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Biblically, the word “baptize” means to wash, to cleanse by washing, to dip, or to immerse. In Old Testament times, the children of Israel baptized, or washed, themselves outwardly as a means of symbolizing spiritual cleanliness. In Gospel times, John the Baptist performed this cleansing for others. His baptism was a water baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

So, is water baptism a necessary element for the Christian believer now? The short answer to that question is no. But it will take a bit longer to get to the full answer of truth on this subject, because when one is born again, he or she is baptized, or cleansed. We will see that the Bible clearly shows that the cleansing at the time of the new birth is not with water but with the gift of holy spirit.

Water baptism was a part of the Old Testament Levitical law. It specifically applied to Israel. By his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the law, and water baptism no longer applies.

Matthew 5:17:

Think not that I [Jesus Christ] am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

Romans 10:4:

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Jesus Christ has done the cleansing for us. Our only work is to accept him. He then washes away our sin.

1 John 1:7:

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Romans 10:9 and 10 give the two necessary components for someone to be saved, or born again, and to receive this cleansing.

Romans 10:9,10:

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Here are the two components: confess with thy mouth; believe in thine heart. There's no mention of water. In the Gospel period, during which Israel was still subject to the law, it is very clear that John the Baptist did baptize with water. But he also foretold of one, Jesus Christ, who would baptize with holy spirit.

Matthew 3:11:

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost [the gift of holy spirit], and with fire.

John indicates here that the material element of water he used would be replaced by a new baptism.

On the day of his ascension, Jesus Christ told the twelve apostles about this new baptism, a baptism without water, that would soon be available.

Acts 1:4,5:

And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost [the gift of holy spirit] not many days hence.

Also on the day of his ascension, Jesus Christ referred to this baptism both as “the promise of the Father” and being “endued with power from on high.”

Luke 24:49:

And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

Then, ten days later, the gift of holy spirit first became available.

Acts 2:1,4:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost [the gift of holy spirit], and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit [God] gave them utterance.

When one is born again, he or she receives the gift of holy spirit.

Since the day of Pentecost, baptism is a baptism of believing. The Apostle Paul pointed out this distinction to the disciples in Ephesus.

Acts 19:4,5:

Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Now anyone who carries out Romans 10:9 and 10 is baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, receives the gift of holy spirit, and becomes a son of God. Since the day of Pentecost, there is no more need for water baptism, for the born-again believer is baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, spiritually cleansed at the time of the new birth.

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