of how the Apostles baptized:

Acts 8:16 ... *they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

Act 19:5 *When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

HAVE YOU BEEN BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF JESUS?

Baptism in the Name of Jesus is the process where a believer in Jesus enters the New Covenant. This is not an optional process. Nor is it one that we should change from its original form. Our faith is “*...built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets...*” (Ephesians 2:20). The Apostles were taught directly by the Lord Jesus. It is clear from the scriptures and from history that the Apostles baptized in the Name of Jesus. Is it more important to follow the scriptures, or the traditions of men? Have you been baptized in the name of Jesus.