

the thieves who was crucified with Christ said, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, to day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42-43). In a very short while, the Lord died on the Cross, and the thief died also. But we have the authority of the Lord Jesus that the thief who hung beside Him was indeed with Him that day in paradise. Since the thief died before he had an opportunity to be baptized, we understand that it is not a requirement for making Heaven.

When a person has the mercy of the Lord extended to him and he repents, he is forgiven and saved. If he dies before he can be baptized, he follows in the footsteps of the forgiven thief who went from the cross to glory. On the other hand, if someone is taught that baptism is a part of God’s commandments and is indifferent or refuses to follow this teaching, he is rebelling against the commandment of the Lord.

A witness to the world!

One reason for water baptism is that it is a symbolic picture to the world of the new birth. In Romans 6:3-4 we read, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death:

that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

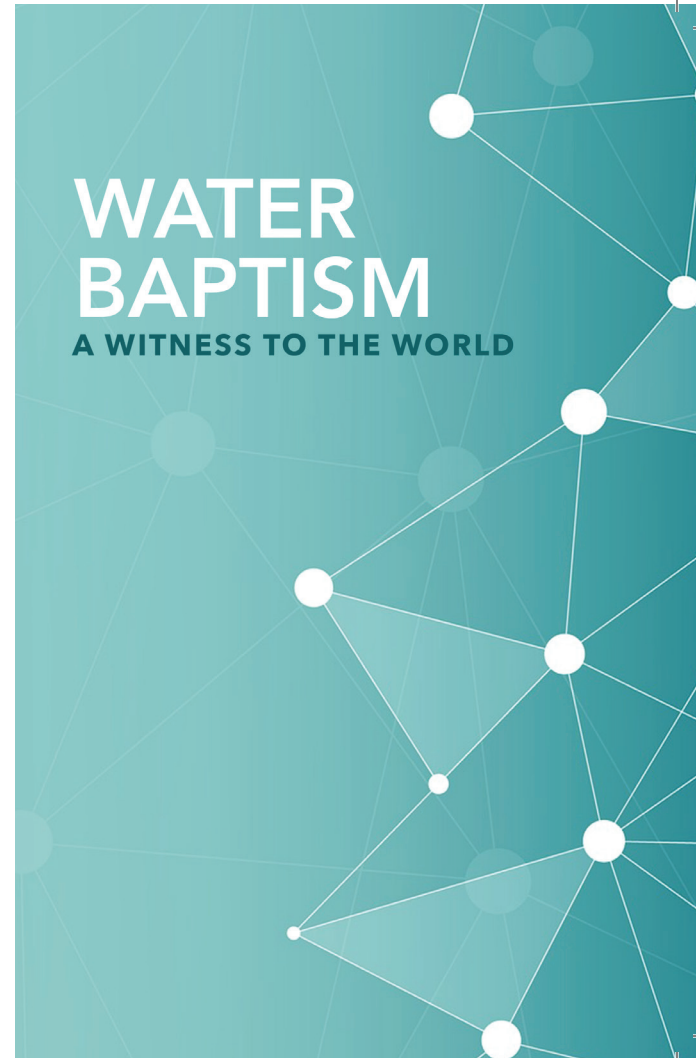
By being baptized, a person testifies that he has been saved and is right with God. His immersion signifies to God and to those who witness his baptism that he is dead to the world. He is buried with Christ in baptism, and then rises to walk in newness of life. The work of regeneration has already been performed in his heart. Water baptism is an outward demonstration to others of what has happened within.

Those who have been baptized in water can look back on it as a landmark in their spiritual walk. And because they obeyed another of Jesus’ commands, they can expect to grow spiritually as a result of it.

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Water baptism is an important step for the person who has been born again. Jesus commissioned His disciples just before He ascended into Heaven, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Three and a half years before, at the start of His ministry, Jesus himself had been baptized by John the Baptist: “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16-17).

On this occasion, the Holy Trinity was manifested. God the Father spoke from Heaven. Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Godhead, stood in the River Jordan. And the presence of the Holy Ghost descended upon Christ in the form of a dove.

Leading by example

Jesus showed by example that water baptism is necessary. Although some in our day

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teach baptism by sprinkling, Jesus also showed that baptism should be by immersion, for He “went up straightway out of the water.”

Another example of baptism by immersion occurred years later. Philip was following the Lord’s command and preaching the Gospel when the Spirit directed him to leave a revival meeting and go to the desert. There, he found an Ethiopian eunuch riding in his chariot. Joining him, Philip preached Jesus to him.

As they journeyed along, the Ethiopian said to Philip, “See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” (Acts 8:36). How would the eunuch have known he was to be baptized unless Philip had taught him? Philip answered, “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.”

So they both went down into the water, and Philip baptized the new convert. When they came up out of the water, the eunuch went on his way rejoicing, and the Spirit caught Philip away to another place.

Whose name?

Some people say baptism should be in Jesus’ name only. Yet Jesus said clearly to baptize “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19).

The disciples followed this direction. On one occasion, the Apostle Paul asked a group of new converts, “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” They answered: “We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism” (Acts 19:2-3).

The Apostle Paul knew that if they had been baptized as Jesus had taught, they would have heard of the Holy Ghost. He explained that John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. When they heard Paul’s explanation, they knew they needed to be baptized again, according to the command of Jesus.

The question may be asked, Can a person make Heaven without being baptized? Some teach that a person is not saved until after he is baptized. Yet we read in Luke 23 that one of