

Di223 We Believe

Lesson Di223-13 Baptism in Water

Who was the first person in the Bible to practice water baptism? All four Gospels speak of John, son of Zechariah, called “the Baptist.” You will remember from your last lesson that John came to prepare the way for Christ. He preached repentance for forgiveness of sins and baptized in the Jordan River those who confessed their sins (Mark 1:4-5). The disciples of Jesus and those they appointed as deacons also baptized new believers in water. Some local churches may have rules about who can perform water baptisms. The Bible itself does not prescribe who does it or where it is done. It does prescribe the method of immersion and the condition that the person being baptized must accept Jesus first.

Acts chapter 8, tells the story of the deacon, Philip, who was sent by an angel into the desert. Philip had been used by God as an evangelist. The angel told him to go down to the road that went from Jerusalem to Gaza. On his way, he met an Ethiopian official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia. This Gentile had gone up to Jerusalem to worship the Jewish God. He was on his way home, sitting in his chariot and reading the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading the scroll of Isaiah aloud. Philip asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

The Ethiopian responded, “How can I unless someone explains it to me?” And so, he invited Philip to join him in the chariot, saying, “Tell me please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”

Philip began at that very passage in Isaiah. He told the Ethiopian official the good news about Jesus—the one who was “led like a sheep to the slaughter” (Isa 53:32). As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the man said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?”

Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.”

The Ethiopian answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” He gave orders to stop the chariot. Both Philip and the Ethiopian went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away. The man went on his way rejoicing because of his salvation (Acts 8:26-38).

All Christian churches believe in some form of water baptism. We believe that water baptism is an ordinance or command given by Christ to the Church. It isn’t a law like the Ten Commandments, but is an act of obedience and testimony. The word ‘baptize’ literally means ‘to dip or to immerse.’ That is why we practice immersing believers in a pool or stream or any container of water that is big enough to dunk someone. In some extreme desert circumstances, baptism has been done by a missionary pouring water over someone’s head. We can trust God to direct in such exceptional situations.

Some churches teach that salvation takes place at the time of baptism. They believe the act of baptism in water is what changes a person spiritually. This is not the pattern taught in the New Testament. Nowhere in Scripture is there even a suggestion that baptism saves a person. If that were so, a dying person who accepted Christ would still be lost if there were no chance for baptism. For example, the thief on the cross never had a chance to be baptized. Yet, Jesus told him he would meet him in Paradise (Luke 23:43).

In the New Testament, believers gave evidence of their decision to follow Christ by being baptized. The disciples baptized 3,000 new converts on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Baptism depicts the old sinful life that has been buried with Christ and the new life that arises in Christ with salvation. Baptism illustrates leaving the old sinful life behind and entering the new life in Christ.

It is not the external act that saves us, but a sincere turning of the soul to God. This is what baptism symbolizes. Water baptism is a picture of a spiritual baptism into the universal body of Christ. Salvation can take place anytime and anywhere, when the human heart believes and accepts Christ's provision. Baptism must wait for an appropriate time. Water does not wash away sin. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can do that. If a person is not saved before being baptized, he goes down into the water a dry sinner and comes up a wet sinner.

Jesus gave a commission to his disciples before he returned to heaven: "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" (Matt 28:19-20). Included in that Great Commission is his command to baptize believers. A person should not be baptized just because someone else has done it or to qualify for church membership. It may not make you a better Christian. Water baptism, like any command of God, should be taken seriously. It should be done because we want to please God, and be obedient—and for no other reason. This command is for all Christ's followers for all generations.

When a man and woman want to be married, they usually plan a ceremony and invite family and friends. They want these people to witness their commitment to one another. Water baptism shows one's friends and family a similar kind of commitment between the believer and Jesus Christ. Because of this commitment, baptism should never be treated lightly. Public water baptism is a testimony to the world that a person has accepted Christ as Savior and is now following his commands, living for him. In many communities, persecution follows a person's identifying with Christ in public baptism. In other places, a baptismal service becomes an opportunity to invite unbelievers to accept Jesus and become his followers. Either way, God is pleased when believers are born again and become part of Christ's body in this way.

We teach that water baptism follows a person's repenting of their sin and acceptance of Christ, according to the Bible pattern. It is often called 'believer baptism.' Children who understand salvation can be baptized at a young age. They should be instructed to make sure they know the meaning of baptism. Teenagers and adults, even the elderly, should also be encouraged to testify of their commitment to Christ through baptism. One person cannot be baptized for another person and we do not practice baptism for the dead. We also do not baptize babies. They are not yet able to make a conscious choice to believe in Christ. Obeying Christ's command in water baptism should be preceded by careful teaching of the responsibility it calls for and the blessings it offers.

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.” Our memory verse is: “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” (Matthew 28:19).

This lesson is **important** because it discusses some practical questions about water baptism. The story of the Ethiopian who believed on Jesus and was baptized, illustrates Philip’s obedience to Christ’s command. Baptism does not wash away sin; only Jesus’ blood can do that. Public baptism is a testimony to others that a person has died to their old life and risen to a new life in Christ.

The **main truth** of this lesson on water baptism is that it is a command of Christ meant for every believer to experience.

Let’s **review** this lesson:

1. Who was the first person in the Bible to practice water baptism? [Pause.]
A. If you said it was John the Baptist, you are correct.
2. Does water baptism save a person from sin? [Pause.]
A. If you answered, “No, water baptism does not save a person from sin, the blood of Jesus does,” you are right.
3. What is the purpose of public water baptism? [Pause.]
A. If you said, “Water baptism is a public testimony that a person has accepted Christ as Savior and is now living for him,” you are correct.

Your **assignment** is to memorize our sixth *Statement of Faith* and the memory verse: “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” (Matthew 28:19). Review all six *Statements of Faith* until you can say them from memory. Then share with several other people about the purpose of water baptism.

Statement #1: We believe the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired of God. They are the revelation of God to man, the unchanging rule of faith and conduct.

Statement #2: We believe the one true God has revealed himself as the eternal Creator of heaven and earth and the Savior of mankind. He has further revealed himself as one being in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Statement #3: We believe the Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, as revealed in the Scriptures by his virgin birth, his sinless life, his miracles, his death on the Cross, his bodily resurrection from the dead, and his position at the right hand of God.

Statement #4: We believe that human beings were created in the image of God for a loving relationship with him. They chose to disobey God, however, and thus experienced physical death and separation from God.

Statement #5: We believe mankind’s only hope of salvation is through the shed blood of Jesus, the Son of God. The gift of eternal life is received when we repent of our sins and confess our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Statement #6: 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.