

Christ and he too was baptized.

Sticking close to Christ through “thick and thin” will make us powerful instruments in His hands. Discover the joy of that ultimate commitment. We can commit our lives to Him unconditionally because He has already made the ultimate commitment to us, the ultimate surrender, on the cross. Jesus paid the greatest price to become our Saviour. What a privilege it is to publicly give Him our love and allegiance! If you haven’t yet done so, why not surrender your life to Him right now as you pray:

Dear Father in heaven: I thank You that Jesus died for my sins, was buried, and came out from the grave the eternal Lifegiver. As I surrender my life to You by dying to self, come into my life and fill me with Your presence. Please pour out Your Holy Spirit in my life as You did in the life of Jesus. Fill my life with the peace and joy that comes from following You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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Design by Kurt Reichenbach

Litho in USA by Pacific Press

DISCOVER

ENTERING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE



One of our Bible school representatives in Africa recently sent us this report:

“Five years ago I received a request from the Voice of Prophecy to visit a prisoner who was a Bible correspondence school student. I presented the request to the prison authorities, who graciously gave permission. Because the student had a deep desire to delve into the Bible, I visited him regularly.

“About six months after my initial visit, the student-prisoner asked to be baptized and join the church. The authorities agreed to provide facilities so the baptism could take place in the prison. The wardens and other prisoners gathered

to witness one of the most moving baptisms I have ever conducted.

“Shortly after this, our brother was released from jail, even though he still had considerable time to serve. When I asked why, I was told that his life had changed so drastically, and he was such a witness for his Saviour and his religion that he could no longer be thought of as a prisoner, nor be treated as such. This man was united with his family and is now a leader in one of our large congregations.”

1. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF BAPTISM?

When this prisoner became a Christian and his life completely changed, why was it important for him to be baptized? The Bible makes clear the importance and true meaning of baptism. In a conversation with Nicodemus, the community leader who came to Jesus by night, Jesus declared:

“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”—John 3:3. *(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

Nicodemus didn’t grasp just what Christ meant. After all, how can a person be “born again”? So Jesus explained:

“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.”—John 3:5.

“Born of . . . the Spirit” signifies entering a new life, undergoing a change of mind and heart. Because

with “patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22, italics supplied).

Having Jesus living inside us by His Holy Spirit gives a profound sense of security and certainty:

“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry ‘Abba [Father], Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”—Romans 8:15, 16.

By faith you can hear your heavenly Father addressing you just as He did Jesus: “This is my beloved son or daughter with whom I am well pleased” (compare Matthew 3:17).

This secure relationship with God brings us many benefits, but it doesn’t guarantee a problem-free life. In fact, the enemy often tries to throw the most difficulties at those who’ve just made a commitment to Christ. However, life with Christ does give us a valuable perspective in the rough times. When we’re in God’s hands we can know that He will use everything that happens to us, good and bad, to teach us and help us grow (see Romans 8:28).

A young woman made a decision to commit her life to Christ in baptism—in spite of her husband’s threat of divorce. He wanted no part of her new faith, but she stuck to

Jesus and tried to become a more loving wife than ever before. For some time the husband made things difficult at home. But finally he was won over by an argument he couldn’t answer: her transformed life.

This man surrendered his life to



“As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?’ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.”—Acts 8:36-39.

What caused the eunuch’s rejoicing? It wasn’t just the fact that he’d been immersed in water. It was the excitement of making a commitment to Christ. The eunuch had testified to his belief in Jesus’ power to come into his heart and save him. Philip took him “down into the water” as an open declaration of the new faith that burned in the man’s heart. He buried him in the water as a symbol of the funeral of his old life of sin. Philip lifted the eunuch “up out of the water” as a sign that the Ethiopian had been born into a new life with Christ. There is great joy in baptism only because we are giving our lives to a great Saviour.

Baptism is cause for great rejoicing because those who place their faith in Christ can have the assurance of eternal life. “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). When we are baptized, we’re on an upward path leading us to eternal joy with God.

Baptism also celebrates a present happiness with Christ. Jesus promises the priceless *gift* of the Holy Spirit to those baptized (Acts 2:38), and with the Spirit comes “the *fruit* of the Spirit”—“love,” which fills the life



entering the kingdom of God involves a completely new kind of existence, not just an old life patched up, it is called the new birth. Being born of the Spirit is important, and water baptism is the outward symbolic portrayal of this inward change. Our representative baptized the prisoner as a recognition of his commitment to Christ and as a symbol of the transformation the Holy Spirit had begun in his character.

2. WHY SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

Our salvation revolves around three of Christ’s great acts:

“Christ DIED for our sins according to the Scriptures, . . . he was BURIED, . . . he was RAISED on the third day according to the Scriptures.”—1 Corinthians 15:3, 4.

Christ made salvation possible through His death, burial, and resurrection. He died for our sins, was buried, then rose from the grave to give us a new life of righteousness.

“Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were BAPTIZED INTO HIS DEATH? 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.”—Romans 6:3, 4.

The act of being baptized shows that, in a way, we can actually participate in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism means that we have

died with Christ, and have buried the old life of sin with Christ, and that we are rising to “live a new life” in Christ. We can benefit from those saving acts just as if we’d been there on Mount Calvary and at the Garden Tomb.

Christ’s death and resurrection becomes our death and resurrection. That’s true, first of all, in terms of our relationship with God. God looks on us as we are in Christ—His blood covers our sins, His perfect life covers our inadequacy. Second, it’s true in terms of our experience. God can make us dead to sin—as if we’d been crucified. He can make us alive to the things of the Spirit—as if we’d been resurrected from spiritual death.

The physical act of baptism graphically represents the steps of conversion. *First*, we’re lowered into the water, we’re immersed completely—just as people who have died are lowered into the grave and covered. This indicates that we have died with Christ and have buried our old lifestyle.

Baptism is a funeral, a formal farewell to an existence in which sin dominated. *Then*, we’re lifted up out of the water by the one baptizing—just like a person being resurrected from the grave. This says that we’re a “new creation,” completely given to the “new life”



turning from selfishness, we become more and more responsive to Christ. In order to grow consistently, we need a daily giving of ourselves to Christ, a daily reception of new life through prayer and Bible study.

What instructions did Jesus give concerning those who are baptized?

“Therefore go and MAKE DISCIPLES of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and TEACHING THEM TO OBEY EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”—Matthew 28:19-20.

Jesus pointed out the importance of “teaching” those baptized “to obey everything” He commanded. Baptism represents our commitment to a Christian lifestyle. It is to be the beginning of a growing relationship with Christ. Peter admonishes us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). We are able to grow as Christians because “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3). Read the entire first chapter of second Peter for more helpful counsel on how to grow as a Christian.

7. A CAUSE FOR REJOICING

Philip, a layman in the early Christian church, was once guided by the Holy Spirit to go and talk with a eunuch from Ethiopia. Philip discovered the eunuch riding in a chariot and reading a prophecy about Christ, the Messiah, in the book of Isaiah. When the eunuch asked Philip who the prophet was talking about, Philip “told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:26-35).

therefore is not baptized] will be condemned.”—Mark 16:16.

By dying in our place at Calvary, Jesus made a public demonstration of His love for us. We need to respond with a public demonstration of our own, an unashamed confession of our commitment to Christ through baptism. Have you begun a new life in Christ? Have you been baptized? If not, why not prepare for baptism in the near future?

6. BAPTISM IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

The rite of baptism, like the wedding ceremony, was meant to be the formal conformation and pledge of a wonderful and growing relationship. But while the ceremony of baptism can have a powerful effect on our Christian experience, we need to be careful not to imagine that it renders us permanently incapable of sinning. Our surrender doesn't automatically last a lifetime.

When a child is born, a celebration is in order. However, after the day of birth is over and the excitement subsides, the baby requires daily feeding, daily bathing, and daily concern for its welfare.

It's much the same with baptism. Paul said of his experience, "I die every day" (1 Corinthians 15:31). By daily



God has waiting for us.

Only immersion can accurately illustrate the true meaning of baptism—death, burial, and rebirth. "Baptism" by sprinkling doesn't adequately symbolize the new birth.

What does it really mean to die with Christ?

"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with [rendered powerless, margin] that we should no longer be slaves to sin."—Romans 6:6.

Baptism represents outwardly what a person must do inside: surrender everything to Christ, lay it all out on the table. If we keep anything a secret, if we hold anything back from God, then we'll likely remain "slaves to sin" in some way. It's a good idea, as you prepare for baptism, to take a personal inventory and ask God to work in and with you to change anything that He wants you to change. Our transformation will not happen all at once. But we must be willing to put our whole selves in His hands. When we surrender fully to Christ, our sinful desires are "rendered powerless."

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but CHRIST LIVES IN ME. The life I live in the body, I LIVE BY FAITH IN THE SON OF GOD, who loved me and gave himself for me."—Galatians 2:20.

When I identify with Christ's crucifixion through baptism, I invite a powerful force into my life—"Christ lives in me." The cross and the empty tomb are supernatural events—they still make things happen.

In order to arouse your will to put your life fully in Christ's hands, first look at Christ dying on the

cross. Don't look at the sin that's threatening you in order to beef up your will; don't look at your past record and moan; look to Jesus. If you look carefully and prayerfully, you'll be inspired. After admiring Christ's gracious and courageous act of will on Calvary, you can express solidarity with Him: "By the power of the cross I claim that I am dead to these habits and responsive to God. I make my stand with Christ. From now on I will 'live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.'"

As we tap into the power of Christ's death and resurrection we'll see more and more of His good qualities replacing our old habits:

"Therefore, if anyone is IN CHRIST, he is A NEW CREATION; the OLD has gone, the NEW has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ."—

2 Corinthians 5:17, 18.

Baptism is the first formal step in this process. Through it we express our desire to lock arms with Jesus and live a new and better life "in Christ." Jesus does in us and through us what we could never do for ourselves. We arise from the water "a new creation," and He gives us the power to live a "new" kind of life.

"No condemnation now hangs over the head of those who are 'in' Jesus Christ. For the new spiritual principle of life 'in' Christ lifts me out



"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."—

Matthew 19:14.

5. THE IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM

How important is it for believers to be immersed? Jesus admonished Nicodemus, "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). According to Jesus, "being born of water and the Spirit" is essential for those who wish to enter heaven.

Jesus gives only one exception. The thief on the cross was "born of the Spirit," even though it was impossible for him to leave the cross and be immersed in water as a sign of his change of heart. Jesus promised him that he would be with Him in the kingdom (Luke 23:42, 43). For the thief, being "born of water and of the Spirit" represents the cleansing blood of Jesus which at that very moment was being spilt to cleanse the thief from his sins.

Augustine observed, "There is one case of deathbed repentance recorded, that of the penitent thief, that none should despair; and only one, that none should presume."

Jesus Himself gave this solemn warning:

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe [and



cathedral in Pisa, Italy, and St John's, the second largest church in Rome. The cathedral in Frejus, France has a well-preserved baptistry that was built and used in the fifth century. The ruins of a second century church at Ephesus in Asia Minor also contains a baptistry for immersing candidates.

It was not until the Council of Ravenna early in the fifteenth century that the Catholic Church accepted sprinkling as equally valid with immersion. In questions of church practice, we are not to follow what any man teaches, but we are to follow the example of Christ and the apostles as closely as possible (Colossians 2:8).

What about the baptism of infants? Many sincere Christians cherish the tradition of infant baptism; it has become a way in which they dedicate their children to Christ. Giving our children to God from the very beginning is certainly commendable, but there are biblically acceptable ways in which we can dedicate our children to Christ.

Baptism, however, serves a very specific function in the New Testament. The Bible makes it clear that a person must be taught the way of salvation before baptism (Matthew 24:14; 28:19, KJV, NIV), that a person must believe in Jesus before being baptized (Acts 8:37), and that a person must repent of sin and be forgiven before being baptized (Acts 2:38). A baby is incapable of believing and of repentance and confession, all of which must precede baptism.

The Bible doesn't give specific information about children who die before they are mature enough to choose Christ as their personal Saviour and be baptized. But we do know that children will be saved in the kingdom (Isaiah 11:6). And we can certainly trust the future of deceased infants to the Saviour who said:

of the old vicious circle of sin and death.”—

Romans 8:1, 2. *(The New Testament in Modern English, Phillips translation, Copyright © J. B. Phillips 1958, The Macmillan Company, New York.)*

3. WHY WAS JESUS BAPTIZED?

Remember that baptism not only symbolizes dying to an old life of sin, it also portrays the washing away of our sins by the blood of Jesus. At Pentecost, Peter told those who were seeking release from guilt:

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”—Acts 2:38.

This brings up a question. Jesus never committed a single sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). Why, then, did He permit Himself to be baptized?

“Then JESUS CAME from Galilee TO THE JORDAN TO BE BAPTIZED by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this TO FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS.’ Then John consented. AS SOON AS JESUS WAS BAPTIZED, HE WENT UP OUT OF THE WATER. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”—Matthew 3:13-17.

Jesus was sinless. He didn't need to repent of

any wrongdoing or have any guilt washed away. Christ was baptized for another reason: “to fulfil all righteousness.” By allowing John to immerse Him in the waters of the Jordan River, Jesus set a positive example for us. He identified Himself fully with weak, sinful human beings; He was willing to take all the steps THEY needed to take. Christ the Saviour never asks His followers to go anywhere He hasn’t been. He’s always leading, never pushing. So when believers are immersed in the waters of baptism, they are following in the steps of the Master.

Through Christ’s death and resurrection He gives us His righteousness.

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”—2 Corinthians 5:21.

Transformed in God’s eyes from sinners into saints, we grow into that righteousness which is already our gift, and thus we live a new life in Christ. Through Christ’s birth and baptism He took His first step of inviting humanity into His life. The Saviour’s death and resurrection were His final, climactic steps.

4. WHY SHOULD I BE IMMERSSED?

All the evidence suggests that Christ was immersed at His baptism; He was not sprinkled with water, nor was water simply poured over His head. One reason John baptized Him in the Jordan River was “because there was PLENTY OF WATER” (John 3:23). When Jesus came to John for baptism, He went down into the water, and “as soon as Jesus was

baptized [immersed], he went UP OUT OF THE WATER” (Matthew 3:16).

When we understand the true *meaning* of baptism, we have little difficulty recognizing the authentic *form* of baptism. The very word “baptize” comes from the Greek word *baptizo*, and means to dip or immerse (put under).

During John Wesley’s visit to America in 1737, a church jury of thirty-four men tried him on the strange charge of “refusing to baptize Mr. Parker’s child, except by dipping.” (The record of the trial appears in the court proceedings of the state of Georgia.) It’s evident that the father of Methodism baptized his converts by immersion.

The history of the early church makes clear that baptism meant immersion to them. Statements by the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Vol. VII, p. 379; and Vol. III, p. 94.) show that the church immersed baptismal candidates in the second and third centuries. Baptistries for immersing converts appear in many of the churches which were built between the fourth and fourteenth centuries in Europe and Asia. The reformer John Calvin stated: “The very word baptize, however, signifies to immerse; and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient Church.”—*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk. 4, Chap. 15, Sec. 19.

Dean Stanley, one of the most scholarly writers of the Church of England, declared that “for the first thirteen centuries, the almost universal practice of baptism was that of which we read in the New Testament, and which is the very meaning of the word ‘baptize’—that those who were baptized were plunged, submerged, immersed into the water.”—*Christian Institutions*, p. 21.

Baptistries throughout Europe testify to the truthfulness of these statements—churches like the