"Baptism"

Sometimes people ask, “Phil, why is baptism so important?” Hello, I’m Phil Sanders. And this is a Bible study, “In SEARCH of the Lord’s Way.” And today we’re exploring the meaning and the purpose of baptism, so stay with us.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord’s Way. Please don’t ever take the Bible for granted. It’s not simply another religious book. It’s unique and filled with the spiritual truth that we need. It’s the only book that can teach us where we came from, why we’re here, and where we’re going. The Bible teaches us the words that lead to eternal life. The word of God is settled in heaven but it can touch our lives for eternity. If we’re born again at all, we’re born again through the preaching of the word. 1 Peter 1:23 says, “for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is,* through the living and enduring word of God.” We’re delighted you’ve joined us today. And we want to be a part of your life each week.

Today we’re going to complete our series on how we respond to the gospel of Christ. We’ve talked about the necessity of hearing the gospel and obeying what God says. We’ve shown the necessity of faith and repentance. Today we’re focusing on the need to be baptized to be saved.

Few people doubt the need to believe or repent in order to be saved, but there’s much controversy over baptism. People have mistakenly said baptism is a work that people do to earn salvation. This simply isn’t true. While it is true that we’re commanded to be baptized, baptism is not so much about what we’re do as it is what God is doing for us. We’re going to study what baptism into Christ means and why everyone who chooses to follow Christ must be baptized.

Now if you want to study more about baptism and you live in the United States, we offer a free printed copy of our study, this particular one, by mailing your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or sending an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. We’re also offering our free little booklet, “What Must I Do”. You can call us on our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. For those outside the United States, we offer this program on our website at www.searchtv.org and on YouTube.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we’ll read from Romans 6:3 to 7, and see what God says about baptism.

Our reading today comes from Romans chapter 6 verses 3 to 7 and there Paul is reminding the Romans about the importance of their baptism and what it did for them.

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.

That’s a reading of God’s holy word. Let’s pray together. Heavenly Father we’re thankful that You have provided a way that You can unite us with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in baptism. And Father we pray that we’ll always come to love You and do Your will. That we’ll listen to the things that You teach and they may make a difference in our lives. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Webster's Unabridged Dictionary defines baptism as "a ceremony or sacrament of admitting a person into Christianity or a specific church by dipping him in water or sprinkling water on him, as a symbol of washing away sin." Well this definition describes what baptism means in the English language, considering there are many different “Christian” groups that baptized in a variety of ways. But simply because the many denominations do things differently doesn’t mean that the New Testament approves all these different ways to baptize.

So, what does the New Testament teach in regard to the act of baptism? Well what action does the New Testament describe? Well the Greek word, baptidzo means to dip, plunge, or immerse. It refers to the specific act of dipping or immersing in water. A different Greek word rhantidzo describes the action of sprinkling. Now if the Lord or the Holy Spirit had wanted us to sprinkle for baptism, they would have moved the writers of the New Testament to use that word rhantidzo instead of baptidzo.

After an exhaustive survey of more than 200 examples in Greek literature and ancient translations, an author Thomas J. Conant in his book, The Meaning and Use of Baptizein, concluded that: “The word baptizein, during the whole existence of the Greek as a spoken language, had a perfectly defined and unvarying import. In its literal use it meant, as has been shown, to put entirely into or under a liquid, or other penetrable substance, generally water, so that the object was wholly covered by the inclosing element.”

Well when the New Testament speaks of baptism, the event described points to an immersion in water. In Matthew 3:16 after Jesus was baptized he “went up out of the water.” In John 3:23 John the Baptizer baptized in the Jordan River “at Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there.” Baptism or immersion would, of course, require enough water to immerse an adult. In Acts 8:38 to 39 Philip and the Eunuch went down into the water, Philip baptized the Eunuch, and they both came up out of the water. Now whatever happened in this baptism, it took place while they were down in the water.

The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 6 and verse 4, “Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” Now the likeness of being buried and raised in water is striking here! It’s not an accident that baptism is a burial and a resurrection that leads to newness of life. Romans 6:5 to 7 says, “For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, (now why?) in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.”

Baptism is that time when our old body of sin is crucified with Christ and done away with. It is buried. And at that point we’re no longer slaves to sin. When we are raised with Him, we have new life just as the Lord Jesus had new life when He was resurrected from the dead. The resurrection caused the new life for Jesus, and our resurrection with Christ in baptism causes our newness of life. Before baptism we are dead in sin, but after baptism we are freed from sin and walk in newness of life!

Now commenting on this passage William Barclay said, “Commonly baptism was by total immersion and that practice lent itself to a symbolism to which sprinkling does not so readily lend itself. When a man descended into the water and the water closed over his head, it was like being buried. When he emerged from the water, it was like rising from the grave. Baptism was symbolically like dying and rising again. The man died to one kind of life and rose to another; he died to the old life of sin and rose to a new life of grace.”

There is a second passage that links baptism to the burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Colossians 2:12 to 13 says, “having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.” Now baptism is an act of faith in the powerful working of God. In baptism we demonstrate our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we’re united with His burial and resurrection in baptism. Before we were baptized we were dead in our trespasses; but in baptism God makes us alive, just as God made Christ alive. In making us alive, God forgives us of all our trespasses.

Now did you notice in this passage how God is active in forgiving us and in making us alive. Baptism is an act of faith on our part. The command in Acts 2:38 and 22:16 is to “be baptized.” Now think with me. Grammatically, “be baptized” is a command, but it’s a passive command. God commands us to demonstrate our faith by letting someone else baptize us in the name of Jesus Christ. “Be baptized” means someone else is immersing us in water. Someone else is acting on us. We receive the action. That’s what “passive” means.

Now just as we receive the physical act of baptism, we receive God’s gracious actions on us in the forgiveness of sins and making us alive. In baptism we are born again and born from above with newness of life. God is the One powerfully working on us. Baptism is not some work of merit on our part to earn salvation. No. Baptism is an act of faith on our part whereby we receive God’s powerful working in our lives, just as He powerfully raised Jesus from the dead. God buries our old man of sin, God raises us up, and God makes us alive. It’s God who washes away our sins, and God who makes us new. It is who God causes us to be born again.

When people say well, “you don’t have to be baptized to be saved,” they’ve missed the point. If baptism is the time when God acts on us to forgive our sins, then baptism would have to be necessary for us to be saved.

So, there is a great importance to immersing as baptism. We should respect what God is doing to us by saving us in baptism or immersion. We have no right or authority to substitute sprinkling for immersing in fulfilling God's commandments. If God is providing salvation to us through our baptism, then shouldn’t we be careful to abide by the Lord’s commands. Shouldn’t we cooperate with what He has told us to do. Sprinkling and immersing are different things. While many have sprinkled people and called it baptism for centuries, sprinkling for baptism has no basis in Scripture. Baptism into Christ is by immersion. Baptism by sprinkling is an old, human tradition begun centuries after the New Testament.

Now obeying the Lord doesn’t mean doing what is conventional or doing what is popular. Obeying the Lord means honoring the Lord to the point that we’re willing to do what He says. Honoring and respecting God means you won’t add to God’s commands, take away from God’s commands, or edit God’s commands. You simply, lovingly, humbly obey the Lord.

So, why should a person who is penitent and believes in Christ be baptized? Well, there are numerous reasons. Peter told the guilty people at Pentecost in Acts 2:38, “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.” People repent and are baptized so that their sins will be forgiven. Ananias told Saul of Tarsus in Acts 22:16, “And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” Baptism is the time when God washes away our sins.

Baptism is the time when we clothe ourselves with Christ or become united with Him. Galatians 3:26 and 7 says, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were

baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Now baptism is a necessary act of faith. And placing your faith in Christ necessarily includes baptism. The faithful children of God today are baptized into Christ and clothed with Christ.

Now we've already seen in Romans 6:4 to 7 and Colossians 2:12 to 13 that baptism is the time when God unites us with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Now in baptism we're crucified with Him, buried with Him, and raised with Him to walk in newness of life. Since the old man of sin is crucified with Him in baptism, God at that time frees us from sin and its guilt. Baptism is also that time when we begin sharing our new life in Christ and with Christ. From that day forward we're new people who belong to Him. His blood has cleansed and purchased us; and we're no longer our own. We've been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19 to 20).

When we are baptized, the Lord adds us as God's children to the church. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (that is the church), whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." Baptism unites us with Christ, with those who are in His body, the church.

To be in the church is to be in God's kingdom. And Paul wrote the church at Colossae and said in Colossians 1:13 to 14, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Forgiveness and membership in the church or kingdom are benefits of being baptized into Christ. Now this agrees with what the Lord Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 and verse 5. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." How are we born again of water and the Spirit? Well, this is surely by baptism. The Lord says that without baptism we cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Now in Christ, we have the grace and blessing of God. Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." And in Christ, we have the promise of eternal life. 1 John 5:11 to 12 says, "And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life." The way to have the Son is to respond to the Son by baptism when you confess Christ and repent of your sins. And baptism is certainly not the only thing necessary to salvation. We've seen in this past month that hearing God, believing in Jesus, repenting of sin, and confessing Christ as the Son of God are also necessary to obey the gospel.

Well why is baptism then so important? Why are we taking the time about its necessity? Because baptism is the culminating act in our obedience. Our faith, repentance, and confession lead us to baptism. Baptism is that point when God acts upon us, transforming us from people dead in sin to people alive in Christ. That's when we're born again and become members of the Lord's church. To talk about baptism means revealing how God unites us with Christ, saves us, and makes us His children. What a blessing! Nothing else could be so very important for today and for eternity than to be obedient to the Lord!

Let's pray together. Father we're thankful that Your gospel has a way and means by which we can leave and old life of sin and have newness of life. Freed from sin and loving and serving You. Father help always to be obedient to Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

The New Testament gives us many examples of people being baptized. The 3000 who obeyed the gospel at Pentecost in Acts 2:41 were baptized that very day. In Acts 8:12, when the Samaritans believed the preaching of Philip about Jesus and His kingdom, they were baptized. They didn't wait. The Eunuch in Acts 8:36 asked to be baptized. It was urgent. He wasn't content to wait until another

day. He came up out of the water rejoicing. In Acts 22:16 Ananias asked Saul of Tarsus, “Why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” In Acts 16 the jailer and his household considered baptism so important that they were baptized in the middle of the night. Why the urgency? Why the emphasis on acting quickly?

I’ll tell you why. Because being baptized is necessary for you to be saved. It’s necessary for you to receive the forgiveness of your sins. Baptism is necessary for you to be united with Christ and to become a Christian. The Bible never contemplates the idea of a Christian who has not been baptized. Baptism is not something you do after you have been saved; baptism is the time when God saves you. That’s when God takes the blood of Christ and washes you free from sin and makes you His child. 1 Peter 3:21 says, “Corresponding to that, 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.” Baptism is how we appeal to God to be saved and to have a clear conscience. Have you been baptized into Christ? If you believe and are repentant, won’t you be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins?

Now we hope that today’s study about baptism has been helpful and has blessed you. Perhaps it’s challenged you to think. We offer a free printed copy of this message and a little booklet, “What Must I Do”. And if live in the United States, so mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office it’s toll-free. 1-800-321-8633.

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We do ask that you show God your love by worshiping at church. You need a church family. And if you can attend, don’t neglect worshiping at church. There’s probably a church of Christ near you. And if you’re looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we’ll gladly help you find one. Check out our church map on searchtv.org. Well we’ll be back next week, Lord willing. We ask that you keep searching God’s Word with us and tell a friend about this program. Invite them to watch along with you. And as always we say to you, God bless you and we want Him to do that. And we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord’s Way.