

LESSON

5 Churches Baptize Believers

Years ago in mainland China some Chinese Christians were discussing various churches' views on water baptism. One lay leader expressed said, "Some groups believe in 'Big Wash.' Others hold to 'Little Wash.' And the rest have 'No Wash.'"

The speaker meant that those in the "No Wash" group do not practice any form of baptismal ceremony. To them it is not essential.

The "Little Wash" group represents the churches that practice baptism by sprinkling water as a symbol of water baptism. Most of these churches also use colorful and impressive rituals.

"Big Wash" groups practice baptism by immersion, putting the candidates under the water. Pentecostal or full gospel churches are in this group. Before being baptized, however, a person should understand the meaning of baptism and why it is recognized as an ordinance of the church.

The Plan

- A. The Symbolism of Baptism
- B. Its Purpose
- C. Its Forms

The Goals

- 1. Explain what water baptism symbolizes.
- 2. State truths concerning the importance of water baptism.
- 3. Evaluate forms of baptism in light of Scripture.

A. THE SYMBOLISM OF BAPTISM

Goal 1. Explain what water baptism symbolizes.

Mary has not yet been baptized in water, although she has seen others being baptized. Timothy, who has already taken the step, is encouraging her to do the same.

“I don’t understand why we have to be put under the water. I wouldn’t want people to see me come up with my hair all wet!”

“They won’t be looking at that,” encourages Timothy. “Haven’t you noticed how people seem to glow with joy after they are baptized? That is because they have identified themselves with the Lord Jesus. All the Christians rejoice with them.”

“I do want to obey the Lord,” agrees Mary. “But I still don’t fully understand.”

“After we attend the class for baptismal candidates, you will,” Timothy assures her. “And you will be eager to be baptized too!”

Jesus instituted two ordinances—water baptism and communion, both of which portray great Bible truths in visual form. An ordinance is an established rule or an authoritative decree. Church ordinances are based on the authority of

God's Word. In this lesson we will look at the first of these ordinances, water baptism. Water baptism gives a two-fold picture. The first is that of Christ dying in our place. The apostle Paul writes,

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:3–4)

The convert going down into the water pictures Christ dying for our sins. His or her being momentarily under the water speaks of Christ being buried. Then when he or she is lifted out of the water this demonstrates Christ being raised to life. Paul writes, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

Baptism is also a picture of our deliverance from sin and union with Christ. The believer baptized in water illustrates the following truths:

1. He or she is "crucified with him" (Romans 6:6). Galatians 2:20 also refers to the old nature being crucified with Christ.
2. He or she is "buried with him" (Colossians 2:12). The believer being baptized is attending, in a spiritual sense, his or her own funeral. The old self life must die and be buried.
3. He or she is "raised with him" (Colossians 2:12). Jesus said, "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19).
4. He or she now lives "a new life" (Romans 6:4). Like Paul, he or she can say, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

Christian baptism is summarized in these words: "All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

Application

1 Complete the following sentence. For a believer being baptized, going into the water symbolizes that Christ ; being under the water symbolizes that Christ was ; coming out of the water symbolizes that He was

2 Water baptism is also a picture of something that happens to the old self. Write it in your own words.

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B. ITS PURPOSE

Goal 2. State truths concerning the importance of water baptism.

Christian baptism probably had its origin in a custom observed by the Jews before the time of Christ. When a Gentile (non-Jew) chose to follow the true God, he underwent a baptism. The convert would stand in water while a rabbi read to him a passage from the law of Moses. Then the convert would plunge into the water as a sign of cleansing himself from the old life of heathenism. Coming out of the water symbolized his new life as one of God’s covenant people. He “acted out” his decision to serve the Lord.

Today baptism in water is a public witness that a believer has accepted Christ and chooses to follow Him in the fellowship of a local church.

A church leader, such as the pastor, performs the baptismal ceremony. Baptism in water is usually a once-in-a-lifetime experience. However, a person who was baptized at a time when he or she was not truly converted might desire to be

baptized again, in order to experience a meaningful baptism in place of an empty ritual.

In simple terms, baptism is an outward sign of an inner trust in Christ. It is a public confession of Christian discipleship in obedience to Jesus' command to make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).


The Bible does not say where baptismal services should be held. We recall some rather unusual services, one which took place at the seashore. For this we had to get special permission from the authorities. Soldiers holding their guns with bayonets fixed watched as the national pastor and I baptized converts. Seeing the candidates for baptism being put under the waves and then brought up again while people sang joyful choruses made them curious.

“What kind of ceremony is this?” they asked.

Thus the way was opened for believers to tell about their salvation and why they were following the Lord in baptism.

Regardless of the facilities, whether in a church baptistry or in a river or stream, the spiritual significance of baptism and our confession of Christ are of primary importance.

Application

- 3** Which of the following statements are true?
- a)** My loyalty to Christ is expressed by my obedience to His commands.
 - b)** Water baptism is an outward sign of an inward trust, an acceptance of Christ as my Savior.
 - c)** It is important for me to be baptized if it is part of our family tradition.
 - d)** I should be willing to confess Christ publicly and let the world know that I have accepted Him as Lord of my life.
 - e)** Baptism is worthwhile but optional for Christians.
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C. ITS FORMS

Goal 3. Evaluate forms of baptism in light of Scripture.

John's Baptism

In a desert area by the Jordan River a prophet named John the Baptist preached repentance. Luke later wrote, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus” (Acts 19:4).

Then one day Jesus appeared and He, too, asked to be baptized. John declined for he knew who Jesus was—the Son of God! Jesus had no sin and did not need to repent and be baptized. But Jesus told John that by being baptized He would fulfill what God required, and John agreed to baptize Him (Matthew 3:13–15).

As soon as Jesus was baptized, He came up out of the water. Then heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and lighting on Him. A voice spoke from heaven, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16–17). Thus Jesus identified himself with sinful humankind, becoming an example for us all.

Application

4 Complete the following sentences.

- a)** John’s baptism was a baptism of
b) Christ’s baptism identified Him with
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Baptism in the Early Church

The baptism of John served a unique purpose in preparing people to receive their Messiah (Matthew 3:1–6). It was a sign of confessing and turning from their sins. After the death of Christ baptism took on new meaning. Now, because their sins were washed away by the shed blood of Jesus, believers were baptized to identify themselves with His completed work of

redemption. (Acts 22:16; 1 John 1:7). However, the water of baptism in itself can never wash away sins! Cleansing from sin comes only through the merit of Christ's shed blood.

In the Great Commission, Christ's clear command is to make disciples by going to all people everywhere, baptizing and teaching them (Matthew 28:19–20). The early church leaders baptized converts in obedience to Christ's command. We read of 3,000 baptized on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Philip the evangelist baptized the Ethiopian official when he believed on Jesus Christ (Acts 8:36–38). Ananias, a layman, baptized Saul who later became the apostle Paul (Acts 9:18). Cornelius, captain of the Italian Regiment, together with relatives and close friends, was baptized in water after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them (Acts 10:24–48).

During Paul's first ministry in Europe, Lydia and her household were baptized (Acts 16:15). Later the Roman jailer and his family were baptized (Acts 16:32–34). Then in Corinth a leader of the synagogue, Crispus, and his family believed on Christ and were baptized along with many others (Acts 18:8).

From all these records of baptisms we learn that turning from sin (repentance) and believing in Jesus as Savior were essential requirements. We also learn that baptism in water was not the same experience as conversion, or the same experience as the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Application

- 5** Which of the following statements is true?
- a)** The baptism of John the Baptist and ours today have the same meaning.
 - b)** The early church baptized in obedience to Christ.
 - c)** Conversion, water baptism, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit are all terms for the same general experience.
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Forms of Baptism Today

Pentecostal churches believe that immersion (putting the candidate completely under the water) agrees with New Testament teaching and practice. In some churches, tradition (and perhaps a lack of water long ago) changed baptism by immersion to baptism by sprinkling or pouring. This form of baptism, however, does not give as clear a picture of Christ who died, was buried, and rose again.

A few groups who believe in immersion also make an issue of being baptized in the name of Jesus, because this phrase is used in Acts 2:38 and Acts 19:5. It was probably used to distinguish Christian baptism from John's baptism, and most evangelical churches do not try to build a doctrine on it. Christ's own command leaves no question: "'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).

Another group baptizes three times—once in the name of the Father, once in the name of the Son, and once in the name of the Holy Spirit. They do it to honor the persons of the Trinity (Triune God), but we do not see that as essential. The act of baptism needs to be only once, even as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one.

Tradition also brought about infant baptism—sprinkling water on a baby to be sure he or she will go to heaven upon death. But a baby has not sinned; neither has he or she knowledge of right and wrong. Therefore, babies have no need of repentance. Many believers choose instead to dedicate their children to the Lord. We shall study about this in Lesson 8.

If you have not been baptized in water, we hope this lesson has helped you to see what the Bible teaches on baptism. As you follow the Lord in baptism, His blessings await you!

Application

6 Circle the letter in front of each true statement.

- a)** Babies should be sprinkled with water to wash away their sins.
- b)** Baptism should be a sad experience because it reminds us of our sin.
- c)** Religious traditions may not always follow Bible teaching.
- d)** One must be baptized to be saved.
- e)** Every believer should obey the Lord's command to be baptized.

7 Fill in the following blanks.

- a)** Jesus' command was to be baptized in the name of the , the , and the
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- b)** Baptism by putting the believer under the water is called
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- c)** Why do Pentecostals practice baptism by immersion?
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Check Your Answers

- 1 died for us, buried, raised to life.
- 5 **b)** is true.
- 2 Your own words. Your answer might be something like this: When we accept Christ our old life is put away and we are raised to live a new life in Him.
- 6 **c)** and **e)** are true.
- 3 **a)**, **b)**, and **d)** are true.
- 7 **a)** Father, Son, Holy Spirit.
b) immersion.
c) They believe it agrees with New Testament practice and teaching.
- 4 **a)** repentance.
b) sinful humankind.

Now that you have completed the first unit, you are ready to answer the questions in Unit One Evaluation. Review the previous lessons, then follow the instructions in your student report. Send your answer sheet to the address given on the copyright page of your study guide.



Lessons

- 6 Churches Remember the Lord's Death**
- 7 Churches Provide Fellowship**
- 8 Churches Celebrate**
- 9 Churches Grow**
- 10 Churches Serve People**