

Lifting Up Jesus

#26

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

We learned in a previous lesson that we were all born in Adam. We were sinners by birth and by nature. Because of this, we of ourselves could not change our hearts and thereby, our actions. In addition, through the sacrifice of Christ for the whole world He has redeemed humanity. Nevertheless, because God created mankind with a free will, He will not force this gift of salvation on anyone. Only those who receive this gift of salvation by faith and are baptized into Christ will obtain it.

The word, “baptism” is used 97 times in the Bible. This gives us some indication of its supreme importance. However, what does it mean and how does it affect us? In this lesson, we will explore what God teaches about baptism.

1. How important is baptism? Mark 16:15, 16; John 3:3–5

2. What is the meaning of baptism? Romans 6:3–5; Col. 2:12

Note: When we are baptized, we show that we are identifying with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism means that we have died with Christ and buried the old self of sin and that we are rising to “a new life in Christ”. The physical act of baptism graphically represents the steps of conversion. First we are lowered into the water; we are immersed completely just as people who have died are lowered into the grave and covered. This indicates that we have died with Christ and have buried our old lifestyle. Baptism is a funeral, a formal farewell to an existence where sin dominated. Then we are lifted up out of the water just like a person being resurrected from the grave. In this world, we begin with life and end with death. In the spiritual, we begin with death and end with eternal life.

3. Who is first mentioned as administering baptism in the New Testament? Matt. 3:1–6

4. Why was John the Baptist baptizing out in the wilderness? John 3:23

5. Why did Jesus say it was necessary for Him to be baptized? Matt. 3:13–17

Note: Jesus was sinless. He did not need to repent of any wrongdoing or have any guilt washed away. Christ was baptized for another reason: “to fulfill all righteousness.” By allowing John to immerse Him in the waters of the Jordan River, Jesus set a positive example for us. He identified Himself fully with weak, sinful human beings; He was willing to take all the steps THEY needed to take. Therefore, when believers are immersed in the waters of baptism, they are following in the steps of their Lord.

6. Was the Father pleased when His Son, our Lord Jesus was baptized? Mark 1:11

7. What does the Bible say that indicates that Christ was baptized by immersion? Mark 1:10

8. What about the early church disciples? By what means did they baptize? Acts 8:36–38

Note: When we understand the true meaning of baptism, we have little difficulty recognizing the authentic form of baptism. The very word “baptize” comes from the Greek word “baptizo”, and means to dip or immerse under water. For the first thirteen centuries, the almost universal practice of baptism was that of immersion. Archaeology has uncovered many baptisteries of the early church. It was not until the Council of Ravenna early in the fifteenth century that the Catholic Church accepted sprinkling as equally valid with immersion for convenience sake. Many Protestants have adopted and adapted what the Catholic Church had changed at an earlier time.

9. What did Jesus instruct His followers to do before they baptized people? Matt. 28:19, 20

Note: Being discipled and taught is part of the preparation for baptism. It is impossible for infants or small children to grasp the significance of salvation. A candidate for baptism is to be taught to “observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

10. What did Peter say we are to do before we are baptized? Acts 2:38

Note: In a total surrender of the heart to Christ, repentance comes by way of the Holy Spirit. Jesus also promises the “gifts” of the Holy Spirit to those who are baptized into Christ. The gifts of the Spirit are those special gifts that are given to you for the building up of God’s kingdom. Some gifts include teaching, wisdom, hospitality, serving, giving, etc.

11. By what rite of passage was membership in God’s church obtained? Acts 2:41

12. How important is a public confession of our faith to God? Matt. 10:32, 33

Conclusion: In this life, we need to die! The only choice we have is how. Either we die to ourselves and become alive again in Christ through baptism or we die as a sinner in Adam.

By dying in our place at Calvary, Jesus made a public demonstration of His love for us. We need to respond with a public demonstration of our own, an unashamed confession of our commitment to Christ through baptism.¹

¹ Lewis, K. A. (2010). *Lifting up Jesus: Bible Study Lessons*. Walla Walla, WA: Karen Ann Lewis.