

Study 0018

Scripture Text: Hebrews 6:2a; Matthew 28:19

The name “Christian Baptism” is used to distinguish water baptism from John’s baptism. It is generally thought that both water baptism and John’s baptism are the same, because they both involve the same kind of medium (water), and the same kind of baptizer (a human being). But although they seem to be very similar, they are nonetheless very different. Christian baptism involves the full immersion of a person in water, after which he is brought out of the water again. Because of this similarity in process with John’s baptism, many have thought Christian baptism to be the same as John’s baptism. Indeed, since the Lord Jesus was baptized by John, many conclude that there really is no difference between Christian baptism and John’s baptism. But, as earlier stated, there are marked differences.

What the Lord Jesus did when He was baptized by John is similar to what He did at the last Supper (**Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26**). Just as the Lord instituted Holy Communion before His death, so also He instituted Christian baptism. Thus, His baptism by John signified the institution of Christian baptism for all who would believe in Him.

If we examine **Matthew 3:13-15**, we would see that Jesus went to John’s baptism without sin, yet John was baptizing people who were still in sin. It can thus be concluded that John’s baptism was not what Jesus went through. The Lord also told John that the baptism had to be administered to fulfil all righteousness; signifying that the baptism Jesus went through was an act of obedience required by God. These give us inkling into what is required in Christian baptism.

- 1) Before a person can undergo Christian baptism, he must first have been born again. That is, he must have repented of his sins, received the forgiveness of God, and is saved (delivered) from his sins. In a manner of speaking, he is to be like Jesus, who was without sin (**1 Peter 3:18**), before he can undergo Christian baptism. Under John’s baptism however, the baptized would still be a sinner, and baptism washed away the sin.
- 2) When John did not want to baptize the Lord, He told him to do so because it was proper for them to fulfil all righteousness. Christian baptism is a physical act which fulfils or satisfies God’s requirement for righteousness. John’s baptism did not do this. What John’s baptism did was to prepare people’s hearts to receive the word of God and Jesus Christ, the Messiah (**Luke 1:17**).

In Christian baptism, the baptizer is a man (a disciple or a minister); and the baptized is a person who has repented of his sins, and has already received Christ into his life. That is, the baptized is someone who has experienced the first two foundational truth: repentance from things that lead to death, and faith toward God (**Mark 16:15-16**). Christian baptism is conducted in the name (or authority) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (**Matthew 28:19**). An unauthorised person cannot baptize another person!

The significance of Christian baptism is that the baptized publicly identifies through baptism with the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and declares in the process, that he is dead to sin and the world, and that he has resurrected to a new life with a new purpose and a new mission (**Romans 6:3-4**). Christian baptism is thus an outward display of an inward conviction. It is a physical ceremonial representation of the truth, which we believe, of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, we are saying by Christian baptism that we are dead (no longer influenced by or are impervious to) sin, the world, and the devil on one hand; but we are alive to (now influenced by or open to) God and His Christ. We also declare through Christian baptism, our identification with all that Christ did and stood for. In other words, through Christian baptism, we are partakers or share in the earthly ministry, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christian baptism thus gives us a clear conscience before God that we have done what is required of us by faith (**1 Peter 3:21**). Whilst it is likened to Noah's salvation from the Flood; the ceremony of Christian baptism does not save us; instead, the ceremony is the evidence of our faith in Christ's death and resurrection. Christian baptism is a symbol of the cleansing that happens in the hearts of those who believe (**Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12**). It is expected that our public identification with Christ through Christian baptism should make it difficult for us to return to the world, even under the pressure of persecution; as well as keep us from the temptation to renounce our faith in Christ (**Hebrews 6:1-6**).

From all that has been said, Christian baptism is something that can only be engaged in by a person who is old enough to repent of sin in a meaningful and sincere manner; and who has confessed his belief in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour. This clearly precludes infants and children below the age of innocence. Furthermore, Christian baptism requires full immersion, not the sprinkling of water, as is practised by some. Again, Christian baptism cannot be conducted on a person who has yet to believe in Jesus Christ as His Lord and Saviour, neither can it be done on someone who has yet to repent of his sins.

Finally, Christian baptism is a clear indication of a person's commitment to God and His Kingdom. Hence, Christian baptism is a mark of discipleship, which is an on-going thing (**Acts 2:41-42**). Christian baptism thus, marks a life of commitment to God and His Kingdom; such that we are now engaged in what God wants us to engage in.

EXERCISE

Please answer true or false.

- 1) Christian baptism is the same as water baptism.
- 2) Christian baptism is the same as water baptism, which is the same as John's baptism.
- 3) In Christian baptism, only Christians are involved.
- 4) The only condition for Christian baptism is that you submit yourself for baptism.
- 5) Jesus' baptism by John was a sign that Christian baptism and John's baptism are the same.
- 6) No sinner can be baptized under Christian baptism.
- 7) Children can be baptized under Christian baptism, whether or not they understand repentance.
- 8) Infants need Christian baptism, just in case they die before they grow old.
- 9) When your child is about to go to boarding house, you should quickly have him or her baptized so that you can rest assured that he or she is in right standing with God.
- 10) As long as water is involved, it does not matter whether it is by immersion or sprinkling.
- 11) Christian baptism is the mark of a Christian's commitment to God and His Kingdom.
- 12) By Christian baptism, we publicly identify with Christ's death and resurrection.
- 13) Our public identification with Christ is to make it difficult for us to backslide.
- 14) Christian baptism is a sign of our conviction that Jesus Christ died and resurrected from death.
- 15) Christian baptism is an act of obedience to God's command.
- 16) Christian baptism saves us from sin.
- 17) Christian baptism is the evidence of our faith in Christ.
- 18) When Jesus Christ said to John "we must fulfil all righteousness", he was instituting Holy Communion.
- 19) Without being baptized in water, you cannot partake in Holy Communion.
- 20) Christian baptism is the believer's graduation ceremony, which makes him ready for heaven.