CORNERSTONE boulder

What is Baptism?

Baptism is an outward expression of our inward faith. It's a symbol (sacrament) of our faith in Jesus Christ as your Leader, and your Savior. The purpose of baptism is to give visual testimony of our personal commitment to Jesus. It is one of the first steps of discipleship (Acts 8:26-39).

New Testament Baptism was born out of the Jewish tradition of Mikva. A Mikvah is a ritual practice of immersion in water that was used to symbolize a person's change of direction and faith. People would choose to enter the Mikvah to symbolize their new faith or renewed faith and repentance. New Testament authors used the Greek word for "βαπτιζω" (Baptism) which literally means to "dip" or to "immerse".

According to Romans 6:1-10, Baptism symbolizes three very important things:

1. First, baptism is a picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. As we stand in the water we are representing Christ on the cross. As we are dipped underwater we illustrate the burial of Christ. As we come out of the water we demonstrate the resurrection of Christ.

2. Second, baptism is a personal testimony to us of the washing away of our sins. As we go under the water we reconfirm that our sins are forgiven and as we come out of the water we are resurrected to live a new life in Christ.

3. Third, baptism represents our personal identification with Christ. Paul declared in Romans 6:3-4 "We were buried with Christ in baptism and we are raised to walk in a new life" as forgiven followers of Christ empowered by the Spirit of God.

Throughout church history, baptism by immersion has taken on several forms and traditions. For example, some baptize in "living water" (stream or spring) by dipping oneself three times into the water in the "name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit". The most common mode of baptism is a single backward immersion in the "name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit."

The Bible teaches that our commitment to Jesus always precedes baptism. The New Testament's order is, personal faith followed by public baptism.

Do You Need to be Baptized to be Saved?

According to God's Word, Baptism is not a requirement of salvation. Let's examine what the Scriptures teach on this issue:

It is quite clear from such passages as Acts 15 and Romans 4 that no external act is necessary for salvation. Salvation is by divine grace through faith alone (Romans 3:22, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30; 4:5; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 3:9, etc.). If water baptism were necessary for salvation, we would expect to find it stressed whenever the saving gospel of Jeuss is presented in Scripture Paul never made water baptism any part of his gospel presentations. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul gives a concise summary of the gospel message he preached. There is no mention of baptism. In 1 Corinthians 1:17, Paul states that "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel," thus clearly differentiating the gospel from baptism.
If baptism were part of the gospel itself, necessary for salvation, what good would it have done Paul to preach the gospel, but not baptize? No one would have been saved. The penitent woman (Luke 7:37-50), the paralytic man (Matthew 9:2), the publican (Luke 18:13-14), and the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43) all experienced forgiveness of sins apart from baptism. For that matter, we have no record of the apostles' being baptized, yet Jesus pronounced them clean of their sins (John 15:3—note that the Word of God, not baptism, is what cleansed them).
There are two Bible verses that may cause confusion in regards to how baptism and salvation is mentioned together. Acts 2:38 says "repent and be baptized"... meaning that baptism is not required but a physical next step to take after the spiritual step. Mark 16:6 "whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."...again ,baptism is stated as a natural next step after the spiritual believing. It is the belief that grants salvation and the failture to believe that causes condemnation.

Water baptism is certainly important, however, the New Testament does not teach that baptism is necessary for salvation.

Jesus' Baptism

Matthew 3:13-17 - "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."
If John was baptizing for repentance and Jesus was without sin, why would he have to be baptized? Jesus' meaning in Matthew 3:15 was not a statement that baptism is necessary for salvation, nor that he needed to repent of anything. The intent of the Jewish people regarding baptism was to signify their readiness to follow the will of God. So by engaging in this action, by

including himself in this tradition of his people, Jesus “fulfills all righteousness,” not merely by the physical act, but by the spiritual implications of it.

There was no written legal requirement for Jesus to be baptized in order to inaugurate his ministry. Jesus followed the law, but he also followed the traditions in line with the heart of the law. By this act, Jesus proclaims the beginning of his ministry.

Scriptures on Baptism

1 Peter 3:21 - "and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.."
Colossians 2:21 - "having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead."
Ephesians 4:4-6 - "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."
Acts 22:16 - "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’"