

16th of July 2017

Baptism – Pt 1 – Introduction & meaning

The word “baptism” and its derivatives only occur in the New Testament. The Greek word for “baptism” is also translated “to wash”. How do you understand the word “baptism” in the scriptures? Do read “baptism” as a baby being sprinkled with water, or a person being immersed in water? The Oxford dictionary says – “Religious rite of immersing (person), or sprinkling with, water in sign of purification & of admission to the Church...”. In this introductory study let us compare the Oxford dictionary’s meaning to the scriptures.

Scriptures upon which this teaching is founded.

1. According to the scriptures baptism is immersing a person in water.

“And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him” (Acts 8:38).

John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus are baptized by immersion in water, whether in the sea or the river of Jordan (Mk.1: 5).

2. Baptism in the scriptures does not include sprinkling of water on a baby’s head.

3. According to the scriptures baptism is a sign of church membership.

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2: 41).

Although our verse does not specifically identify baptism as a sign of church membership our verse indicates that when a person received the word during the time of the early church, was baptized, they were added to the church. Is this true for today?

4. Figuratively a person is buried with Christ by baptism and raised with Christ, and therefore an outward sign of inward purification.

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom.6: 3 & 4).

Figuratively a believer is baptized into Christ’s death and raised up from the dead (through the water) to walk in newness of life.

Additional comments on our points.

Baptism is one of those topics that is “hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2Pet.3: 16).

Applying the teaching to our life today.

Roman Catholics, Presbyterians and Methodists baptize infants by sprinkling their head with water.

Question to think about.

How do we understand the verses regarding baptism when they are “hard to be understood” and some of the main-stream churches establish doctrine that is contrary to the scriptures?

My answer to our question from the scriptures.

Look not to the churches for truth, but to the scriptures. If you establish a doctrine from the book of Acts (which records actions of the early church) and this differs to that which the apostle Paul taught the churches, then identify the doctrine as historical. We can say for certain that where baptism involves water the person is immersed and never sprinkled. Is baptism a sign, and is it required for salvation? These are questions we will address in subsequent studies.