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# **Baptism: A Symbol and A Command**

**Ryan M Marks**

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**Hillsboro, MO**

## **Baptism: A Symbol and A Command**

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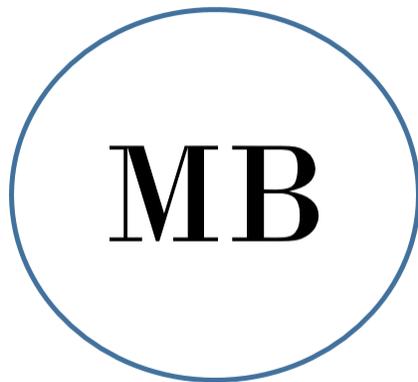
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## **Baptism: A Symbol and A Command**

What is Baptism? Let me start by stating clearly since there are so many false teachings out there that baptism does not save anyone. Baptism, immersion into water, does not save an infant or an adult. To teach that Baptism saves is a perversion of the Gospel, for salvation is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ alone (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation is by Faith; not by anything that you or I do. Sprinkling is found nowhere in Scripture and nowhere in the Bible were babies baptized. Baptism in the Scriptures **is always** done of an individuals' own **free will** as a response following repentance. Baptism is immersion in water *following repentance*. Repentance is the point at which salvation occurs for it is then that an individual admits his or her sin and trusts Jesus' alone to save them from and forgive their sins (Matt. 4:17, Rom. 10:9-13, Luke 24:44-48).

Baptism is a **symbol** of repenting of one's sins and placing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness. It is a symbol that my **old life** is gone and that I now have **new life in Jesus** Christ. But while symbolic, that does not make baptism irrelevant or unimportant for the person who believes in Jesus. Baptism is also a command.

The Scriptures tell us in Matthew 3:1-17 and Luke 3:1-22 that John the Baptizer came baptizing people. Why did John baptize? Not to save people, but as a symbol of their true repentance. John the Baptizer said,

*“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”*

*Matthew 3:11*

John was sent to call the people of Israel to repentance before Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God, would come and give His life as a sacrifice for forgiveness of sins. And not only would Jesus pay for sins with His blood but He would baptize (immerse, cover) those who Believed with the Holy Spirit. The person who places their faith in Jesus Christ today receives a physical baptism in water when he is baptized in water but spiritually, Jesus also baptizes the Believer in the Spirit. We are immersed and filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit lives within the Believer convicting, guiding, teaching, comforting us (John 14, 16; Gal. 5, 6; Rom. 8). The filling, the Baptism of the Spirit is a blessing that John the Baptist and the Old Covenant saints did not have! As followers of the New Covenant, we have the Spirit of God!

Why was Jesus baptized then if baptism was for repentance? Jesus was baptized as our example. Notice Matthew's account:

*Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. **John would have prevented him**, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*

*Matthew 3:13-17, emphasis added*

Jesus' baptism was the beginning of His "new life" if you will. Jesus was always the Son of God but He had not embarked upon the mission of spreading the Gospel and preaching prior to His Baptism. Our Baptism is likewise meant to be a mark of leaving our old life and beginning a new life full of the Spirit of God. Now we live for God, to please Him and to be His witnesses to a lost and dying world heading for Hell. Thanks be to God we are a new creation in Christ!

Jesus was baptized, giving us an example to follow. Scripture also clearly tells us to baptize those who repent and believe the Gospel in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28). Baptism is an issue of obedience. Getting baptized does not mean that your life will be easy. As a matter of fact, Jesus was tempted immediately following His baptism (Matthew 4) and Paul immediately began proclaiming the Gospel and was persecuted (Acts 9). While baptism does not save, just as the Lord's Supper does not save, both are clearly commanded in Scripture. Neglecting to practice either is clearly disobedience to the teaching of our Lord.

It is clearly an issue of obedience. In America, many neglect baptism saying to themselves, "Baptism doesn't save me and I don't really feel ready yet, so someday I'll get baptized but not today." What a pitiful excuse. Jesus died for you. As we will shortly see in studying further Scripture, baptism represents the beginning of your new life in Christ just as the Lord's Supper is a memorial to Jesus' sacrifice for us. If you are a Believer and you are putting off baptism, I have to ask one thing: Paul was baptized and so were the Early Christians and just doing that put their lives at risk. You live in comfort O Westerners and you are putting Baptism off because you don't feel like it or because you don't want to fully surrender to living completely for Jesus! You don't want a new life completely lived for Jesus. I am sorry for you. What will the Lord's words be to you for disobeying Him? May we obey, may we surrender and follow Jesus. To my Brothers and Sisters in the East

who continue to follow the Lord in sincerity of heart and childlike obedience, may the Lord bless you for your faithfulness to His Word.

Baptism—taking the plunge into the water identifies and declares your allegiance **publicly** to Christ Jesus and, **symbolically**, your own death, burial, and resurrection into a new life with Christ Jesus has taken place. Water Baptism is a picture, a symbol, of our burial with Christ and our resurrection with Him into a new creation, it's a **symbol of our new life** by accepting Christ by faith and committing to follow Him.

*“And that water is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing dirt from your body, but as a response to God from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”*

*1 Peter 3:21 NLT*

*“For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.”*

*Colossians 2:12 NLT*

*“Paul said, ‘John's baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus.’”*

*Acts 19:4 NLT*

## **About the Author**

**Ryan M Marks** (B.A. in Communications and pursuing an MTS in Theology from Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary) has taught in two local churches and served as an evangelist throughout Missouri. Having begun preaching and writing at 15 following the Lord's call, Ryan has authored a number of books. He serves as Director of and contributor to the blog and online ministry of [FocusingOnTheMarkMinistries.com](http://FocusingOnTheMarkMinistries.com) which provides resources for evangelism and discipleship globally.

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