

Baptism – A Commandment

Many are confused about the New Testament doctrine of baptism due to the diversity of teaching and practice among various religious groups. Unquestionably baptism is a Bible topic. Since the Lord placed significance on baptism, we must not assume it is unimportant, nor inconsequential.

Baptism in water was introduced during the ministry of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:5, 6). Jesus Himself even was baptized by John to fulfill all righteousness (3:13, 15). Baptism required “much water” (John 3:23), and the person would go down into the water and then come up from the water (Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:38, 39). These descriptions of the action illustrate what the Greek word for baptism actually means – to dip, to immerse, to submerge.

Following Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Lord taught His disciples concerning the kingdom of God. Prior to His ascension He sent out His apostles to preach the gospel throughout the world. Included in His instruction was the commandment of baptism, which rests on His divine authority. *“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 of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”* (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus intended for baptism to be preached and practiced.

The apostles of Christ were faithful to the Lord’s commission. When they preached Christ, they also commanded baptism in the name of the Lord (Acts 2:38; 10:47, 48). Examples of conversion in the book of Acts emphasize a pattern. Believers were baptized. There was also a sense of urgency in obeying the Lord’s commandment. Upon hearing and receiving the gospel of salvation, believers responded by being immersed in water – 3,000 on Pentecost (Acts 2:41), the Ethiopian (8:36-38), Saul of Tarsus (9:17-19), Lydia (16:14, 15), and the jailer (16:31-33).

The command of baptism is not a meaningless ritual. The word of God reveals the object and purpose of this immersion in water, which is according to the Son’s authority: *“be saved”* (Mark 16:16); *“for the remission of sins”* (Acts 2:38); *“wash away your sins”* (22:16); *“buried with Him [Christ]”* (Romans 6:4); *“baptism now saves us”* (I Peter 3:21). Scriptures point out the significance and the urgency of the commandment of baptism. *“Those who gladly received his word were baptized.”* (Acts 2:41)