

## What is the Church of the Brethren? People Who are Immersed in Christ

Getting into the Baseball Hall of Fame is tough! Not only do you have to become a major league player, you have to become an all-star! In fact, being an all-star is not enough: you have to be sure to follow the rules too. If you don't follow the rules, now matter how good you are, you aren't getting in. Some of the greatest hitters of all time will not be getting into the Hall of Fame because of some rules that are broken:

- Pete Rose was one of the best ball players of all time. He won't get in because of gambling, even if he only bet on himself winning.
- Jose Conseco definitely won't get it, because of extensive steroid use.
- Then there are those who are the best long ball hitters ever: Barry Bonds, Sammy Sosa, and Mark McQuire. They have been accused by others of taking steroids. They probably won't make it either, even they all broke records of hitting the most homeruns in a year!

Following the rules is important in baseball. You don't get into their "best of all time" club, if you don't follow the rules. Following the rules in our faith has to be even more important!

We must learn to follow the rules of our faith.

We have been learning about what it means to be a Church of the Brethren:

- Counting the Cost and Following Jesus
- Finding Peace in Jesus
- Peace-Making
- Seeking God's Anointing

Today, I want you to consider that the Church of the Brethren has always been serious about following the rules of the Bible. Brethren would question the existence of a believer's faith if that believer did not practice the rules found in the New Testament. They didn't make up rules for their faith, but if found the rules in the Bible herself.

*2 Timothy 2:5 (NLT) - Follow the Lord's rules for doing his work, just as an athlete either follows the rules or is disqualified and wins no prize.*

*Jesus said: Matthew 7:21 (NLT) - Not all people who sound religious are really godly. They may refer to me as 'Lord,' but they still won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven.*

Brethren see certain actions found in the New Testament as rules that must be followed if you claim you are a Christian. They don't find these rules to be burdensome at all.

1 John 5:3 - *This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome...*

If the New Testament says to do it, then the Church of the Brethren says that this is one of the rules of the faith. There are many: love God, love your neighbor, seek God's anointing, take communion, to name a few. But one of these rules is also baptism. Baptism is one of these commands that must be followed.

There is a lot of confusion about baptism. I want you to get a clear picture of why you should be baptized.

## **Why should you be baptized?**

### **1. Baptism is Commanded by Christ**

Jesus said: Mark 16:16 - *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*

Jesus put it bluntly: I want you to be baptized. The Church historically has practiced three different forms of baptism: sprinkling, pouring, and immersion. Almost every scholar agrees, however, that the word "baptize" really means "to immerse under water." We believe in our church that Christ wants a person to be immersed into Him.

Jesus said again: Matthew 28:19-20 - *Jesus said, 'Go then, to all people everywhere and make them my disciples, baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.'*

The Great Commission mentions the Trinity with Baptism, so we baptize three times at the naming of each person of God. One baptism, three dunks. One God, three persons.

We don't baptize to be saved. We get immersed into Christ because of salvation. You see Jesus is the source of salvation. If He says to do it, then we do it.

1 John 2:3 - *We know that we have come to know Him, if we obey His commands.*

So what happens if we don't get baptized? To tell you the truth, the Bible never really answers that question. It just gives us the command to do it. From the beginning the Church of the Brethren has taught that Baptism is an act of obedience.

Alexander Mack once said, "A believer who desires to be baptized, but cannot obtain it because of necessity - like the criminal on the cross - is still saved. If, however, a man does not desire to be baptized, he is rightly to be judged as unbelieving and disobedient, not because of baptism, but because of his unbelief and disobedience."

Why be baptized?

1. Baptism is Commanded by Christ, and...

## 2. Baptism Connects Us to Christ

Jesus is our example. Following Him in what He did connects us to Him in a real and satisfying way.

Matthew 3:16 - *As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water.*

Mark 1:9 - *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth and was baptized by John in the river.*

If Jesus did it, then we must realize that baptism is a chance to connect with Christ.

There are several significant benchmarks in life. Birthdays, graduations, and anniversaries all serve as important points of reference that something really significant happened in your life.

Baptism is a benchmark and celebration that a significant transformation has occurred in our lives. Baptism says that we have been connected to Christ.

When we're baptized it's a line of demarcation—we are buried with Christ and we rise to walk in newness of life.

Baptism is the act that connects us to Christ. We need to remember that Jesus is the source of our salvation—not baptism. Baptism just shows that we trust Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for salvation.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4:

<i>Christ died for our sins ...</i>	<i>He was buried ...</i>	<i>and He rose again.</i>
We go under the water	We are fully immersed	Come up out of the water

Colossians 2:12 - *For when you were baptized, you were buried with Christ, and in baptism you were also raised with Christ.*

In fact, we see that every person who gave their life to Christ in the book of Acts, used baptism as their benchmark.

Acts 18:8 - *...many of the people who heard Him believed and were baptized.*

Acts 8:12 - *But when they believed Philip as he preached the Good News ... and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.*

Acts 2:41 - *Those who believe ... were baptized ... that day!*

Since we look to Christ as our example, as our connection, we baptize forward in our church. When Jesus dies on the cross, He bowed His head. We therefore baptize forward.

John 19:30 - *Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

Baptism makes us humble, like Christ was.

The single greatest obstacle between God and man is pride:

- Our pride tells us to not trust the New Testament. Our pride tells us that we can figure it out on our own. It takes humility to say I can't reason it out myself. It takes humility to say that I accept God's revealed word as truth.
- Our pride wants us to impress people. It takes humility to follow Christ in what He did, what He said, and what He expects from us.
- Our pride wants us to earn salvation by doing good works – by doing it ourselves. It takes humility to say, "I can never pay for my own sin, Jesus—I have to trust you to do it for me on the cross. I will follow you"

I've seen all kinds of people in the baptistery – young, old, rich, poor, healthy, dying, beautiful, homely, powerful, and unknown. There is, however, one person I've never seen in the baptistry, and that is a proud person.

Baptism strips away our pride and let's the world know that you humble yourself before Christ and what He wants.

Baptism is a humbling act but not a humiliating one.

It's a beautiful picture of submission to the authority of God. Just as Christ humbled Himself (Philippians 2:5), we must humble ourselves. Baptism satisfies this need and connects us to Christ.

Why be baptized?

1. Baptism is Commanded by Christ
2. Baptism Connects Us to Christ, and...

### **3. Baptism shows our Cleansing in Christ**

When we sin, we feel dirty inside. We call it a guilty conscience.

Nearly every religion acknowledges there is a need for cleansing from sin.

However, regardless of how much we try, we cannot erase the wretched memory of our sin. We cannot purify our conscience. We cannot pay for our own sins. There is one who can thoroughly cleanse us. The blood of Christ can wipe the slate completely clean, and we can be whiter than snow.

*Galatians 3:27 - for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

You are made clean and pure when you are clothed in Christ at baptism.

*Isaiah 1:16-18 - Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. "Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."*

*Revelation 7:14 (NLT) – [An angel describes those who are saved:] "They washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white."*

*Revelation 22:14 - Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.*

Baptism provides this wonderful sense of cleansing and renewal—we begin with a new slate; we have a new start. We have new life!

*Romans 6:4 - We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

Since you are clean, this makes room for the Holy Spirit to move in.

*Acts 2:37-38 (NRSV) - Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

You are promised the Holy Spirit when you are baptized! He wants to come into you life, and wants you to be baptized. Even though the Holy Spirit is not commanded by baptism, the Holy Spirit does command baptism. He wouldn't have led the writers of the New Testament to put baptism in there, if He didn't.

The Holy Spirit wants to come into you life, because He has the POWER to deal with your problems:

1. **He knows what lies ahead for you!** 1 Corinthians 2:10 - *The Holy Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.*
2. **He is always there for you!** Psalm 139:7 - *Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?*
3. **He can give you real and new life everyday!** Job 33:4 - *The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.*
4. **The Holy Spirit has Creation Power!** Genesis 1:2 (MSG) - *Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.*
  - When a chicken broods over her eggs, she is setting the environment for that egg to grow and hatch. The Holy Spirit watched over the earth as it was hatching. He has creation power! If you need newness in the midst of the void of your life – He can do it!
5. **The Holy Spirit has Resurrection Power!** Romans 8:11 (NLT) - *The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as he raised Christ from the dead, he will give life to your mortal body by this same Spirit living within you.*

We are promised this power, this new life in the Holy Spirit when we are baptized.

Baptism shows us that the Holy Spirit is in our lives! When you are cleansed by the washing of sin, you are then filled with the very Spirit of God who has the power to handle anything the world throws at us!

Why be baptized?

1. Baptism is Commanded by Christ
2. Baptism Connects Us to Christ
3. Baptism shows our Cleansing in Christ

When something makes a big impact on you, it needs to find an outward expression or you feel frustrated. When you have to suppress your emotions, it's like trying to restrain a sneeze—it hurts inside.

An impression needs an expression; it's stifling not to be able to express emotions.

What do you do when you are impressed with Jesus Christ?

When you really grasp the reality that because of His love all your sins are forgiven, you have the promise of life and a meaning for living everyday, and you are loved and accepted by God, what do you do? You follow the rules set by God.

The Bible doesn't say pray a prayer, sign a card, raise your hand, or come forward. When your heart is melted by God's love, and you want to receive His grace, God Himself has provided baptism as a means of expressing your faith.

In 1708, Alexander Mack and seven others expressed their faith. They covenanted together to follow and obey the teachings of the New Testament. Mack and these seven gathered on the banks of the Eder River in Schwarzenau, Germany, to demonstrate their love for Christ in baptism. They felt strongly that they "must be baptized according to the teaching of Jesus Christ and the apostles."

You have to know that it was an illegal act for an adult to be "re-baptized" after having been baptized as a baby. By being baptized as an adult in immersion, they could have been enslaved, could have lost all their wealth, and could have even been killed. The meaning of baptism was so deep for these early founders, that they were willing to die for it. They risked everything when they went down under the water.

What do we risk today? Are you willing to risk your pride? Are you willing to be baptized for Jesus?

If Christ commanded baptism,  
If we are connected to Christ through baptism,  
If we are shown the picture of our cleansing in Christ in baptism,  
Then why not be baptized?

*Acts 22:16 - And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.*

Favorite Hymns of Praise #365 – **Trust and Obey**