Baptism

Do Christians have to be baptized? And what does baptism really mean?

Baptism is not required to go to heaven, but it is a sign of obedience to God and a way of publicly declaring your decision to follow Christ. Christ commands His followers in Matthew 28:19 to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Remember that nothing we do will earn us salvation. Salvation is not about our actions, but about what Christ has done for us—the fact that He died for our sins. We must recognize our sin and ask forgiveness for it, but the Bible says that we are saved "by grace ... through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). Grace is God's undeserved mercy.

You might recall the criminal who hung on a cross next to Christ when He was crucified. The criminal confessed Christ as Lord, and even though he didn't have a chance for baptism, his place in Heaven was secured (Luke 23:43). God is a perfect, holy God, and there is nothing we can do to be good enough to spend eternity with Him in heaven. It's all about what He has done for us.

At the same time, when we trust in Christ and desire to live the way He wants us to, it will show in our actions. We are changed because of His work in us. Baptism means that we identify ourselves with Christ; it's a sign that He washed away our sins by His death on the cross. Just as water often symbolizes life in the Bible, baptism is a sign of our new life with Christ.

Christian churches haven't always agreed on the details of baptism—how to do it or when, but they agree on its importance. Baptism reminds us that we aren't saved by our own good works, but because of Christ and what He did for us on the cross. As evangelist Billy Graham has said: "Baptism is a conclusive act of obedience and witness to the world that we are Christ's."