

16 - MAKING A NEW START



1

You Can Begin Again



2

(Video: 10 sec) In March of 1992, a Christian evangelist held a series of evangelistic meetings in Moscow's Kremlin auditorium.

After one of the meetings, he was seated in his little office, when the door was suddenly flung open.



3

A tough-looking young man with a scruffy beard and rough appearance came bursting into the room.

Believing he was going to attack him, the evangelist stepped back. His Russian translator stepped between them.

Immediately the man began waving his arms and talking animatedly in Russian.

The translator explained that this man was one of Moscow's notorious criminals.

He had been in and out of jail twenty-eight times.

Filled with guilt and hopeless about his future, he longed to find peace.

The evangelist calmly read 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

He told the troubled man the story of the thief on the cross who found forgiveness. He assured him, "Jesus is the same Savior today.

He offers forgiveness. He offers deliverance. He offers salvation. Take it! Rejoice in it! Praise God for it!"

With tears running down his face, this guilty young Russian knelt and received God's forgiveness.



4

About a year later, the evangelist visited Moscow.

As he praised God with a group of believers in a newly formed church, he noticed the converted criminal singing in the choir.

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5

The ex-criminal's face revealed a new inner peace. The man just radiated with happiness. He had accepted Christ. The teachings of the Bible had transformed his life, and he followed Jesus in Bible baptism.

Bible baptism is a symbol of a life transformed by God's grace. Baptism witnesses to a beginning of a new life in Jesus Christ.

Baptism speaks of a transformed life. One of the most powerful examples of the dramatic change Christ can make in a life is the story of Saul who later became the apostle Paul.



6

Although Saul was a Roman citizen by birth, and was educated by the very best teachers in Jerusalem. Saul was zealous for the Jewish religion, and was recognized as a staunch defender of their faith.



7

Saul—whose name later was changed to Paul after his conversion—himself describes what he did to put an end to the Christians.



8

(Text: Acts 22:4, 5)
"I persecuted ... to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. . . .



9

and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished."
Acts 22:4, 5.



10

As he was on his way to Damascus, a bright light shone out of heaven and struck him to the ground.

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11

(Text: Acts 22:7, 8)

He heard a voice, saying, “...Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”



12

and he answered, “Who are you, Lord?” And the voice answered,



13

“I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.” Acts 22:7, 8.



14

(Text: Acts 22:10)

The proud Pharisee humbly asked the Lord, “What shall I do, Lord?” And the Lord said..., ‘Arise and go into Damascus,



15

and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.’” Acts 22:10.



16

Saul was blinded by the bright light and had to be led to a house in Damascus.



17

For three days Saul had time to think of the suffering and pain he had caused the people of God, and of the times he had avowed that Jesus was not the Messiah and that His followers were deluded fanatics.

In testifying against God’s people and falsely accusing them, he had accused and testified against the Savior of the world! What anguish of heart that realization must have brought to Saul.

Saul had time to make things right with his Lord.

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18

He sat in total darkness for three days, and then God sent a prophet to him by the name of Ananias.

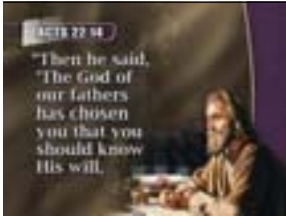
Then Ananias said to Saul,



19

(Text: Acts 22:13-15)

“‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him.



20

Then he said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will,



21

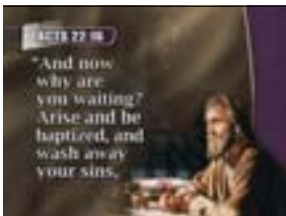
and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth.



22

For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.” Acts 22:13-15.

Then, in order for Saul to go forward in his life and shut the door on his past,



23

(Text: Acts 22:16)

Ananias said to Saul, “And now, why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins,



24

calling on the name of the Lord.”
Acts: 22:16.



25

This is the way Saul was to be joined to His Lord forever. Baptism was the doorway to a new life for Saul.

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**Saul needed to be washed clean from the terrible things he had done in the name of his religion.
His needed to be cleansed. He knew he needed God's amazing grace and forgiveness.**



26

**When he was baptized he knew that God had forgiven him.
And Saul the persecutor would become Paul, a zealot for Jesus all his life!**



27

Have you ever wished you could start all over again and that all of the mistakes you had made in the past could be washed away?



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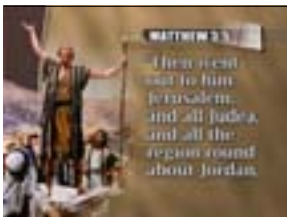
(Video: 8 sec) God knew that we all need just such an experience, so He instituted baptism as a sign that we would be joined to Him from that time on: a new start—a new life in Jesus.

What could more beautifully symbolize death to sin and the beginning of a new life than baptism by immersion-by being lowered beneath the water?



29

**Christian baptism had its origin with John the Baptist, a rugged prophet who appeared in the wilderness of Judea boldly preaching repentance.
All roads leading to the Jordan River were crowded with people going to listen to him.**



30

**(Text: Matthew 3:5, 6)
The Bible says, "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan,**



31

and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." Matthew 3:5, 6.

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32

Closing the door to His carpenter shop and bidding His mother farewell, Jesus also made His way to the Jordan. When John caught sight of Jesus, he recognized Him and stopped preaching.



33

(Text: John 1:29)
Pointing to Jesus, John said, "...Behold! The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."
John 1:29.



34

John recognized the true sacrificial Lamb who was to die for the sins of all who would accept His sacrifice. When Jesus asked to be baptized, John hesitated.



35

(Text: Matthew 3:14)
He said, "I need to be baptized by you." Matthew 3:14.



36

(Text: Matthew 3:15)
But Jesus insisted, "...Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Verse 15.
John recognized that Jesus had no sinful past to confess.

And Jesus certainly did not need to demonstrate His belief in His own resurrection!



37

Jesus asked to be baptized because He wanted to identify with man. He wanted to leave a perfect example for us to follow. So John immersed Jesus in the Jordan River, for that is what the word baptism means.

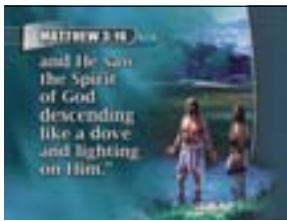


38

(Text: Matthew 3:16, 17)
The Bible says, "As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened,

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39

and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.



40

And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'. Matthew 3:16, 17
On the wings of a dove, God sent His love and words of encouragement to Jesus, but He did something else.



41

As Jesus walked up out of the water and stood with dripping clothes on the muddy banks of Jordan, God publicly introduced Him as His Son—the Anointed One.
Christ's baptism marked the beginning of His public ministry, for Peter said,



42

(Text: Acts 10:38)
“..God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power:



43

Who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.”

Acts 10:38.

Jesus Himself did not baptize, but the Bible records that His disciples did:



44

(Text: John 4:1, 2)

“The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John,



45

although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but His disciples.”

John 4:1, 2.

And notice Christ's last recorded command just before He went up to heaven:



46

(Text: Matthew 28:19, 20)

“Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit:

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47

teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19, 20.



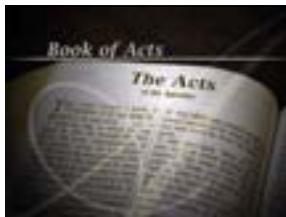
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Perhaps you are wondering what mode of baptism Jesus' followers practiced after He returned to heaven. No doubt they followed Jesus' example, since they were His disciples.



49

(Text: Ephesians 4:5)
Paul, one of Jesus' most ardent followers, says that there is only "One Lord, one faith, one baptism."
Ephesians 4:5.



50

The only detailed account of baptism after the cross is recorded in the Book of Acts—a baptism conducted by Philip, the evangelist.



51

As Philip was walking along the dusty road to Gaza, he saw the Ethiopian treasurer of Queen Candace, who had charge of all her treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship.



52

Now he was on his way home, riding in a chariot and reading from a scroll. Philip ran and over to the man and asked him if



53

(Text: Acts 8:30, 31)
he understood what he was reading. The treasurer quickly replied,



54

"How can I, unless someone guides me?"

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55

He also invited Philip to join him in his chariot.
Philip looked and saw that the man was reading: Isaiah, chapter 53.

The Ethiopian invited Philip to explain it to him.
The chapter told of Jesus' life and the details of the crucifixion of the Messiah.



56

(Text: Acts 8:35)
The Bible says, "Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus."
Acts 8:35.



57

What a Bible study that must have been, bouncing along in that chariot!

Not only did Philip tell about Jesus, but he evidently explained the significance of baptism, for the Bible says that when they came to a pool of water, the Ethiopian said to Philip,



58

(Text: Acts 8:36, 37)
"...See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?"
Acts 8:36.



59

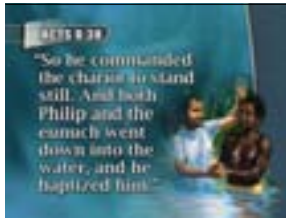
Philip replied, "If you believe with all your heart, you may."



60

The Ethiopian said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."
Verse 37.

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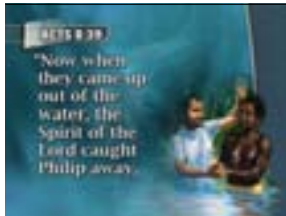
61

(Text: Acts 8:38)

“So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.”

Acts 8:38.

Philip immersed the Ethiopian treasurer in the water, just as John immersed Christ when He was baptized.

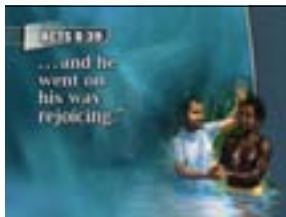


62

(Text: Acts 8:39)

“Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away,

... and he went on his way rejoicing.
Acts 8:39



63



64

That is what happens when we bury the old life of sin and start a new life in Christ.
Clearly, immersion was the mode of baptism practiced by the early Christian church.



65

In fact, there is no evidence in the New Testament for any other method of baptism. Here is a picture of a baptistery in a first century church in Philippi.
Early church historians and findings by archaeologists



66

both show that immersion was the mode of baptism until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

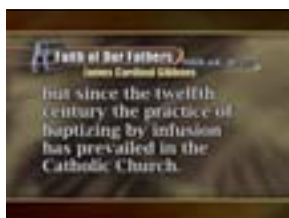


67

Cardinal James Gibbons wrote: “For several centuries after the establishment of Christianity baptism was usually conferred by immersion;

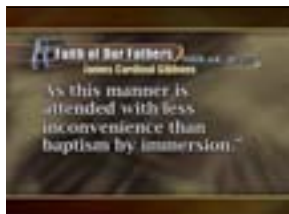
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68

but since the twelfth century the practice of baptizing by infusion has prevailed in the Catholic Church,



69

as this manner is attended with less inconvenience than baptism by immersion. . . .



70

The Church exercises her discretion in adopting the most convenient mode, according to the circumstances of time and place."

—The Faith of Our Fathers, 94th edition, p. 277.



71

Many tourists today visit St. John's Church, located in the ruins of the biblical city of Ephesus in Turkey.

This church was built as a memorial to the disciple John. Of special interest is the baptistery, circular in shape, about twelve feet in diameter and four feet deep, with stairs leading down into the font on two sides.



72

Most people have heard of the old bell tower in front of the Cathedral of Pisa, in Italy, more commonly known as the Leaning Tower of Pisa.



73

Along with the cathedral and the leaning tower is a baptistery, a round building that encloses



74

a pool about twenty feet across and four feet deep that was constructed in the fourteenth century. Thirteen hundred years after Christ's ascension, the mode of baptism was still by immersion!

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75

There are dozens of such cathedrals with large baptismal pools in Europe. Sixty-six are found in Italy alone, whose construction dates between the fourth and fourteenth centuries.



76

But how important is the rite of baptism?



77

Is it really necessary to be baptized?



78

(Text: John 3:5)
"Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit,



79

he cannot enter the kingdom of God.'" John 3:5



80

Jesus indicates here that being born of water, a reference to baptism as we shall see later, is necessary in order to enter heaven.



81

Christ didn't make this solemn statement only once. Notice that He says essentially the same thing in Mark 16:16:



82

(Text: Mark 16:16)
"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved."
Mark 16:16.

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The first step in preparing for Bible baptism is believing that Jesus Christ died for your sins and is your Savior and Lord.



83

Philip emphasizes this need for total belief in Christ to the Ethiopian.

When the Ethiopian asked Philip if he could be baptized, Philip said,



84

(Text: Acts 8:37)

“If you believe with all your heart, you may.” Acts 8:37.



85

(Text: Matthew 28:19)

**Jesus gave His disciples a second step,
“Go ...and teach all nations, baptizing them.”**

Matthew 28:19.

Teaching precedes baptism.



86

(Text: Matthew 28:20)

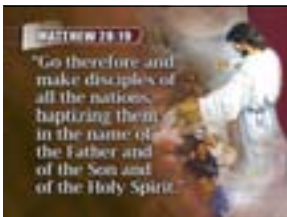
Jesus said the baptismal candidate is to be taught “...to obey everything I have commanded you...”

Matthew 28:20.



87

In other words, an individual preparing for the sacred rite of baptism needs to understand Jesus’ teachings and accept them. But, more than a mere knowledge of doctrines is needed.



88

(Text: Matthew 28:19)

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19

There must be a commitment of one’s life to Christ.

When a person unites with Jesus, he naturally begins to live Christ’s way.

He does not want to do anything Jesus would not agree to!

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The third step is repentance. Peter said,

89



(Text: Acts 3:19)

“Repent therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.”

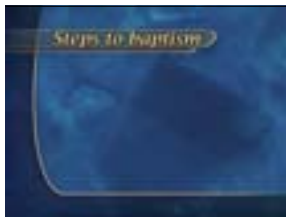
Acts 3:19. Repentance means to be deeply sorry for one’s sins and to turn from them.

90



This can only come from a heart that has been to Calvary—a heart touched and softened by the sacrifice made on the cross to save us from our sins.

91



Let’s just summarize these steps in preparing for baptism;

92



1. Before baptism the person should accept Jesus as Savior and Lord.

93



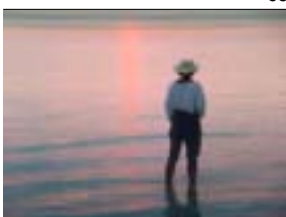
2. Before baptism, the person should understand the teaching of Jesus and be willing to follow Him.

94



3. He should confess all sins and repent.

95



Perhaps you have wished at times that you could change your life for the better—but you haven’t known just how. By following these three steps in preparation for baptism, you may truly become a new person—from the inside out.

96

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Through God's power, you can be changed, reborn, and converted.



97

Sometimes people ask, "When I am baptized, do I become part of a church? Or am I only baptized into Jesus?" The Bible teaches that baptism into Christ is baptism into Christ's body, the church. When multitudes were baptized on the day of Pentecost, the Bible declares,



98

(Text: Acts 2:41, 42)
"Then those who gladly received His word were baptized and that day about three thousand souls were added to them."



99

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship



100

in the breaking of bread and prayers." (Acts 2:41,42)
The text is plain. When we are baptized, we do not become spiritual orphans. We are not left alone.

The people baptized in Acts "continued in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship."

They became part of God's Bible-believing church.

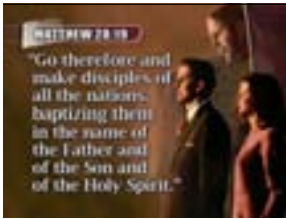


101

(Text: 1 Corinthians 12:13)
1 Corinthians 12:13 states: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized in one body..." The 28th verse points out clearly that the body is the church.

When men and women accept Jesus and commit their lives to follow Him, they long to worship with like believers. Their hearts burn within them to be part of Christ's commandment-keeping church.

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102

(Text: Matthew 28:19, 20)

This is why Jesus said in Matthew 28:19,20:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,



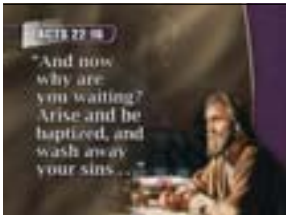
103

teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you..."



104

Tonight Jesus is appealing to you to commit your life to Him. He is appealing to you to become part of His Bible-believing, commandment-keeping people. He gives you the same invitation he gave the apostle Paul:



105

(Text: Acts 22:16)

"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins." Acts 22:16.



106

One night a Jewish leader by the name of Nicodemus came to Jesus.

He didn't want his friends to know that he was interested in Jesus.



107

(Text: John 3:2)

He flattered Jesus by telling Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God;



108

for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."

John 3:2.

Jesus could read this man's heart, so He cut right to the point and showed Nicodemus what he needed.



109

(Text: John 3:3)

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly,

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110

**I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
John 3:3.**



111

**(Text: John 3:4)
Nicodemus was puzzled, and he asked Jesus, “How can a man be born when he is old?**



112

Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” John 3:4



113

**(Text: John 3:5)
Then Jesus pointed out that He was talking about a spiritual rebirth, when He said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit,**



114

**he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”
John 3:5.
Here Jesus is talking about a spiritual rebirth that is witnessed to by baptism.**

The reference here is to the fact that the person will be washed in the water of baptism.



115

No doubt Nicodemus, the proud Pharisee, anticipated entrance into God’s kingdom by virtue of his being a natural-born, devout Jew.



116

However, Jesus made it clear that anything less than a complete transformation of life by the power of the Holy Spirit—as signified by baptism—was inadequate.

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117

This is the way a person seals his acceptance of the sacrifice given by the Father and made by the Son.



118

This is the beginning of the new life in Christ.



119

**(Text: Matthew 3:17)
At Christ's baptism, the voice of God was heard, saying,
"...This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."
Matthew 3:17.**



120

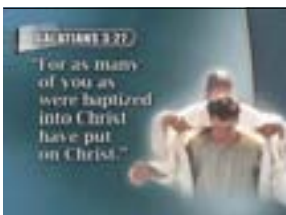
It was at this time, as the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove anointed Jesus, that He became the Anointed One or the Messiah or the Christ.



121

**This event marked the beginning of Jesus Christ's public ministry.
Just so, the baptism of the believer marks the beginning of his new life with Christ as his Savior.**

This event also marks the public testimony of the believer by his baptism that he is joined to Christ, that he has put on Christ.



122

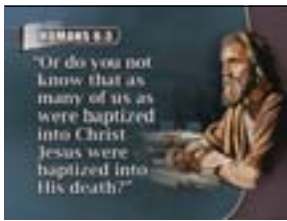
**(Text: Galatians 3:27)
Galatians 3:27 says, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ."**



123

(Video: 10 sec) Baptism, to the one who has accepted Christ as his sacrifice, shows his faith in the three great facts of Christ's sacrifice.

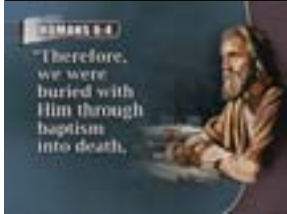
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124

(Text: Romans 6:3, 4)

Paul said, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"
Romans 6:3



125

Then he proceeds to point out the next step that the Christian takes in this rite: "Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death." Verse 4.
But there is a third part to this act of faith.



126

(Text: Romans 6:4)

"That just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,



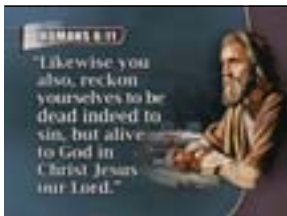
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even so we also should walk in newness of life." Verse 4.
There you have it. The person being baptized has been born of the Spirit and the water!



128

We publicly demonstrate our faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.



129

(Text: Romans 6:11)

Paul then tells us, "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."
Now can you see why this is such a beautiful part of the Christian's life?



130

It is like the wedding ceremony for the engaged couple.
This is their opportunity to publicly witness that they are joined together as long as life lasts.



131

(Text: Ephesians 4:5)

The Bible tells us that there is, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." Ephesians 4:5.
Yet in the church, there seem to be so many ways that baptism is practiced.

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132

**Some sprinkle, some pour, and some immerse.
How can there be one baptism, when there is so much confusion over which method is correct?**



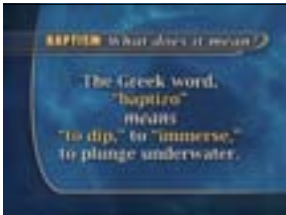
133

We only have to ask, “What did Jesus do?”



134

**We find that the Bible says that John was baptizing in the Jordan River.
When Jesus was baptized, He “went up out of the water.”
He was baptized by immersion.**



135

**In fact, that is what the Greek word baptizo means.
It means to dip under the water or cover over with water.
This is the only method of baptism that represents the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.**



136

One time Paul and his coworker Silas went to the city of Philippi on the invitation of a Macedonian man Paul had seen in a dream.



137

By their preaching, Paul and Silas really stirred up the people of Philippi.



138

So much so that a mob attacked them, and their lives were in danger. The mob tore off the two men’s clothing, and the authorities had them beaten.



139

They were taken to prison, where the jailer was told to put them in heavy confinement and to make sure they did not escape.

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140

At midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing, when suddenly an earthquake shook the prison walls—and immediately, the doors of the prison were opened and everyone's chains fell off.

The keeper of the prison came running, and, seeing the doors opened, assumed that all the prisoners had fled.



141

He was in the process of taking out his sword to commit suicide—certain that he would be put to death for letting the prisoners escape.



142

(Text: Acts 16:28)

But Paul called out to him in a loud voice, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.” (Acts 16:28)



143

The poor jailer was awed! These men—Paul and Silas—had suffered agony at the hands of the jailer, yet they held no resentment and wanted no revenge.

The jailer knew they were innocent men.

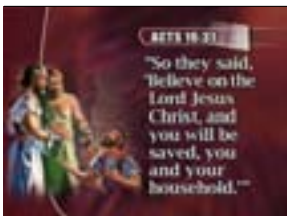
He ran and got a light, then went to their cell, falling at their feet and begging forgiveness.



144

(Text: Acts 16:30, 31)

“And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’”



145

So the two men of God answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

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146

The jailer took Paul and Silas to his house and bathed their bleeding feet and backs.



147

(Text: Acts 16:33)

“And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes.



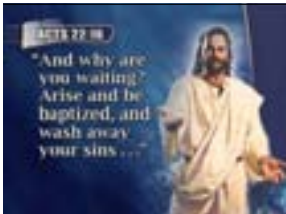
148

**And immediately he and all his family were baptized.”
Acts 16:33**



149

Friends, if you have not understood the meaning and importance of baptism before, or if you have not had the privilege of following Jesus in this sacred ceremony of baptism by immersion, the same question and invitation comes to you that Annanias asked of Saul:



150

(Text: Acts 22:16)

“Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins...”

Acts 22:16.



151

When Jesus was baptized, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” When you, too, enter the waters of baptism, our Lord will speak to your heart saying, “You are my beloved son. You are my beloved daughter. I am well pleased with you.”

Life’s greatest joy is knowing that you are pleasing God.

When you are baptized, you will have the wonderful sense that you belong to God. You are a child of God. In a sense baptism is like a wedding. Before marriage the bride and groom are in love. Marriage does not create the love in a man’s heart for a woman or in the woman’s heart for the man.

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**Marriage is a testimony of that love. Marriage is a public commitment before family and friends.
Baptism is like that. Baptism does not create love in our hearts for God.**

The reason we want to be baptized is because we already love Him.

Baptism is the public testimony before our family and friends and the church that we are deeply in love with and committed to Jesus Christ.

When we make this public commitment, our past is symbolically buried in the waters of baptism, and we rise to live a new life in Christ.

**The past is gone – buried – never to haunt us again. God promises to give us the power of His Holy Spirit to enable us to live the Christian life
Some people hesitate. They hold back. They don't believe they are ready.**

Baptism does not mean you are perfect. It does mean you are committed.

Jesus is appealing to you today to follow His footsteps in the watery grave of baptism. He offers you forgiveness, freedom from all the guilt of your past and power to live a new life through His Holy Spirit.

Will you say yes to Jesus right now? If you would like to follow Jesus all the way in Bible baptism, I want you to walk to the front of this auditorium so I can especially pray for you.

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I invite you all to stand for prayer just now. Before I pray, if you want to say, “Yes, Jesus, I want to be baptized,” walk down the aisle right now and stand at this altar with your head bowed, so I can pray for you. Don’t hesitate. Come — Come right now, and I’ll pray.