

## Why Be Baptized?

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I've seen football fans who've painted themselves purple to match the color of their team, shaved the name of their team into their haircuts, worn silly rubber mascot masks, tattooed the team logo onto their shoulders, and even shortened their honeymoons, all in the name of loyalty. However, if for no other reason than sheer longevity, none of these expressions of fanatic enthusiasm can compare with the support of Giles Pellerin for the University of Southern California Trojan football team.

Pellerin, at eighty-seven years old, attended his seven hundred fiftieth consecutive USC football game. He has not missed a Trojan game – home or away – in sixty-nine years. One year he had an emergency appendectomy just five days before a game. Still hospitalized on Saturday, he told the nurses he was going for a walk and instead went to the stadium.

Why make such sacrifices to identify with an athletic team? Pellerin's answer: "But that's just all part of being a fan."

Though few go to Pellerin's extremes, there are millions throughout the world whose actions prove that they agree that "part of being a fan" is to openly demonstrate your dedication.

Jesus asks that we openly identify with Him as well. How important is baptism? Why should anyone seek baptism in a local church?

Experiencing baptism doesn't make you right with God. The water of baptism does not wash away the guilt of your disobedience to the laws of God. Rather it is the grace of God, through the work of Jesus Christ that brings you into God's family and favor (Ephesians 2:8-9). That doesn't mean, however, that baptism is unimportant. Although baptism is never equated with faith or salvation in the New Testament, it is closely associated with both.

### **Baptism Openly Identifies You as a Follower of Christ**

"The Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John the Baptist," (John 4:1), Jesus didn't do the actual baptizing, His disciples did. Thousands often flocked to Jesus, some to be healed, some to see a miracle, many just to see this famous man from Galilee. But others went further by committing themselves to be Jesus' disciples and submitting to a baptism that publicly marked them as His.

The last words of Jesus before He ascended into Heaven, according to Matthew 28:19, were "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."

The timing of this command of Christ is significant. He had completed His work of living, dying, and rising from the dead. Before He returns to heaven, He gives what has been called the "Great Commission" about making "disciples of all the nations." Part of being a disciple is identifying with Christ in baptism.

For example, when Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, that day when the Holy Spirit first came upon all who were followers of Jesus, Acts 2:41 reports this response by some of Peter's listeners: "Then

those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.”

When Saul of Tarsus, who later became known as the apostle Paul, became a believer in Jesus Christ, “he arose and was baptized” (Acts 9:18). Later when Paul was in the Grecian city of Philippi, a jailer implored him, “What must I do to be saved?” The answer was, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:30-31. “And immediately,” says verse 33, “he and all his family were baptized.”

### **Baptism Openly Obeys the Command of Christ**

Baptism is no mere custom started by ancient church leaders, then passed down from generation to generation as a meaningless religious ritual. Baptism is a practice ordained by Jesus Christ Himself.

Let’s look again at Jesus’ Great Commission to the church: “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; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus commanded baptism for those who become His disciples.

### **Baptism Openly Expresses Your Faith in These Truths**

Christian baptism is symbolic of many things. To submit to baptism says that you believe what baptism represents.

#### **1. God Is Triune**

Jesus instructed His disciples to be baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Baptism “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” is another way of identifying yourself with each member of the Trinity. In other words, you are not being baptized in the name of Moses, or the name of the apostle Paul, or the name of your church or pastor, but rather in the name of the triune God. Thus you are declaring allegiance and devotion to the God of the Bible. You are saying, “I belong to Him.”

By submitting to a baptism where “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” is spoken over you, you are agreeing with the teaching that God is Triune. You are saying through your baptism that you believe there is only one God who is three persons.

Baptism “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” confesses your belief that each member of the Trinity is involved in your salvation and that you are brought into a relationship with each.

- God the Father chose you before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-6).
- God the Son died a bloody, painful death to make you right with the Father (Romans 5:1, 9-10; Galatians 2:16).
- God the Holy Spirit opened your eyes, enabling you to see your need to be reconciled to God and to believe in the work of Jesus Christ (John 16:8; I Corinthians 1:12; Titus 3:5; I Peter 1:2).

## **2. Your Sins Have Been Washed Away**

Water baptism doesn't wash away sins; rather, it symbolizes cleansing. The baptismal water, which washes the body, is a picture the cleansing of the soul. The outward act of baptism portrays the inward purification that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

In the course of his famous sermon to the thousands gathered in Jerusalem in Acts 2, Peter proclaimed, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (v. 38)

Some have taken the words "be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" to mean that the forgiveness (remission) of sins and reception of "the gift of the Holy Spirit" occur at the time of baptism. This is incorrect. When you see a poster that says: "WANTED: John Doe for Murder," that doesn't mean John Doe is wanted for the purpose of murdering someone, but he is wanted because he already has murdered someone. Likewise, the Bible teaches here that those who have repented of their sin and believed in Jesus Christ for the remission of sins should be baptized because their sins are now forgiven. It affirms that repenting believers are given the gift of the Holy Spirit when they repent and believe

Furthermore, it is not "the asking" for forgiveness of sins plus baptism that results in the washing away of sins. To do this would be adding our work to the work of Christ, who lived and died and rose again for our salvation. It would mean that Jesus is not sufficient as a Savior. Our salvation would also be dependent upon our own baptismal actions as well as the efforts of another to baptize us. A right relationship with God would no longer be totally by the grace of God, Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved...not of works." Part of the glory of our salvation would then belong to us because we participated in the righteous act of baptism. Paul stated in Titus 3:5, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." God saves us by giving us new spiritual life and the Holy Spirit to help us to live the Christian life, not by baptism. Notice that baptism is not mentioned at all in this passage. Although baptism is an important practice, if it were essential for salvation, we would always see it mentioned when the Bible talks about being made right with God.

## **3. You Have Been United with Christ in His Death and Resurrection**

Your submission to baptism also announces your faith in the Bible's teaching about the believer's identification with Christ. Read what the apostle Paul says about this great truth in Romans 6:3-5: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection."

It is important to understand that the baptism spoken of here is spiritual in nature. Baptism means "to be placed into." When we are born again, the Holy Spirit baptizes, or places us, "into" Jesus Christ. Paul spoke similarly elsewhere when he said, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:13). So the Holy Spirit places us, or baptizes, us "into Christ Jesus" and "into one body," i.e., the body of Christ.

Obviously these passages do not teach that we are physically placed into the human body of Jesus Christ. So this baptism is something done in the spiritual realm. There is a mysterious, but true, spiritual unity that the Creator has created between Christ and those who believe in Him.

Water baptism symbolizes unity with Christ and what he did for us. It is a statement of faith that you have been placed into Christ, bonded with Him spiritually. Receiving baptism with water expresses your belief that you have received the baptism by the Spirit into Christ.

#### **4. Through Christ God Has Given You a New Life**

Baptism announces to the world that you have a new life in Christ. You emerge from the baptismal experience a living testimony to the truth of II Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

"I've been changed," your baptism exclaims: "I'm not the person I was before meeting Christ. I'm alive to God now. My life is different – my thoughts, my actions, my heart, my perspective – they're all new."

This symbolic connection between baptism and a new life is suggested in Romans 6:4: "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life".

Jesus avowed, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25), and proved it by His resurrection to new life. Those who have been united with the living Christ, the God-man who "was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father," are united with life. This new life – eternal life – transforms them from the inside out. Planted and growing within them are new loves (love for God, love for His Word, love for His people), new desires (for purity, for holy living, for heaven), new priorities (the will of God), and more. This is not merely turning over a new leaf, but being given a new life. Baptism is both a testimony to this new life within and a pledge to "walk in newness of life."

\*This article is adapted from a book called *Spiritual Disciples within the Church* by Donald Whitney.