

Di223 We Believe

Lesson Di223-12 A Command for Today

What next? Your last lesson taught the steps to salvation that every person should follow. Briefly, they are to admit their sin, believe in Jesus as God's Son, and ask God's forgiveness on the basis of Christ's shed blood. A person is thus restored to fellowship with God and begins to live in obedience to him. Today's lesson discusses the first command that every new believer should obey. It is to be baptized in water according to the biblical pattern.

John the Baptist got his name because his ministry was preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He then baptized in water those who repented. John was the son of the priest, Zachariah, and his wife, Elizabeth. John was a cousin to Jesus. People came from Jerusalem and the region around it, confessing their sins and being baptized by John in the Jordan River. Isaiah the prophet described John as, "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord'" (Matt 3:3). John's task was to get people ready for the coming Messiah.

Jesus was just beginning his ministry. He came from Nazareth in Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. John recognized Jesus when he saw him. John said, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus asked John to baptize him, not because Jesus was repenting of sin but saying, "It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt 3:14-15). Jesus did not have to change his ways or prove to anyone he was a follower of God. Jesus was baptized to set an example for all believers to follow. It indicated he was consecrated to God. This is an important reason why we should be baptized.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. Heaven was opened and the Spirit of God descended on him in the form of a dove and lighted on him. A voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt 3:16-17). In this New Testament incident, we see the working of the Godhead, the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

At Jesus' baptism, John was publicly announcing the arrival of the Messiah and the beginning of his ministry. The next day John admitted that he had not been sure who Jesus was at first. Then he saw the Spirit come down as a dove and remain on Jesus. He recognized the sign God had told him to look for, to identify the one who would baptize with the Spirit. John said, "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God" (John 1:31-34).

In the Great Commission, Jesus instructed that believers be baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 29:19). If you have witnessed a baptismal service, you have heard someone say, "And I now baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

Repentance and a living faith are necessary in order for baptism to be meaningful. That is why we do not baptize infants. Babies are not yet able to make a conscious choice to believe in Jesus. They have not had a chance to exercise Christian faith in life. Baptism in water would be meaningless to a baby. There are no instances in Scripture of the baptism of infants. However, the

public ceremony of dedicating a child to God shows that the parents desire God's best for their child. They are dedicating the child to him, promising to raise their child to know God as the child grows. Jesus, too, was presented to God by his parents.

Those who are baptized should first be believers. They must have repented of their sins and accepted Christ as Savior. In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost Peter told the people, "Repent and be baptized every one of you" (Acts 2:38). The Bible sets no age limit on salvation. Some people have been saved at a very early age and may not fully understand the meaning of water baptism. They may not be ready for the commitment to live for Jesus. Parents and teachers can explain what baptism means and determine when a child is ready to take that step.

An older child, a teen, or an adult who has just been saved realizes that a change has taken place in his or her spiritual life. Such a person, who begins to live the Christian life, would qualify for baptism soon after salvation. If you have accepted Christ as Savior and have not yet been baptized, you should do so soon. Where you are baptized doesn't matter as long as there is enough water for immersion, if possible. That is the Bible pattern.

'Death' and 'burial' are two key words Paul uses in teaching the Romans. He reminds them that Jesus gave his life on the Cross and was buried in a tomb. At his death, Jesus took our sins and made it possible for us to be free from sin's bondage. Water baptism is a simple object lesson. When we are lowered into the water at baptism, we are completely covered by water. Thus, we are symbolizing Christ's death and burial. We are buried with Christ. We are also showing that the sins of our old life are buried. Our old self died when we accepted Christ as Savior.

'Raised' and 'life' are the other two key words Paul uses. When we talk of being raised, we think of Jesus' resurrection. This is the greatest event of Christianity. Jesus had conquered sin and death. He brought salvation to all who will believe in him. Paul says, "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" (Rom 6:4). When we are raised from the water, we are telling everyone that our sins are washed away. We now have a new, clean life and are freed from the power of sin. The person being baptized participates in this symbolic ritual to emphasize that he identifies with Christ. Water baptism is an outward physical sign of an inward spiritual work.

Our *Statement of Faith* for this lesson is: "We believe water baptism by immersion is commanded of all who repent and believe on Christ as Savior. Water baptism is a witness to the world that we have died to sin and been raised to new life in Christ." The memory verse is from Matthew 28:19: "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."

This lesson is **important** because it shows Jesus' example in being baptized by John the Baptist. It also emphasizes Jesus' command that his followers also be baptized in water. Water baptism should be preceded by a person's repentance and acceptance of Christ as Lord. It is a testimony to others that a person is committed to living the Christian life.

The **main truth** of this lesson is the meaning of baptism. Our old sinful life is buried in the waters of baptism and we are raised in newness of life as followers of Jesus Christ.

Let's **review** this lesson--

1. What was the purpose of John the Baptist's ministry of water baptism? [Pause].
 - A. If you answered, "John called people to repentance and baptized them in water, preparing them for the coming Messiah," you are correct.

2. What evidence of the Trinity do we see at the baptism of Jesus? [Pause].
 - A. If you said, "God the Father spoke from heaven, Jesus the Son was baptized, and the Holy Spirit came in the form of a dove," you are right.

3. What does baptism picture for the believer being baptized? [Pause].
 - A. If you answered that water baptism pictures our sinful life being buried in the water and being raised to new life in Christ," you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** is to listen to this lesson as many times as necessary to memorize our sixth *Statement of Faith*: "We believe water baptism by immersion is commanded of all who repent and believe on Christ as Savior. Water baptism is a witness to the world that we have died to sin and been raised to new life in Christ." Learn Christ's command for today as the memory verse from Matthew 28:19: "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." Share with two other believers who have not been baptized. Explain what the meaning of water baptism is and why they should be baptized in water in obedience to Christ.