

C. Water Baptism

In the Bible there are two sacraments (holy rituals) which Christians are enjoined to practice and observe: The Lord's Supper and Water Baptism. The purpose of both is to signify by outward symbolism what Christ has accomplished in a believer's life through faith in Him. As true believers, we are both instructed and commanded to submit to both as expressions of our faith in Christ.

In what has become known as the "Great Commission," Jesus gave the following command:

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. (Matthew 28:19, 20)

The word "baptize" is taken from the Greek word *baptizo* meaning: (1) to immerse or submerge, (2) to overflow or cover with water, (3) to wet thoroughly or moisten and (4) to pour upon or drench. Because of the wide scope of this definition, and differing views on the word's usage in the New Testament, three different methods of baptism have developed over the centuries:

1. Immersion, wherein a person is completely lowered under the water.
2. Pouring, where water is ladled or poured over the person's head and body.
3. Sprinkling, in which the person is lightly sprinkled.

Unfortunately, these differences have often led to a great deal of conflict among God's people over the years. Each have value in that they testify to differing benefits derived from a relationship with Christ.

1. Immersion portrays the atoning death of Christ and gives witness to the reality of His bodily resurrection. (Romans 6:3-5)
2. Pouring signifies the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the believer's life when he/she commits his/her life to Christ. (Acts 2:17,18)
3. Sprinkling tells us we are washed from our sins only by the shed blood of Christ. (Hebrews 10:22)

Why You Need To Be Baptized

1. Act of Obedience

Throughout the New Testament water baptism was practiced following conversion. This was done in direct response to Jesus' command. Christians everywhere are to "preach" and then "baptize" those who believe. Therefore, everyone who becomes a Christian needs to be baptized out of obedience to God.

2. Statement of Faith

As mentioned earlier, water baptism is an outward statement of one's belief in Christ's atonement for our sins; the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit to guide and influence our lives; and the only means for gaining a clear, guilt-free conscience toward God. Baptism is a means to make a public statement of your faith.

3. Public Testimony

In the New Testament we see baptism practiced publicly. It was a very powerful and meaningful way to fulfill Jesus' promise "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven." Those who are publicly baptized "acknowledge before men" their life's commitment to Him as their Lord and Savior.

What Baptism Cannot Do!

1. Baptism cannot save.

Salvation comes through faith alone, and not works (Ephesians 2:8). Therefore, the act of baptism cannot save us. Rather, it gives evidence through public action a person has already been saved.

2. Baptism cannot cleanse from sin.

The cleansing of sins takes place when we believe and accept Christ and ask Him to cleanse our sins (1 John 1:9). Baptism may witness to our cleansing, but the water itself is powerless to cleanse from sin.

3. Baptism cannot magically free us from sinful habits.

Self-control, moral purity, holiness and much more, are all benefits of receiving Christ and allowing the Holy Spirit to influence and change us. Baptism should represent a statement on our part to live lives free from controlling passions. Baptism alone will not magically or automatically free us from these things. Still, it does tell others you have willingly submitted your life to the process of spiritual growth and change through the power of the Holy Spirit.