

WATER BAPTISM

Although there were various circumstances under the laws of the tabernacle requiring the washing of clothing or of bathing in water (see Hebrews 9:10 and Numbers 19:7-8), water baptism as we know it was not practiced until God initiated it through John the Baptist in the wilderness of the Jordan River when Annas and Caiaphas were high priests (see Luke 3:2-3).

John baptized many people who came out to see him, urging them to experience salvation "through the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:76-77), but John's greatest challenge in administering water baptism was his baptism of Jesus. Matthew 3:13-17: "Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him."

The challenge is then recorded in verse 14: "And John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and are you coming to me?'"

Jesus understood John's great honor toward Him by this statement. However, there was an over-riding principle at work (verse 15): "But Jesus answered and said to Him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he (John) allowed Him."

Verse 16 and 17 recorded the actual baptism of Jesus - the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus and God's voice speaking audibly from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17)

Jesus' baptism prepared Him for the Holy Spirit to lead Him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (See Luke 4:1-13).

John added an important dimension to his baptisms that must have been helpful to the people being baptized. He explained, when asked by the baptismal candidates, how their behavior should reflect their repentance - even giving them real life examples (See Luke 3:10-14). John urged people to be baptized for repentance and forgiveness of sins but also wanted them to understand their obligation before God to live righteously in keeping with their repentance.

Much later, after Christ was put to death and was raised from the dead, the Apostle Paul gave us new insight about the meaning of water baptism based on Christ's death and resurrection. Much of this new insight is written in Romans 6:3-6:

Verse 3: "Whoever has been baptized into Christ Jesus has been baptized into His death."

Verse 4: "Whoever has been buried with Him (by immersion) in the waters of baptism will be raised (from that death) to newness of life, just as Christ was raised from the dead."

Verse 5: Water baptism, is our union with Christ in the likeness of His death so that we can be in union with (and a recipient of the likeness of His resurrection). To say it another way, our death and resurrection via water baptism is the spiritual likeness of Christ's actual death and resurrection.

But what must we specifically believe God to do in us as we are baptized?

(1) To crucify (put to death) our old sinful person and its desires in order to do away with our "body of sin." In this way, we are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6:6) because..."he who has died has been freed from sin (Romans 6:7)." Putting off the body of the sins of our flesh is also referred to as the circumcision of Christ in Colossians 2:11-12.

(2) To raise us from the death and burial of the baptismal waters to a resurrected life in Christ in which "we also should walk in newness of life" as Christ did as He was "raised from the dead by the glory of the Father." (Romans 6:4)



A MOMENT TO REFLECT:

1. Have you been water baptized?
2. If so, how has your life been different?
3. If you have not, we encourage you to do so.