Through the waters of baptism

READ: Matthew 3:1-17

Now that you have come to understand more clearly what your new life in Christ means, we are now ready to consider another important step you must take with Jesus - the step of baptism.

Baptism is a clear way of showing that you now belong to Jesus and want to follow Him. As you go down into the water and are submerged beneath it, you are saying 'goodbye' to the rule of your old sinful self-life. As you rise from the water, you are rising to your new life with Jesus as Lord.

1. Why be baptized?

Some people ask, *"Is baptism really necessary? Does it make any difference whether I am baptized or not? Isn't believing and trusting in Jesus all that really matters?"* The New Testament gives us some clear reasons why we should be baptized once we have committed our lives to Christ:

Jesus was baptized

He came to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. He didn't need to be baptized because John was baptizing people as a sign that they were repenting and turning away from their sins. But Jesus had no sin to repent of. Yet He still came to John for baptism. Why? He knew this was what God wanted Him to do. Through His baptism He was showing a willingness to stand by the side of sinners and be counted as one of them. And through His example, Jesus calls all who believe in Him to follow in His steps.

It is Jesus command

Baptism isn't something we are free to choose to do or not to do. It is a command Jesus gives to all who would be His true disciples. To Nicodemus Jesus said, *"Unless a man is born **of water** and **of the Spirit**, he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (John 3:5).* And to His disciples Jesus said, *"Go ... and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit . . .." (Matthew 28:19).*

Baptism is Jesus' command for all who are born of the Spirit and want to be obedient to their Lord's desires. Just as baptism was God's will for Jesus, so baptism is Jesus' will for us. Jesus said, *"If you love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15).* Do you love Jesus? Then obey Him by following Him in this way. If you don't want to obey Him in this first step of discipleship, how will you obey Him in all the other steps He will later call you to take?

The early Christians practised it

The first Christians accepted and obeyed the example and command of Jesus. In their preaching they made it clear that part of the process of becoming a Christian was being baptized *(See Acts 2:37-38).* And in practice, whenever anyone became a Christian they were baptized almost straight away. Baptism was a part of conversion (see diagram on page 11). And baptism was only for believers. It always came after a person believed and trusted in Christ. In New Testament times there was no such thing as an unbaptized Christian.

2. The meaning of baptism

What then is the meaning of baptism? What are you doing when you step into the waters of baptism in obedience to Jesus call?

Baptism makes your commitment clear

Jesus calls all true followers to declare Him openly before others *(Matthew 10:32-33).* Baptism was how the first Christians showed clearly that Jesus was Lord. They also confessed this with their lips *(Romans 10:9).* You may find this hard to do, but Jesus calls you to do this and will help you and bless you as you take this step with Him.

Baptism is a sign of cleansing

Through baptism you are showing that your sins have been washed away and you are now forgiven and made clean in God's sight. Of course, it isn't water that can wash away sin. Baptism itself doesn't make you a Christian. It is only the blood of Jesus applied inwardly that cleanses you from every sin *(1 John 1:7).* But baptism is the outward sign of what God has done inwardly.

Baptism is a sign of new ownership

Through baptism you are showing that you now belong to Jesus. As you go down under the water, you are saying 'goodbye' to your old master Satan and the rule of your sinful self-life. As you rise from the water, you are rising to your new life with Jesus as *Lord (Romans 6:1-7)*. This doesn't mean that baptism makes you perfect and you will no longer sin. It simply means you now want Jesus to live his resurrection life through you. You will still fail at times, but sin will no longer be your master. Jesus is now your master instead.

Baptism marks a new beginning

Baptism is a sign that you are now a new creature in Christ. It is also a way of showing that you are entering the family of God, and now belong to the Body of Christ. In the early church, baptism was seen as part of the conversion process *(See Acts 2:38).* It was also seen as a way of acceptance into the life of the church. Repentance, the gift of the Holy Spirit, baptism, and commitment to the local body of believers, all happened close together. But in the following centuries, and even today, baptism is often separated in time from the moment of conversion and so loses some of its meaning. If baptism means a new beginning, it is best not to delay baptism too long after you have become a Christian.

Perhaps you feel you are not ready, or not good enough to be baptized yet. But it is important to realize that baptism is not a step of spiritual 'graduation' that you take when you feel good enough. No, it is rather the 'commencement' of the course. It is the beginning step in the way of discipleship. You will never be good enough. But the whole of the Good News is that only Jesus is good enough and our trust is in Him. Baptism is an important first step in following Him. Are you willing to take that step with Him?

Questions:

1. Why was John the Baptist baptizing people? What was the meaning of his baptism? *(See Matthew 3:1-6, 11)*

   _____

   _____

   Why then did Jesus come for baptism when He had no sin to repent of? *(Matthew 3:13-15)*

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   _____

2. Jesus has not only left us an example to follow, but he has also given us a command to obey. What is this command? *(See Matthew 28:19)*

   _____

   _____

3. The first Christians accepted and obeyed the command of Jesus. What did Peter call the people to do in response to his message? *(See Acts 2:36-38)*

   _____

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   What would happen to those who obeyed? *(verse 38)* _____

   _____

4. What were the steps that took place in the conversions of the following people?

   The Samaritans (Acts 8:12-13) _____

   _____

   The Ethiopian (Acts 8:34-38) _____

   _____

   Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48) _____

   _____

   The jailer (Acts 16:29-33) _____

   _____

What place did baptism have in each of these conversions?

_____

5. Number the following in the correct order:

Joining the church;
Repentance and faith in Jesus;
Being baptized;
Receiving the Holy Spirit.

6. The New Testament speaks to us clearly about 'believers baptism'. What does this mean?

_____

Does baptism make a person a Christian? yes; no; not sure.

Does baptism before one is a believer fulfil Christ's command? _____

Should baptism be delayed after conversion till one feels good enough? _____

Does baptism mean a person will now be perfect? _____

7. What meaning or symbolism does baptism have according to the following references?

Acts 22:16 _____

Romans 6:1-7 _____

_____

8. Now think back over all that we have seen in this study. What does this all mean for your personally? Write down what Jesus is saying to you. *(Or if you have been baptized, when did this take place and what did it mean to you?)*

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_____

Don't forget to memorize the verse below. Cut out the verse from page 41.

MEMORY VERSE:

Be baptized **Romans 6:4**

"We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."