

Baptism

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The Definition of Baptism

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ. It is a testimony to the believer's faith in the final resurrection.

The Method of Baptism

The Bible teaches that the proper mode of baptism is immersion. The word "baptize" literally means to dip, sink, submerge, immerse, or bury. The baptismal accounts in the New Testament show that immersion was the practice of both John the Baptist and the early church. When Jesus was baptized, He was baptized *in* the Jordan River, not on the banks, and the Scripture records that He came up out of the water (Mark 1:9-10). Again at the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch "both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him" and "then they came up out of the water" (Acts 8:38).

Baptism has no part in salvation

Baptism has no part in the work of salvation, but it is a God-ordained and God-commanded accompaniment of salvation. *Baptism does not save, but salvation is followed by baptism.* Jesus said, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Some use this verse to support baptism as a part of salvation. However, Jesus made clear that it is disbelief that condemns, not the absence of baptism.

Six Reasons why Christians should be baptized

First, baptism is *commanded* by Jesus Christ. Jesus commanded His disciples in Matthew 28:19 by saying, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Then again in

Acts 10:48 Peter “ordered that they be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ.” From these Scriptures it is evident that baptism is a command of the Lord to those who believe in Him.

Second, baptism is *commended* by our Lord’s example. Matthew 3:16-17 records the baptizing of Jesus in the Jordan River. He said He did it “to fulfill all righteousness.” He had no sins of His own, but He endorsed the ordinance of baptism as practiced by John the Baptist. For Him it was a must. Peter tells us that Christ left us an example, that we should follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21). His footprints lead every believer into the water of baptism. It must bring great pleasure to the Lord Jesus Christ to watch His people as they are baptized in His name.

Third, baptism was a *common practice* of the early church. Regarding the early church, God’s Word says , “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:41). The first Christians baptized on a regular basis as people were being saved. It was a common practice. Other verses to consider are Acts 8:35-38; 9:18; 10:43-48; 16:14-15, 30-34; and 18:8.

Fourth, baptism is the believer’s public *confession* of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism is the visible, outward expression of your inward decision for Christ. It identifies you as a follower of Jesus Christ in a very definite way. It is a sign of your commitment and discipleship. When people saw Christians being baptized in the days of the New Testament, there was no doubt in their minds as to why they were doing this or to whom they owed their allegiance.

For this reason baptism can be particularly helpful to young Christians brought up in non-Christian homes where perhaps their decision for Christ is hardly known. Their baptism will be their act of confession in which they make a definite stand for Christ. But whatever their background, their baptism will prove to be a source of strength and courage in their desire to follow Christ and witness for Him in this way.

Fifth, baptism is a *challenge* to live a godly life. When a believer is baptized he or she is not just simply doing another religious ritual or ceremony. He is testifying to Romans 6:3-4 which states that “all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death. We were therefore buried with Him through baptism in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” It is a testimony that the believer will “not offer the parts of [his] body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer [himself] to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of [his] body to Him as instruments of righteousness” (Romans 6:13).

The baptism of the believer is symbolic in that it shows the death of the old life and the birth of the new. It symbolizes the washing away and the burying of sin and rising to walk in newness of life, cleansed by the blood of Jesus. It proclaims that “if

anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Sixth, baptism identifies believers as a part of the *community of Christ*. Baptism symbolizes one of the purposes of the church: fellowship (which is identification with the body of Christ). Christians are called to *belong*, not just *believe*. They are not meant to live Lone-Ranger lives; instead, they are to belong to Christ's family and be members of His body. Baptism is not only a symbol of salvation, it is a symbol of fellowship. It not only symbolizes a person's new life in Christ, it demonstrates a personal incorporation into the body of Christ. It says to the world, "This person is now one of them!" When new believers are baptized, they are welcomed into the fellowship of believers. They are not alone - they have the body of Christ for support. Ephesians 2:19 says, "You are members of God's very own family... and you belong in God's household with every other Christian" (LB).

When considering the six reasons why a believer should be baptized, it is clear that when a Christian is baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit they are being identified with everything that God is, has and represents. The believer is publicly identified as a child of God.

Who is to be baptized?

Who is the proper subject for baptism? All 12 year-old children? All people who have reached the age of 18? All adults that are 25? All people who have been brought up in Christian homes? All infants? According to the Bible, the proper candidate for baptism is someone who has *repented of their sin and placed their faith in Jesus Christ*. Peter exhorted the people at Pentecost to "repent... and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). Throughout the New Testament, baptism and repentance are linked together.

Repentance means to have a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ. Repentance involves a 180-degree turn, an about face. No longer a slave to sin, the person turns to Christ in repentance. Since baptism follows repentance, the person must be able to repent of their his or her sin.

Closely linked to repentance is faith or belief. The proper candidates for baptism have not simply repented of sin but have put their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. *Baptism is for believers in Christ*. The Ethiopian Eunuch asked Philip, "What hinders me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:36). Phillip replied, "If you believe... you may." Belief proceeds baptism.

Therefore, all who want to be baptized should acknowledge their repentance of sin and their faith in Christ. Anyone who does this is a candidate for baptism.

What about infant Baptism?

Since the Bible teaches that baptism is for those who have repented and believed in Christ, infant baptism is not a legitimate baptism. An infant cannot repent or believe; therefore, all believers should practice what is commonly known as the “believer’s baptism.” Only those who can and have repented and turned to Christ in faith should be baptized.