

# What the Bible Says About Baptism

Special Topic  
By David Arnold

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Baptism is important because it relates to our keeping the unity of the Spirit. The term "baptism" is used in the Bible to refer to John's baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the baptism of suffering, and in other ways. In this article we will only consider the one baptism which must be accepted to keep the unity of the Spirit.

The apostle Paul entreated his readers to "preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Eph. 4:1-3. He then wrote: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all." Eph. 4:4-6.

Most, who believe in the Bible as the inspired word of God, have little difficulty understanding or accepting six of the seven one's of this passage. They believe in God as Father, Jesus as Lord and the Holy Spirit as the revealer. Most do not seek to add to or take from this concept. Most hold to one hope of eternal life after the life on earth. Perhaps most believe that the one faith is the revealed will of God and that the one body is God's spiritual family or church. There are misconceptions about the one faith and the the one body, but it is on the one baptism that great differences occur.

The one baptism was commanded.

When Paul speaks of the one baptism in Eph. 4:5, he refers to that baptism which was being practiced at that time. Paul had received this baptism, and he taught it's necessity.

Not long before Jesus' ascension, He said to the apostles, "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 the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I command you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matt. 28:18-20.

This baptism is obviously important. Jesus commands it based on His having all authority. The baptism is to be in the "name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." The command to be baptized should be considered seriously.

The one baptism is in water.

When Philip had taught the Ethiopian eunuch about Jesus, he had included Jesus' teaching on baptism. They were riding in the chariot toward Gaza when "they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" Acts 8:36. The eunuch confessed his faith in Jesus Christ as God's Son. "And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him." Acts 8:38.

After Peter had preached to Cornelius and his house, and having observed the gift of the Holy Spirit having been poured out on them, he said, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he? And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." Acts 8:47, 48.

The one baptism is for penitent believers.

One cannot expect to do anything acceptable to God unless one is acting by faith. "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." Heb. 11:6.

Peter taught the devout Jews that Jesus was approved of God, they had demanded his crucifixion, God had raised Him from the dead and that He had ascended back to the Father. He then said, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified." Acts 2:36.

The Jews then asked what they must do. It seems apparent that they recognized their sin of having rejected Jesus and they wanted forgiveness. Peter understood this to be their meaning and commanded, "Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Acts 2:38.

Jesus had told the apostles to make disciples. They were to

teach them about Christ. It was these disciples that were to be baptized. Matt. 28:19. Those who do not believe in Jesus as Christ are not subjects of Bible baptism. The persons who were commanded to repent and be baptized were believers in Jesus as Lord. Acts 2:36-38.

The one baptism is not for non-believers or those too young to believe. It is not for those who are unwilling to repent of their sins. Baptism is for believers in Christ who have repented of their sins.

The one baptism is for the remission of sins.

Just as one is to repent in order to have the remission of sins, so is he also to be baptized to have his sins forgiven by God. Remember, Peter commanded, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Acts 2:38.

Some deny that baptism is "for the forgiveness" of sins. The same argument would preclude the necessity of repentance, because repentance and baptism are joined as conditions which must be fulfilled in order to obtain forgiveness.

In Matt. 26:28, as Jesus initiated the memorial to His approaching death, He said, "for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins." Jesus declared that His blood was shed "for forgiveness of sins." All serious Bible students conclude that this means that Jesus shed His blood in order to provide the forgiveness of sins. Using the same words, Peter declares that repentance and baptism are in order to provide the forgiveness of sins. How can the serious Bible student believe that Jesus must have necessarily shed His blood in order to provide the remission of sins and, at the same time, deny that repentance and baptism are necessary to obtaining the forgiveness of sins?

Saul, the penitent believer, was commanded, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." Acts 22:16. If you, like Saul, believe in Jesus as Lord and repent of your sins, could you understand the message, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins"? Surely you would understand this command unless you had believed false teaching that baptism has nothing to do with salvation. May I suggest that you carefully consider how some perish because

they believe false teaching. II Thess. 2:10-12.

The one baptism is into Christ.

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Gal. 3:26, 27. We are sons of God "in Christ Jesus." How do we come to be in Christ? We are baptized into Christ!

It is "in Christ" that we are new creatures. "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." II Cor. 5:17. Penitent believers are baptized into Christ, and it is in Christ that they are new creatures.

The one baptism is a burial into the death of Christ.

Paul uses the figure of circumcision made without hands, in contradistinction to that made by hands, to describe the "removal of the body of the flesh" in Col. 2:11.

He continues to describe how the process of this spiritual circumcision, or cutting away sin, is accomplished as he says "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." Col. 2:12.

He reminded the Roman saints, "or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." Rom. 6:3, 4.

These passages, indicating that baptism is a burial, are in harmony with the example of the Ethiopian, considered earlier in this article. They came to water. Acts 8:36 The chariot was stopped. Philip and the Ethiopian both went down into the water, Philip baptized the Ethiopian, and they both came up out of the water. Acts 8:38, 39. Sprinkling or pouring water on a candidate is not the one baptism depicted in the Bible.

Baptism is important in keeping the unity of the Spirit. It is commanded and is for the forgiveness of sins. It is a burial in

water. If you study the subject carefully, without the bias of those who have taught false doctrine, you can understand that you, as a penitent believer, should receive baptism for the remission of your sins. You will, then, be a new creature in Christ, and the Lord will add you to His church. Acts 2:47. How great are God's gifts when we humbly obey His commands!

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