



*A Ministry of the  
Church of God (Seventh Day)*

# Christian Baptism





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The Christian ordinance of baptism is based on Jesus' explicit instructions to His disciples: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them" (Matthew 28:19). He intended it to be practiced until "the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Biblical baptism of a believer in Jesus Christ is immersion in water. Based on New Testament teaching, it symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord. First, the believer dies to sin:

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? . . . For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin (Romans 6:3, 6).

Second, the believer is buried and resurrected with Christ, "buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Colossians 2:12).

Baptism is an important part of the believer's response to God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Through faith, repentance, and baptism, the believer comes into a personal relationship with Christ. One may express faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and he may repent of his sins and confess his sinful nature. However, his relationship with Christ is incomplete without baptism in the name of Jesus.

A number of questions come to mind: Is it necessary to be baptized? Should there be any spiritual preparation for baptism? Does baptism wash away our sins? Does it

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matter which method is used: sprinkling, pouring, or immersion? May infants be baptized? Should anyone be “re-baptized”? This study will address these questions.

## **The Necessity of Baptism**

Although Jesus had never sinned in any way (Hebrews 4:15; I Peter 2:21, 22), He came to John the Baptist to be baptized. Jesus’ baptism was not for remission of sins.

Why, then, would our Lord have sought baptism? It was an example of obedient humility, as Matthew observes and Christ confirms:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented (Matthew 3:13-15).

If He, the sinless Son of God, humbled Himself, allowing an imperfect man to baptize Him, we should not hesitate to humble ourselves and be baptized.

After His resurrection, Jesus said to His disciples:

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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Any doubts we may have as to the importance of baptism should be weighed

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against our desire to please our Lord. He clearly expects baptism to be a part of our believing and becoming children of God. If we wish to please Him, we will not be interested in the hypothetical question "Can I be saved without being baptized?" For Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15).

## **Spiritual Preparation for Baptism**

What spiritual preparation, if any, should we make before baptism? After Peter preached his soul-stirring sermon on the Day of Pentecost, his audience asked "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:37b, 38).

Notice their obedient response:

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (vv. 40, 41).

Acts 8:26-39 tells of Philip encountering an Ethiopian eunuch who had been worshipping in Jerusalem and was returning home. While traveling, the man read from the book of Isaiah. Philip preached Christ to him, beginning at the same scripture the eunuch had been reading. The story continues:

Now as they went down the road, they

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came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him (Acts 8:36-38, NKJV).

Philip was concerned that the Ethiopian needed to have a firm belief in Christ before baptizing him.

Peter taught that one should repent of his sins before being baptized:

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38).

Belief and repentance are part of the spiritual preparation necessary before baptism. Remember what Philip looked for: "If you believe with all your heart, you may."

Baptism shows others the decision we have made to be Christians, shows the way we feel about sin, and shows our willingness to obey Christ. When we believe in Christ, repent of our sins, are converted, and commit our lives to Christ, then we are ready for baptism.

After Paul was confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus and was converted, he heeded the admonition of Ananias: "Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his [Christ's] name" (Acts 22:16).

We may learn from Scripture that it is the grace of God in Christ that washes us clean before God, not literal water. Baptism symbolizes what Jesus did in shedding

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His own blood: "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Revelation 1:5, NKJV). Because repentant sinners believe in Christ's death on the cross, God declares them righteous (see Romans 5:1, 9).

These scriptures help us understand that a person is ready to be baptized only after he has repented of his sins and has forsaken his former sinful way of life. They teach that the blood of Jesus washes away sins and that baptism symbolizes that washing. The removal of sins depends on the death of Christ, for He "washed us from our sins in His own blood."

God made forgiveness and cleansing from sin possible because He so loved the world that He gave His only Son, Jesus, as a sacrifice for sin:

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace (Ephesians 1:7).

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from every sin (1 John 1:7).

## **The Method of Baptism**

The Scriptures compare baptism to burial:

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

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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 (Romans 6:3-5).

Writing to the Christians at Colosse, Paul referred to them as “having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12).

These verses describe burying the old body of sin in baptism, with the individual rising from this burial to a new life.

A proper burial requires covering the dead completely. Likewise, the only baptism the Bible describes is to immerse (completely submerge) the candidate in water.

Notice how this corresponds with the baptism of Christ and that of the Ethiopian eunuch. When He was baptized, Christ “went up out of the water.” John 3:23 states why John baptized in a certain place:

Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized.

The eunuch and Philip “went *down into* the water”:

Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away (Acts 8:38, 39).

In these instances, both the one who did the baptizing and the repentant sinner went down into the water. The candidates

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were baptized in water; water was not poured or sprinkled on them. Immersion is the only biblical example of baptism given to us. Scholars agree that *immersion* is the English equivalent to the Greek word *baptizo* from which the word *baptism* originates.

Some think that the biblical examples of baptism provide evidence that it should be performed in running water. They feel the Bible teaches that baptism should be performed only outdoors in a lake, river, or stream. No text suggests this. We do have the example of John baptizing Jesus in a river, but no Scriptures require that we follow this part of the example.

Since baptism is a “burial,” and the word to *baptize* means to “immerse,” the water must be deep enough for immersion. Nothing indicates that the water should be running or that water in a tank or baptistry is inappropriate.

The source of the water does not seem to be the concern.

## **Baptism of Infants**

It is evident from the following texts that spiritual preparation is needed prior to baptism:

Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38b).

“I [Paul] preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds” (26:20b).

The candidate should not only feel sorry enough about his sins to ask God to forgive

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him, but should also sincerely intend to stop sinning. This is called repentance.

Repentance is illustrated in Jesus' parable about the Pharisee and publican praying in the temple. The publican humbled himself before the Lord, saying, "God have mercy on me a sinner." Jesus said this repentant man went to his house justified (Luke 18:9-14).

The Bible teaches that spiritual preparation, including repentance, should precede baptism. Infants cannot repent of sin, nor do they realize they have a sinful nature.

Jesus blessed the children when they were brought to Him, but there is no account of infants being baptized. Jesus did instruct His disciples, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14), but He did not baptize them. Therefore, baptism of infants is inappropriate and without scriptural foundation.

## **Rebaptism**

When Christians come to a fuller understanding of an important doctrine or accept fellowship in a different denomination, they sometimes wonder if they should be re-baptized.

Acts 19 provides the only example of re-baptism found in the New Testament. While Paul was traveling, he met certain disciples at Ephesus, and he questioned them about their spirituality:

"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we

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have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:2-5).

Christian baptism demands faith in Jesus Christ and repentance resulting in conversion. If you have been baptized by immersion in the name of the Lord Jesus by another Christian, then you do not need to be re-baptized. Consider this admonition from Hebrews 6:1, 2:

Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

Spiritual growth, greater understanding, and better obedience can be lifelong, but Christians don't need to be baptized anew with each step forward.

Neither is it necessary to be re-baptized because of failures on the part of one who officiated the baptism — either his personal life or his doctrine. Baptism's validity depends wholly on the grace of the Lord and the sincere repentance and belief of the candidate, not on the personal holiness of the baptizer or the particular words pronounced at the occasion.<sup>1</sup>

The object and nature of baptism pre-

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cludes the idea of repetition. Its symbolic reference to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ necessitates a single experience. When our confession of faith in Christ and repentance of sins are sincere and our baptism is performed in the name of Christ, our new life begins (Romans 6:4). “Therefore, let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity” (Hebrews 6:1).

## Conclusion

Our Lord was baptized; He commissioned His followers to go into all the world, preach the gospel, and baptize believers. In obedience to this commission, the disciples called people to repent and be baptized.

When we are baptized, we express our belief in the death of Christ as the atonement for our sins and we witness to our own spiritual rebirth.

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 in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection (Romans 6:4, 5).

Do you sincerely believe in Jesus Christ as your savior and Lord? Are you sorry for your sins? Have you asked God for forgiveness? Are you ready to bury the past and begin a new life in Jesus?

What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name (Acts 22:16).

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- 1 There is no essential difference between being baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ,” according to Acts 2:38, and baptism “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” according to Matthew 28:19. The vital matter in baptism is not what words are spoken at the moment, but what faith and trust reside in the mind and heart of the new believer.

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