

## Must I Be Baptized?

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Throughout Christendom baptism is looked upon as a revered part of Christian tradition. Few would want to disassociate baptism from Christianity. Most religious people realize there is great symbolism in the act. Some of the great paintings of history are of the baptism of Jesus or of John's baptizing in the Jordan. What a beautiful and meaningful act. Yet, the meaning and significance of baptism are greatly disputed. Some might become discouraged over the dissension concerning baptism. However, if you seek to please God, you will search the Scriptures to find baptism's significance and then submit to whatever God says. Let's try to put away all the traditional ideas concerning baptism and let God alone tell what it is and what it means.

"Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:36). This honest worshipper of God had just been taught about Christ by an evangelist named Philip. The Bible says, "And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him" (Acts 8:35). Something Philip said while preaching Jesus caused this Ethiopian to desire baptism immediately. New Testament evangelists must have preached Christ with a strong emphasis on the importance of baptism. They must have believed that Jesus wanted them to stress the urgency of baptism. Exactly what did Jesus say about it?

"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit'"; (Matthew 28:18-19). The reason Philip and the other New Testament evangelists attached great importance to baptism was that Jesus had said He wanted every believer to be baptized. That was enough to convince them that they needed to try to persuade every believer in Christ to be baptized. Thus, when Philip "preached Jesus", he included baptism. Other New Testament examples testify to the urgency of both the message and the response concerning baptism (Acts 2:37-41; 16:32-33). If such urgency is placed upon baptism by Jesus and His apostles and evangelists, then it must play an important role in someone coming to Christ. What significance does the Bible attach to baptism?

"And He (Jesus) said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned'"; (Mark 16:15-16). Here, as Jesus charges His apostles, He identifies the role of baptism in His plan for saving man. He says that, along with belief in Him, baptism is necessary for salvation. That makes it pretty important. His followers faithfully taught the same concerning baptism. As the church began, Peter, along with other apostles, stood up and preached Christ in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and said, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Thus, they, too, taught baptism was involved in the forgiveness of sins. Later, when the apostle Paul first became a Christian, he was told, "And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16).

According to the Bible, baptism is the climactic act of obedience that puts you into Christ: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothes yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:27). Again, in Romans 6:3 Paul reminds Christians, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" Whatever symbolism the religious world tries to attach to baptism, one conclusion is inescapable. The Bible says it is necessary for salvation or forgiveness of our sins. It could not be stated more plainly than in the passages we have examined. Therefore, anyone who honestly seeks to please God will be baptized for the reasons stated in the Bible. If you haven't been baptized for those reasons, then I can only ask as it was asked of Paul: "Why do you delay?" Listen to the Bible, God's Word. He will not lead you wrong on this matter.