

**Series: Baptism - What Does the Bible Really Teach?**  
**“What is the Meaning and Purpose of Baptism for Today?”**

**Introduction:**

1. Water baptism is not a simple, "cut and dried" subject as many would have you to believe. If it were, there would not be multitudes of different convictions and beliefs about it.
2. It is, in fact, a complex subject that must be rightly divided if it is to be properly understood. Scriptures must be taken in context and **all** Scriptures must be examined, not just a select few that prove whatever point we are trying to make.
3. This is what we have endeavored to do in this series of lessons. This is our tenth study on this subject because we have sought to examine the whole counsel of God's Word.
4. In this final lesson, we will seek to take what we have learned and answer the question, "What is the meaning and purpose of baptism for today?"

**Water baptism is an external identification.**

1. As we study the Scriptures, we see the issue of **identification** constantly associated with baptism. Here are a few examples:
  - **1 Corinthians 10:2** - When Israel was baptized unto Moses, they were identifying themselves with Moses and his message of deliverance.
  - **Mark 1:4-5** - When Israel was baptized by John, they were identifying themselves with John and his message of repentance.
  - **Luke 3:21** - When Christ was baptized, He was identifying Himself with the believing remnant of Israel and separating Himself from unbelieving and apostate Israel.
  - **Acts 2:38-41** - When Israel was baptized, they were identifying themselves with Peter's message that Christ was the risen Messiah and they needed to repent. They were identifying themselves with the *“little flock.”*
  - **Acts 18:8** - When Jewish and Gentile Corinthians were baptized, they were identifying themselves with Paul's gospel of grace and separating from their previous belief system (whether it was Judaism or paganism).
2. The believer must understand that today it is **Spirit** baptism that identifies the believer eternally with Christ and His body. **Romans 6:3-4; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:26-28; Ephesians 4:4-5**
  - This is the baptism that is absolutely necessary and it only comes through faith in Jesus Christ. It is a spiritual baptism that takes place in the inner man.

**Water baptism is an external testimony to others.**

1. We never see any person baptizing himself in the Bible. When a person is baptized in the Bible, there is always at least one other person present. Typically, there was a group of people present to witness the baptism.
  - **Matthew 3:6-7** - When these Jews were baptized by John, it was a testimony that they no longer aligned themselves with the religious leadership of Israel.

- **Luke 7:29-30** - The publicans were baptized as a testimony that they believed the message of John and Jesus. The Pharisees' and lawyers' rejection of baptism was a testimony that they rejected the counsel of God.
  - **Acts 8:36-38** - The Ethiopian man's baptism was a testimony to Philip that he believed Philip's message concerning Christ.
  - **Acts 10:44-48** - Baptism was a testimony that Cornelius and those with him had received the Holy Spirit.
  - **Acts 16:14-15** - Lydia's baptism was a testimony that she believed Paul's message.
2. Baptism is not a testimony to God. God sees the heart, and He is simply looking for your heart to rest fully in faith in Jesus Christ. At that moment God's Spirit enters into your spirit and places you into the body of Christ. **Ephesians 1:13-14**
  3. Another human being cannot see your heart, so baptism is simply an external testimony of your faith in Christ and your separation from any previous belief system you might have held.

**Baptism is a matter of personal liberty.**

1. Baptism was an absolute requirement under Israel's program, but we do not see Paul teaching or exercising baptism as a legalistic requirement for Gentiles.
2. Paul does not **demand** it, nor does he **forbid** it. We see baptisms taking place on Paul's second missionary journey, but a total absence of any baptisms on his first journey.
3. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 1:17** that Christ sent him not to baptize, but Paul wrote many letters after this, and never does he forbid water baptism.
4. Paul makes it clear that there is only one baptism that can place you in the body of Christ and that is Holy Spirit baptism (**Ephesians 4:4-6**). But Paul never establishes a legalistic command forbidding water baptism, nor does he do this regarding other highly Jewish issues such as circumcision, eating of certain meats, Sabbath days, etc.
5. If a believer wanted to observe certain dietary restrictions or Sabbath days, Paul taught that this was a matter of personal liberty (Romans 14). But the believer is wrong when he attempts to foist his personal preferences on others and make it a legalistic law.
6. We even see Paul circumcising Timothy in **Acts 16:3**, taking a Jewish vow in **Acts 18:18**, and going to observe a Jewish feast in **Acts 18:21**. Paul understood that these things brought no spiritual merit before God. He did these things as a testimony to the Jews in an effort to open up doors for the gospel.
  - On the other hand, Paul refused to allow Titus to be circumcised. Titus was a Gentile and it would have sent the wrong message to others. Paul made some wise choices based on the situation he was in.
7. If a person desired to be baptized in an effort to be a testimony for Christ to unsaved loved ones and to identify themselves with their new faith in Christ, Paul would say, "Amen!" If it can be a bridge to reach others, Paul would say, "Go for it."
8. If a person felt that baptism would be counter-productive in their testimony to unsaved loved ones, Paul wouldn't have demanded it of them. **Illustration:** Mark Murdock

- Paul would say, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."  
**Romans 14:5**

**In Conclusion:**

1. If you desire water baptism here are some questions to ask:
  - Am I doing this in an effort to please God and get Him to bless me? **Wrong reason.**
  - Am I doing this as a religious ritual as a means of attaining God's grace? **Wrong reason.**
  - Am I doing this to please and appease other believers? **Wrong reason.**
  - Am I doing this to identify myself externally with Christ (realizing I am already identified eternally with Christ) and thereby open up doors to share the gospel and my new faith with others? **The right reason!**
2. The first three motives result in nothing but a dead religious work. The last motive results in a demonstration of God's grace to others.