

Navigating the Waters of Baptism

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Many unbaptized Christians are simply ignorant when it comes to baptism. They've never been taught about baptism—what it signifies and why it matters. And what little teaching there is on the subject—you might find a random book chapter here or there, but little else—usually just further confuses the issue.

For example, many believers today have been taught that if they were baptized or christened as a baby, that is sufficient to fulfill Scripture's command. Think about the confusing message that sends—that a passive act as a newborn has anything in common with the public profession of faith and identification with the risen Christ and His church. Most Christians today could rightly claim ignorance when it comes to baptism, but that's not a valid excuse to ignore it altogether.

Other believers might be avoiding baptism out of pride. Many have allowed a long period of time to elapse since their conversion. They repented and believed long ago, and they are faithfully involved with the church, active in ministry, and submissive to the authority of God's Word, but they have never been baptized.

It's understandably a little embarrassing to acknowledge that kind of failure—that you've been disobedient on something so fundamental for so long. But better to humble yourself than to further extend that disobedience by remaining unbaptized.

Indifference is another reason professing believers might not be baptized. There are plenty of people in the church today who simply can't be bothered. It doesn't fit into their busy schedule and they're not willing to sacrifice something else—their work, their ministry, their leisure time, or whatever it is—and make the command of the Lord a priority for their life. Obedience simply isn't that important to them. They're apathetic. They might want to do it; they might even plan to do it. But until obedience is their first priority, they'll never finally get around to being baptized.

For others it goes a step further into defiance. Some people in the church haven't been baptized because they are just rebellious. They brazenly refuse to obey. Usually people like that are living in active patterns of sin, and any public confession of their faith in Christ would only elevate their hypocrisy. They won't surrender their sin, so they charge further into rebellion against the Lord.

In addition to ignorance, pride, indifference, and defiance, there is one other reason people in the church aren't baptized—they're unregenerate. They're simply not saved. They have no desire to publicly identify with Christ because they know in their hearts they don't truly belong to Him. They might be familiar with the Bible and the church—they might even attend regularly, hanging on at the fringes without ever fully committing. But they won't—they *can't*—take a public stand with Christ because they've never truly submitted their lives to Him in the first place.

The New Testament has no concept of an unbaptized Christian. When people repented and believed in Christ, they were baptized—often immediately—as a public profession of their faith and to identify with the body of believers. The two were inextricably linked throughout the early church (cf. Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:38).

Likewise, the New Testament has nothing to say about many of the modern methods of baptism. Sprinkling, pouring, or dabbing people with water makes no biblical sense. Only immersion paints an accurate, biblical picture of the transformation that takes place in salvation.

The believer's baptism by submersion in water is consistent with the metaphor the apostle Paul used in Romans 6:3-7.

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, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.

He wasn't referring to the ordinance of baptism, but the spiritual reality of union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Water baptism is the outward symbol of that unity—your physical baptism signifies the spiritual baptism that's already taken place. It's the public, ceremonial depiction of your death to sin and your new life in Christ.

However, that rich truth isn't celebrated or even taught in many churches. And because the theology and practice of baptism are so muddled, today we likely have more unbaptized believers than at any other time in the history of the church.

If you're a professing believer who hasn't been baptized, you fall into one of those categories—your disobedience is the result of ignorance, pride, indifference, defiance, or it's an indication that you're not truly saved. It's critical that you carefully and biblically examine your life and determine what's

keeping you from publicly identifying with Christ in His resurrection and with the local gathering of believers. You don't want to live in open disobedience to the clear command of Scripture, regardless of the excuses you might be clinging to.

You need to repent and be baptized.

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