

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn about the practical life of the Christian community. Two teachers will teach from the Bible about the Christian ceremonies. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today's teaching is: CHRISTIAN BAPTISM, the ceremony signifying the Christian's unity with Jesus Christ.

(S) **POINT 1. THE INSTITUTION OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM**

First. The baptism of Jesus Christ himself.

Matthew 3:1-17 describes the ministry of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus Christ. Jesus never sinned. So why was he baptised? He was baptised for two reasons.

One. Jesus was baptised to reaffirm John's ministry. He reaffirmed God's righteous requirement that John prepared the way for him and proclaimed him. God had sent John to prepare the way for Jesus. He preached repentance. Those who repented were forgiven and baptised as a sign that their sins were washed away. John promised that Jesus would baptise them with his Holy Spirit.

Two. Jesus was baptised to reaffirm God's righteous requirement that all sins must be punished. God's holy and righteous indignation against sin had to be satisfied and removed before people could be saved. Jesus reaffirmed his eternal personal resolution (1 Pet 1:20) to save people by bearing their sins in their place (Isa 53:5-6).

(T) **Second. Christ's command to baptise.**

In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, *baptising* 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."

Only after Jesus finished his work of redemption by his death and resurrection, he instituted Christian baptism. People who became disciples of Christ had to be baptised. After their baptism they had to continue to learn the teachings of Christ and learn to obey them.

(S) **Third. The Christian baptismal formula.**

In Matthew 28:19 we read that new Christians have to be *baptised in the name of God the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. Note, not in three names, but in the one name. Christians believe in one God.

But in Acts 2:38 we read that new Christians were *baptised in the name of Jesus Christ* only. What is the difference between being baptised in the name of Jesus Christ only and being baptised in the name of the Triune God?

There is no difference, because Jesus Christ is God! Colossians 1:15 teaches that Jesus Christ is the visible revelation of the invisible God. Colossians 2:9 teaches that all the fullness of the divine nature lives in bodily form in Jesus Christ. In the book of Acts the Jews, Samaritans and God-fearing Gentiles were baptised only in the name of Jesus Christ, because they already acknowledged the one true God of the Bible before they realised that Jesus Christ was the visible image of the invisible God and before they believed that Jesus Christ had made complete atonement for their sins. However, *it is appropriate to baptise all believers from every nation in the world* in the one name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

(T) **POINT 2. THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM**

The only right understanding of Christian baptism is to study *everything* the Bible says about baptism and not to base Christian baptism on one favourite passage in the Bible. By *emphasising* only one passage in the Bible, Christian churches have come to different conclusions about the meaning and method of Christian baptism.

The basic meaning of Christian baptism is unity with Jesus Christ in all the phases of his salvation work with reference to the past, the present and the future. The following six teachings make this very clear.

(S) **First. The baptism with water is a sign of being bound to Jesus Christ and his righteousness. It is the sign of the purification or the washing away of all sins.**

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament the baptism ceremony and procedure signifies ritual cleansing from all sins or purification of sins.

One. In the Old Testament all the ceremonies that consisted of the *sprinkling* of blood and the *washing* with water signified purification or ritual cleansing from sins. For example, king David had committed adultery with another man's wife and even murdered her husband. Then God sent the prophet Nathan to show him his sins. In Psalm 51:4-7, David

confesses his sins and pleads with God to purify him from all his sins. He prays, “*Wash me and I will be whiter than snow*”.

Two. In the New Testament the symbolism of Christian baptism is derived from the Old Testament. In John 3:25-26, a Jew questioned the *baptism* of John by arguments from the ceremonial *washing* in the Old Testament. Hebrews 6:2 also speaks of the Old Testament *purification ceremonies* as ‘*baptisms*’. This proves that Christian baptism in the New Testament was entirely in line with the purification baptisms in the Old Testament period.

Acts 2:38 teaches that Christians are baptised *for the forgiveness of their sins*. Acts 22:16 teaches that the apostle Paul was baptised *in order to wash away his sins*. Romans 6:3-7 teaches that Christians are baptised *to do away the body of sin* and be set free from the slavery of sin. And Colossians 2:11-12 teaches that Christians are baptised *to put off the sinful nature*.

Conclusion. Christian baptism is a visible sign and seal that all the sins of the believer have been washed away, that he is forgiven, justified and saved. *The invisible purification of sins* is expressed by *the visible baptism or washing with water*.

(T) Second. The baptism with water is a sign of being bound to Jesus Christ and his Spirit. It is the sign of the baptism with the Holy Spirit or rebirth.

In Mark 1:8 John the Baptist said that he baptised people that repented *with water*, but that Jesus Christ would baptise these people *with the Holy Spirit*. The baptism with the Holy Spirit is the real event that changes people and the baptism with water is the visible sign and seal that this event has really taken place. When people repent from their sins and believe in Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ comes from heaven above to dwell in their hearts and lives here below on earth. This event is the spiritual rebirth or regeneration of a new believer and is called ‘the baptism with the Spirit’ in the Bible. The baptism with water is the visible sign and seal of the baptism with the Spirit.

In John 3:5 Jesus said, “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of the Spirit.” In Titus 3:5-6 Paul teaches that people are saved through the *washing* of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom God *poured out* on all believers. God did this when people believed and were justified. And in Acts 10:47, Peter says, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptised with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have”.

Conclusion. Christian baptism is a visible sign and seal that the believer has been born again and that the Spirit has come to dwell in his heart. *The invisible baptism with the Holy Spirit* is expressed by *the visible baptism with water*.

(S) Third. The baptism with water is a sign of being bound to Jesus Christ and to all the phases of his salvation work in the past, present and future.

Union with Jesus Christ himself cannot be separated from union with his accomplished work of salvation. And union with his death cannot be separated from union with his resurrection! Romans 6:3-7 teaches that *justification* is expressed in the baptism with water, that *sanctification* is expressed in a holy life and that ultimate *glorification* will be expressed in the resurrection of our bodies from the dead.

One. Baptism with water is a sign of justification. In Romans 6:3, baptism into Christ is a sign of *union with Christ and participation in all his privileges*! Here it particularly signifies union with Christ in his death and participation in all the benefits of his death! Their symbolic burial with Christ is proof of the reality of their death. In Romans 6 baptism particularly signifies the believer’s *spiritual union with the death and burial of Christ*. The (aorist) tenses of the verbs in Romans 6:3-4 show that Christians have *once for all* in their past history died and were buried spiritually. They are as effectively shut out of the realm of sin, the sinful world and the kingdom of Satan as a dead person in a grave is shut out from human life! Thus, they are once for all forgiven and justified! The (perfect) tense of the words “has grown together in the likeness of his death” in Romans 6:5a shows that this forgiveness or justification is *a continuing present reality*! Christian baptism is not the cause, but only the sign of this unity with Christ.

Two. Justification cannot be separated from sanctification and glorification. The argument of Romans 6:5 is that the intimate spiritual union with Christ’s death and burial cannot be separated from the intimate spiritual union with his resurrection! Just as the death of Christ as an atonement for sins is necessary and certain for justification, likewise the resurrected life of Christ is necessary and certain for sanctification. Christians *shall* be conformed to Christ in a holy life here and now on earth. And finally Christians *shall* be conformed to Christ in a life of glorious immortality of soul and body hereafter!

Conclusion. Christian baptism is a visible sign and seal that the believer has been spiritually united with Christ and therefore participates fully in all the phases of Christ’s salvation work in the past, present and the future. *The invisible union with Christ and with his justification, sanctification and glorification* is expressed in *the visible baptism with water*.

(T) **Fourth. The baptism with water is a sign of being bound to Jesus Christ, who is the visible image of the Triune God, and to his mission in this world.**

Baptism *in the one name* of God the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is a sign and seal that the believer is united to the God, who revealed himself in the Bible. The believer is united to everything God's name signifies in the Bible and to everything God does in this world. The believer is particularly bound to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, namely, to make disciples in every country of this world. Baptism in the name of the God of the Bible means that the believer has become his disciple, fellowships with him, submits to him and obeys him.

Conclusion. Christian baptism is a visible sign and seal that the believer is bound to the God of the Bible and follows him as a disciple. *The invisible union with the God of the Bible and his mission in the world is expressed in the visible baptism with water.*

(S) **Fifth. The baptism with water is a sign of being bound to Jesus Christ and to the Body of Christ, which is the Christian Church in the world.**

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 says that the relationship between Christ and Christians is very well expressed in the picture of a body, its head and its members. A believer becomes a genuine member of the Christian Church only when he is baptised by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ, that is, when he is born again. The fact that a believer is baptised by another believer and usually in the presence of other believers means that a Christian may never view himself as disconnected from Jesus Christ, from the Christian Church or from other Christians in the world.

Conclusion. Christian baptism is a visible sign and seal that the believer has become united to Christ, to the Christian Church and to all the Christians in the whole world. *The invisible membership to the Body of Christ is expressed in the visible baptism with water.*

(T) **Sixth. The baptism with water is a sign of being bound the Jesus Christ and his covenant people in the world.**

Galatians 3:26-29 teaches that a person who is baptised into Jesus Christ has clothed himself with Jesus Christ, belongs to Jesus Christ, has become a spiritual descendant of Abraham and thus has become an heir of God's covenant people.

Conclusion. Christian baptism is a visible sign and seal that the believer has become united to Christ, to the covenant of God with Abraham and thus to God's covenant people in the Bible. *The invisible membership to God's covenant people is expressed in the visible baptism with water.*

(S) **POINT 3. THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM**

First. In baptism, God gives a testimony to the believer.

In the meaning of baptism we have seen that when a person is baptised, *God gives to the believer a testimony* in the form of a visible sign and seal that he has been united the Jesus Christ and to all the benefits of Christ's salvation work.

(T) **Second. In baptism, the believer also gives a testimony to the people present at his baptism.**

When a person hears the gospel, he is called to repent and to believe in Jesus Christ. And when he is baptised, he ought to confess Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord.

In Acts 2:38 and 22:16 when believers were baptised, they were required *to call on the name of Jesus Christ*. This meant that they were asked to publicly confess (or call on) the name of Jesus Christ when they were baptised.

At the institution of baptism in Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus taught that believers should always put his teachings into practise. Thus, Christian baptism should include *a profession* of faith in Jesus Christ and *a commitment* to obey him!

(S) **Third. Baptism is administered in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

It seems clear from the Bible that the person that baptised the new believer spoke *the name of Jesus Christ or the one name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit* over the new believer during baptism.

(T) **Fourth. How were believers baptised in the Early Church?**

The time or mode of baptism is not taught or prescribed in the Bible. This is because the general teaching and practise of purification or the washing away of sins were already known among the Jews and the earliest believers.

One. The washing away of sins was symbolised by the sprinkling or pouring of water over the believer. Throughout the Old Testament people were purified by *sprinkling* water over them or by *washing* them with water. In ancient days, people washed or bathed themselves by *pouring* water with a cup over themselves.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 says, "I will *sprinkle* clean water on you, and you will be clean ; ... I will give you *a new heart* and put a new spirit in you; ... I will put my *Spirit* in you and move you to follow my decrees." The washing away of sins was symbolised by the sprinkling of water and this was connected to rebirth and the reception of the Holy Spirit.

In Psalm 51:2,10-11 David prays, “*Wash away* all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ...Create in me a *pure heart*, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me....Do not take your *Holy Spirit* from me.” Again the washing away of sins was symbolised by *pouring water over* him and this was connected to renewal and the Holy Spirit.

In Luke 11:38 and Mark 7:2-4 *the washing* of hands and utensils is called a *baptism*. They way people *washed* hands was by *pouring water over* hands while they rubbed the one hand into the other.

Two. The baptism with the Holy Spirit is visibly expressed by the baptism with water. John the Baptist said, “I baptise you *with water*, but Jesus will baptise you *with the Holy Spirit*” (Mk 1:8). The same word is used for both baptisms. How were people baptised with the Holy Spirit? Throughout the New Testament the Holy Spirit *was sent from above* (Lk 24:49); *descended from above* onto people (Mk 1:10); was *poured out from above* over the people (Act 2:33); *fell on* people (Act 8:16) and *came upon* people (Act 11:15). All this was called *the baptism* with the Spirit (Act 11:16). It is therefore very likely that when a believer was baptised, water was *sprinkled over or poured out over* the believer.

Three. The example of John the Baptist. In Marc 1:5 and 8 John baptised people *in* the River Jordan, but *with* water. And he said, “I baptise you *with* water, but Jesus will baptise you *with* the Holy Spirit.”. It is very likely that John the Baptist and the believers stood with their feet in the water of the River Jordan while John baptised them by sprinkling or pouring water out over them.

Four. The example of Paul’s baptism. In Acts 22:16 Ananias said to the apostle Paul, “Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name”. Paul was in a house. Ananias requested him *to stand up* to be baptised and he called the baptism a *washing away* of sins. There are four conclusions. The believer was requested to stand up. The believer let another person baptise him, because believers should never baptise themselves. The believer confessed his faith in Jesus Christ. And the baptism symbolised the washing off or washing away of sins. It is therefore most likely that Paul was baptised while he stood and Ananias poured water from above over him.

Five. The method of baptism. Because the Bible does not prescribe or forbid any method of baptism, Christians are free to baptise people in a way that is meaningful to them. That is why some Christians baptise by sprinkling water or pouring water over the believers and others baptise by immersing the believers in water.

Six. Conclusion. While a particular mode of baptism is not taught or forbidden in the Bible, Christian baptism with the meaning of washing away of sins may be expressed by the pouring of water over the standing believer. The earliest picture of a Christian baptism is a painting on a wall in the catacombs of Rome. It depicts two people standing in water while the one pours water out over the other. Like John the Baptist, they stood *in* the water and baptised *with* water.

Seven. Christians are not commanded how to baptise, but they are commanded to accept and love Christians that have a different way of baptising people. The *meaning* of Christian baptism is essential and Christians cannot compromise this. But the practical *method* of baptism is not essential and therefore Christians must accept one another’s differences and continue to speak of one another in love.

(S) ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Teach new believers what the Bible teaches about the meaning and practice of Christian baptism.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and build Christ’s Church” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.