

# How to Perform a New Testament Baptism

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**B**APTISM is a divine and sacred ordinance. It is not a humanly appointed act or form. Jesus Christ himself it was who said: "Teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." That which is done by the direct command of Christ, and in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is the most solemn and sacred possible, and deserves and demands the strictest reverence and solemnity. He who looks upon it as a type of formality has never caught the first glimpse of its sacred significance and deep meaning.

Baptism is the most significant step in the life of the convert. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). There can be no step more significant than being born to everlasting life. He who administers baptism, therefore, has no right to take away from, mar, nor allow to be obscured, the sacred significance of this divinely appointed act.

Baptism stands for the most tragic and the most triumphant events in the life of our Lord. The most tragic event in the life of the world was His death and burial, and the most triumphant event in all the world was His resurrection. Without these, all hope vanishes, and with them, hope has no limits except the limit of assurance. These lie at the absolute foundation of Christianity. Take these away, and there is not a claim for Christianity that can stand. Baptism, standing for these things, must be so performed as to be in keeping with the things for which it stands.

It stands for the solemn burial of the candidate. The baptistery typifies and stands for the grave of the Lord himself. "We are buried with him by baptism into death" (Romans 6:4). We should, therefore, teach old and young to have respect for that which stands for the grave of the Lord: hence, the inadvisability of a baptistery so placed that we walk and tramp carelessly over it and perpetuate other indignities.

Baptism signifies in the life of the candidate: burial to the old life out of Christ, and resurrection to the new life in Christ; burial to the old life without promise, and resurrection to the new life with all God's promises; burial to the old life unforgiven, and resurrection to the new life in the kingdom; burial to the old life of disobedience and sin, and resurrection to the new life of obedience and service; burial to the old life with death as its end and the grave as its goal, and resurrection to the new life with eternal life as its reward and heaven as its goal.

There is no sermon so eloquent on the subject of Christian baptism as a properly performed baptism. With the Scriptures on the subject being quoted while a baptism is being so performed as to bring out the sacredness, the beauty, and the significance of the act, unbaptized men are impressed, and, perhaps, persuaded to thus obey Him, as they could not be by any human oratory or argument.

The way in which it is performed determines whether its message is made or marred. If a baptism is so carelessly or unskillfully performed as to appear to be a "ducking" instead of a solemn burial, then shall we blame the irreverent, or shall we blame ourselves, for the impression that has been made

and which they reveal when they call it a "ducking"?

If the impression is left that it is a silly act of fanatics instead of a sacred and significant act of obedience, is it not because of failure to prepare properly the minds of the beholders?

If the impression is left that it is a foolish spectacle, disgusting, and even immodest, rather than a most beautiful and sacred act of deepest significance and piety, is it not because of carelessness?

The solution of the problems mentioned above lies in easy reach. It consists in most careful preparation—spiritual, mental, and physical—of the minister, the candidate, and the audience.

## PREREQUISITES

The minister must be thoroughly impressed that a baptism is a serious and sacred burial. While baptism is the fulfillment of a command, it is more than that; it is a burial. While baptism may be and is the fourth and consummating step in becoming a Christian, it is something more than merely the next necessary step. It is a solemn burial "with Christ." The minister must not only know this, but he must ever keep it in mind.

The candidate must be thoroughly impressed that baptism is a serious and sacred burial, and is not mere conformity to a congregation's customs.

The audience must be thoroughly impressed that baptism is a serious and solemn burial done under the direct command of the Son of God, and demands the strictest of reverence and most profound respect.

## PREPARATION FOR THE PHYSICAL ACT OF BAPTISM

Regardless of the size of the church, provision should be made for convenient and decent robing facilities. No church of Christ is complete with these omitted. Robes are most advisable. One advantage is that they enable many a baptism to be performed immediately after the confession, which is better than putting the matter off for convenience. Again, they eliminate the tendency to undue display in the matter of clothing. Again, they make all candidates appear the same, and thus leave a bit of Scriptural lesson by suggestion. Again, they make it much more possible to immerse ladies without any chance of any untoward happening tending to embarrassment. Again, they make provision so that the minister may know that all are properly robed without leaving anything to the inexperience and unwisdom of the candidates. These robes, in sufficient quantities, can be easily prepared by the ladies of the church at only the cost of material.

A suggestion is here offered for baptisms performed in open pools and rivers. Let the minister provide himself with a long, sleeveless cape with a clasp at the throat. This must be made of thin, rubber-filled material, incapable of absorbing water. This is in addition to his own personal equipment. The neckband can be clasped about the minister's neck

while going out. Immediately upon raising the candidate up, the cape can be unclasped and placed about the candidate before starting from the water. Being non-absorbing, the cape will not cling, and will prevent all embarrassment due to clinging robes.

The baptistery should be so located that, as a grave for burial, it will not be tramped or stamped upon. It should be a prominent feature in every church of Christ. It should be as ever present to the vision as the communion table. It should be beautiful and suggestive of that for which it stands.

Apparently, small details sometimes have great bearing. A careless janitor who is not thoroughly impressed with the importance of baptizing properly may easily make an error that will annul all that the minister may have been able to teach on the sacredness of baptism in months. The water should be fresh warmth, tempered with a thermometer, and not left to guesses. In depth it should be slightly above the knees of the average-sized man. By all means it should be clean. Baptism stands for a cleansing.

There are two important and sometimes overlooked matters in regard to the baptistery approach. Too frequently the approach is long, narrow, winding, inconvenient, and ugly. To get to the baptistery, one would feel that he was following the crooked way to darker regions. These errors should be eliminated where possible.

The other matter is that the approach should be such that curtains can be used, concealing the candidate and the minister from the audience until the candidate is down in the water.

The matter of assisting the minister and assisting the candidates in preparation for baptism should not be left to any one and every one. There should be men and women specially instructed and regularly appointed for this work. These men and women should know and appreciate that baptism is a sacred burial, and should be capable of leading in prayer and in conversation, while preparing the candidates, that would help the candidates to appreciate the meaning of the ordinance.

## PREPARATION OF THE MINISTER

The minister must have an appreciation of the holiness of the task which he is about to perform. A thorough, Scriptural knowledge of the meaning, place, and significance of baptism is absolutely essential to any proper spiritual preparation. It also seems hardly possible for one to be prepared to perform an act so sacred without prayer, earnest and devout.

To properly perform a baptism, the administrator must be in absolute and perfect mental command of himself. He must throw off the thousand and one other things that may distract him at times, and give his whole heart and mind to the one thing.

The minister must be in perfect command of himself mentally, because the responsibility of performing the act rightly and sacredly is entirely his responsibility. It is little less than sacrilegious to do a bungling job of that which is sacred. He must also be in perfect command of himself, because his mental poise and assuredness will have everything to do with the mental calmness and general performance of the candidate. Perhaps more errors made in baptizing are due to a bit of mental excitement and lack of complete mental