

ARTICLE 10

We believe in water baptism by immersion, and all who repent should be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The ordinance of water baptism is a precious gift from God. Through baptism, we express publicly that we have become believers in Christ. Although being baptized does not transform us into being Christians, it gives us an opportunity to confess our faith publicly. During baptism, our immersion is a dramatic testimony about the death of Christ and His bodily Resurrection. Water baptism is more than a religious ceremony—it is a pledge to God and others that we will devote ourselves to Christ-like living.

1. Ordinances of the Church

a. Water baptism, the Lord's Supper, and feet washing are all ordinances of the church.

These ordinances, also referred to as "sacraments," are visible signs of the saving work of Jesus Christ. They are outward signs of the great realities of salvation and confirm God's divine promise that through His grace, He will redeem (save) believers. For believers, Christian ordinances are not mere ceremonies or rituals for worship, but are means of real communion with God and are means of strengthening our faith in God.

Scripture references: Romans 6:1-11; 1 Corinthians 11:23-24; John 13:5-17

b. Ordinances are important because they are commanded by Christ and strengthen our faith.

Acts of worship identified as ordinances have the following characteristics: (1) they were instituted by Jesus Himself; (2) they are reminders of Jesus' atoning death; and (3) they are repeated in the church. The ordinances are not absolutely essential for receiving salvation. They do not create faith, but they presuppose faith and are a response to faith (Acts 2:41; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32).

Scripture references: Acts 2:41; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32

2. Definition of Water Baptism

The verb "baptize" (*baptizō*) means to "immerse, dip, submerge." A number of biblical passages reinforce an immersion understanding of baptism. According to Matthew 3:16, "Jesus, when He had been baptized, came up immediately from the water." Later in Romans 6:1-14, the apostle Paul refers to the symbolism of water baptism.

a. Water baptism symbolizes death and resurrection.

When a believer is united to Christ by faith, that believer is dying to sin and is rising with Christ into a new life. To portray the union of the believer with Christ in His death and Resurrection, Paul refers to the immersion of the Christian in water (Romans 6:4; see also Colossians 2:12). This

mode of baptism proclaims the spiritual death to the old life and the spiritual resurrection of the believer to a new life in Christ. Therefore, immersion symbolizes the death and Resurrection of Christ and the believer's spiritual death and resurrection at conversion.

Scripture references: Matthew 3:16; Romans 6:1-14; Colossians 2:12

b. Water baptism symbolizes forgiveness and cleansing from sin.

The ordinance of baptism is a picture of the new relationship into which the believer has entered through faith in Christ. When a person becomes a Christian and is united with Christ through faith, that person is dying with Christ to sin and rising with Him to a new life. Baptism proclaims our spiritual death to the old life of wrongdoing and our resurrection to our new life in Christ. It is a vivid reminder that God has forgiven and cleansed us from our sins.

Scripture references: Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:5; Acts 8:12; Romans 6:3-5

3. Three Baptisms: Conversion Baptism, Spirit Baptism, and Water Baptism

Conversion baptism is a spiritual event that automatically occurs at the moment of one's initial faith in Christ. This baptism is God's way of joining believers to the body of Christ, the universal church.

Water baptism, on the other hand, does not make one a Christian, but illustrates what has happened in conversion. It signifies a spiritual death with Christ to the old life of sin and a spiritual resurrection with Christ to a new life.

Baptism in the Spirit, which is distinct from both conversion and water baptism, gives the believer special power for service and ministry.

a. Conversion baptism is the unique act of the Holy Spirit that occurs when a person becomes a follower of Christ, resulting in that person's being placed as a member of Christ's body, the universal church.

"Baptism by the Spirit" and "Baptism in the Spirit"—The New Testament refers to this conversion baptism as "baptism *by* the Spirit" and to another baptism as "baptism *in* the Spirit." Baptism *by* the Spirit is received at the point of conversion, and baptism *in* the Spirit is an additional blessing of spiritual empowerment that is received after conversion.

"One" Baptism—The existence of these two baptisms should not be thought to be inconsistent with Ephesians 4:5, which says, "[There is] one baptism." It is through the one conversion baptism that all penitent sinners become members of the body of Christ. We all receive the same "one" baptism during conversion. This truth is also stated in 1 Corinthians 12:13. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free." There is only one baptism that incorporates the believer into the church, Christ's body, and that is administered by the Holy Spirit at conversion. It is distinct from baptism in water and Christ's act of baptizing believers in the Holy Spirit after their conversion.

Scripture references: 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:5

b. Spirit baptism (baptism in the Holy Spirit) is directly related to the believer's being empowered by the Holy Spirit for witness and service.

Baptism in the Spirit follows conversion baptism, and it may either follow (Acts 2:38; 8:14-17; 19:5-6) or precede water baptism (Acts 10:44-48).

(For further explanation regarding Spirit baptism, please see "Articles 8 & 9" of the this document.)

Scripture references: Acts 2:38; 8:14-17; 10:44-48; 19:5-6

c. *Water baptism portrays a vital biblical truth—the identity of the believer with Christ's death, burial, and Resurrection.*

A believer's baptism is a public testimony or statement that he or she has been united with Christ and is now a part of the body of Christ (Galatians 3:26-28; Colossians 2:12; see also Romans 6:1-11).

(1) *Baptism in water was instituted by Christ.*

God has given this act of worship to the church and has made it part of what He has called the church to do (Matthew 28:19). Therefore, the church is obligated to baptize. Baptism is necessary for all believers because it fulfills the Lord's missionary command. Preaching the Good News of Christ's love and baptizing are the church's mission. These actions are God's assignment or call for the church. The Lord commanded the church to go into the world and preach and baptize, sharing with others the Good News of Christ and initiating them into His body (the universal church).

(2) *Baptism in water is to be administered "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*

Father—Believers have been adopted into the divine family by the Father. As children of God, they have received special rights and privileges.

Son—Through Christ, believers' sins have been forgiven, and they share in the saving benefits of His death and Resurrection.

Holy Spirit—Through the new birth, the Holy Spirit has established believers in a new life, enabling them to resist temptation and to give their lives in service to Christ.

In water baptism the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are to be honored and worshiped (Matthew 28:19).

(3) *The conditions for baptism in water are the hearing of the Word of God, repentance from sin, and faith in Jesus Christ.*

These conditions for water baptism are not conditions that we meet through our strength alone. They are responses of faith to God's offer of salvation (Acts 2:38; 18:8). In His offer, God invites us to come to Him, and He gives us strength to humbly ask for forgiveness, to turn away from wrongdoing, and to accept Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of our lives.

(4) *Baptism in water is a public response to the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer.*

Water baptism serves as a testimony to the death and Resurrection of Christ. But more than that, baptism demonstrates in a visible way our death with Christ and resurrection to a new life (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:1-11).

(5) *The proper candidates for baptism are those who have accepted Christ as their Savior.*

In the New Testament, baptism is associated with repentance (Acts 2:38), believing on Christ (8:12,37), and receiving the Word (2:41). These responses can only be made by believers.

(6) Water baptism is a once in a lifetime public testimony of our conversion and our entry through repentance and faith into the Christian life.

The outward sign of water baptism declares that we have been cleansed from sin because of what Christ has done for us (Ephesians 5:26).

Scripture references:

Baptism as an ordinance of Christ—Matthew 28:19

Administration of water baptism—Matthew 28:19

Conditions for water baptism—Acts 2:38; 18:8

Water baptism as a response to God—Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:1-11

Candidates for water baptism—Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 37

Baptism as a public testimony—Ephesians 5:26

Discussion

Ordinances of the Church

- 1) What are the ordinances of the church? Why are they important?

Definition of Water Baptism

- 2) What is the meaning of the verb "baptize"?
- 3) What does immersion symbolize?

Three Baptisms: Conversion Baptism, Spirit Baptism, and Water Baptism

- 4) What are the three baptisms mentioned in the Bible? What is the significance of each?
- 5) What are the conditions for water baptism?

Prayer

Almighty God, we give thanks to You for the divine ordinance of baptism. You have so graciously given us this sign as a reminder of Your love and work in our lives.

In our baptism we remember that You have washed away our sins and have united us with Christ. In our baptism we joyfully testify that we have died to sin and have received a new life through the death and Resurrection of our Lord. We thank You for redeeming us through the sacrifice of Christ.

Dear Father, we pray that you will give us the power through Your Holy Spirit, to be faithful disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we always remain sensitive and obedient to Him.

Amen.

Resources for Additional Study

Barth, Karl. *Baptism as the Foundation of the Christian Life*. Translator: G. W. Bromiley. (Church Dogmatics, Vol. 4, Part 4) Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969.

Carson, Alexander. *Baptism: Its Modes and Its Subjects*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1955?

Fiddes, Paul S., ed. *Reflections on the Water: Understanding God and the World Through the Baptism of Believers*. Oxford, England: Regent's Park College, 1996.

Shurden, Walter B., ed. *Baptism and the Lord's Supper*. Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 1999.