



Believer's Water Baptism

Being baptized is an *essential* part of following Christ. Take some time right now to find out what the Bible says baptism is all about.

What is baptism?

The word, baptize, means 'to immerse' or 'to put into.' When used in the Scriptures, it could be translated from the original Greek as "sink." In the New Testament baptism refers to the act of submerging ('dunking') someone in water. This immersion into water is a *picture* of what has already happened to the person spiritually.

Romans 6:3-5

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection."

Baptism is a public testimony before God and other witnesses (1 Timothy 6:12) in which one identifies himself as a "follower of Jesus Christ." In baptism one is testifying that he has placed his faith in His atoning sacrifice for his sins and has made a commitment to living a righteous life.

In Matthew 28:19 Jesus indicates that water baptism is to be done "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." He was not saying the phrase needs to be verbalized as a formula at a person's baptism, but rather that a disciple of Jesus Christ identifies himself with the triune God when he is baptized. "Name" speaks of all that a person is, has, and represents. In water baptism, a believer is identifying himself with all that God is, has, and represents. It is done in view of God's authority.

Why is baptism important?

First of all, understand that baptism *does not save you*, it is *not essential for salvation*. Clearly, the Bible says that a person cannot be saved by doing any kind of good works (including the "work" of being baptized).

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Romans 4:5

But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness

Romans 5:1-2

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand

Although baptism does not save you, it is still important for at least 3 reasons:

Reason #1: It is part of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus Christ gave the church the mission of making disciples, which includes baptizing them. We know from this passage that being baptized is part of being a disciple. In fact, if a person has not been baptized (which is part of being a disciple of Christ) how can he faithfully obey Jesus' command to disciple others? How could he encourage someone else to be baptized if he has not been baptized himself?

Reason #2: It is a declaration that a man will strive to maintain a clean conscience before God. First Peter 3:21 says baptism is "not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God." Peter says that baptism is a pledge to God for a good conscience. When you make a pledge, you are making a vow, or a promise of some kind. When a person is baptized, he is declaring his commitment to serve God with a clean conscience (pure intentions).

Reason #3: Jesus Christ *commands* you to be baptized. Acts 2:38 says, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for [in view of] the forgiveness of sins." Being baptized is *not optional*.

When should a person be baptized?

It is to be done after a person is saved. Believer's baptism follows the "born again" experience at conversion (John 3:3), symbolizing the death of our old way of life (going down) and our "first breath" (raising up) to a new life in Christ (Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:17). This is the pattern in the NT. New believers were commanded to be baptized (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Whenever possible baptism should immediately follow one's conversion.

Acts 2 describes the first converts in the first church. Acts 2:41 says, "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." The account of Philip and the eunuch also shows this same pattern. Acts 8:35-38 says, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."] And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him." (For other examples read about the Apostle Paul in Acts 9:18, Cornelius in Acts 10:48, and new converts in the city of Corinth in Acts 18:8.)

Although one who desires baptism must first be "born again" (John 3:3), he does not need to feel worthy, perfect, or sinless. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the only perfect and sinless person who became the worthy sacrifice for the sins of all men (John 1:29; Romans 5:1-10; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; 3:18).

Should infants be baptized?

Though there are many people who teach that infants should be baptized, the idea is nowhere to be found in the Scriptures. Acts 16:33 speaks of a man and his household being baptized. Some wrongly use this passage as support for the idea of infant baptism. First, "infants" are not mentioned in the passage. Second, the passage indicates that the whole household *believed* (v.34). Certainly infants, who do not have the intellectual capacity to believe, are not in view.

Others teach that infants should be baptized because baptism, they say, is the New Testament replacement for the Old Testament practice of circumcision (which infants experienced – without

demonstration of faith in God). Though many teach this idea, the Bible never makes a connection between water baptism and circumcision. A comment by the Apostle Paul's in his letter to the Colossians is wrongly used for support.

Colossians 2:11-12

... in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Notice, first, that the *circumcision* referred to in the passage is spiritual rather than physical, whereas the rite of OT circumcision was definitely physical. Second, the *baptism* spoken of is also spiritual rather than the physical act of water baptism. Water baptism (as in Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 2:38) is a *picture* of the spiritual baptism that every believer experiences when he is "immersed" into Christ (see Romans 6:3-5). We conclude that there is no Scriptural support for infant baptism.

Is there a place for getting re-baptized?

There are some who question whether they should be re-baptized if they have been baptized in a Roman Catholic Church (RCC) or as an infant. It is absolutely critical that you understand precisely what Scriptural baptism is. The RCC teaches that baptism is part of salvation. When they add the "good deed" of baptism to salvation, they have contaminated the gospel so that it is no longer the one true gospel (see Galatians 1:5-9). One baptized in the RCC has never been baptized in the biblical sense, therefore he needs to be baptized for the first time.

As well, one who was baptized as an infant has not yet received a Scriptural baptism since baptism, according to the Bible, always follows one's repentance from sin and faith in Christ. In some cases, folks realized they weren't saved at the time of their baptism (even though they were baptized as an adult). Again, *Scriptural* baptism must take place *after* salvation.

Still, in another case, a Christian will want to get baptized a second time when he joins another church. This is not necessary since baptism signifies one's commitment to Christ, not his commitment to a particular church. Re-baptism is never necessary, but every Christian needs to be baptized the *biblical way*.

Have you identified yourself with your Leader?

Just as you are called by James to question the validity of your faith if you have no works to back it up (James 2:14-26), so you have reason to question the validity of your claim to be a true disciple of Christ if you *resist* getting baptized. We have already seen that you are *commanded* to be baptized (Acts 2:38). First John 2:4 says, "The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

It could be that you have never understood what baptism is and why it is important until now. You are certainly not alone. Though you may have been unaware of God's will in this matter, we can praise God for leading you to take this important step of obedience!

Remember, baptism is a wonderful opportunity to identify yourself with Christ. It is a powerful way to communicate an important message. In being baptized, you are telling others in a powerful way that...

- You have committed your life to Christ.

- You are determined to turn from your old ways of serving yourself to a new life of serving Jesus Christ.
- You are trusting in Christ's death on the cross as the substitute for your sin.
- You have determined in your heart to do whatever Christ wants you to do.
- You want to be a part of the body of Christ.
- Jesus Christ, as your Leader, is worth following – even though it may be uncomfortable to do so.
- Jesus Christ is worthy of all of the worship that you have to offer Him.

Are you ready to be baptized?

As discussed above, the only prerequisite to water baptism is salvation. You must be sure that you have been genuinely saved. Please seriously consider the following questions before requesting to be baptized:

- Have I agreed with Romans 3:23, that "I am a sinner" in need of a Savior?

Romans 3:23

...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

- Have I received Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior and turned (repented) from my former life of sin?

Acts 2:38

... "Repent [turn from living your way to living God's way], and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ

- Am I committed to righteous living in attitude, desire, and regular practice in my life?

John 14:21

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me

1 Peter 2:24

...He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness

- Do my heartfelt ambitions reflect the pursuit of a new life in Christ?

Colossians 3:1-5

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God...Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

- Am I committed to being a "follower and imitator of Jesus Christ?"

1 John 2:6

the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

As you consider being baptized before God and other witnesses, please ponder these questions in your heart before God, making sure your public testimony honestly reflects your desire to live a changed life for Christ. Baptism is a public statement made in the integrity of your heart between you and God.

A special appeal, from the elders at Crossway, to older Christians who have never been baptized:

We know that there are many who have received Jesus Christ as their Savior but for various reasons have never been baptized. Perhaps you were saved in a stadium crusade or as the result of a parachurch ministry not connected with a local church. Maybe you just haven't gotten around to it because you didn't know it was a command. Perhaps you have waited so long that you struggle with your own worthiness knowing that you are not right with God. We want you to know that whatever your reasons for not having been baptized, they can all be changed in one simple act of obedience. We encourage you and implore you to take this simple step of obedience to Him. If you would like to be baptized or if you have further questions please talk to one of the Elders/ Shepherds at Crossway.