

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Some of this material was adapted from Online Commentary and Saddleback Church resources



Q: WHY SHOULD A CHRISTIAN BE BAPTIZED?

A: Jesus was baptized. As Christians, we are to follow the example of Jesus (John 13:15).

"At that time Jesus came from Nazareth and was baptized by John..." (Mark 1:9)

A: Jesus noted the importance of baptism by incorporating it into the "Great Commission."

"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 then teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.'" (Matt. 28:19-20)

Q: WHAT IS THE MEANING OF BAPTISM?

A: It symbolizes the burial and resurrection of Jesus (Gal. 2:20, Rom. 6:4)

"Christ died for our sins...He was buried...and He rose again." (I Cor. 15:3-4)

"For when you were baptized, you were buried with Christ, and in baptism, you were also raised with Christ." (Col. 2:12)

A: It illustrates one's new life in the faith.

"When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a new person inside. The old life has passed away and a new life has begun!" (2 Cor. 5:17)

"By our baptism then, we were buried with Him and shared His death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead...so also we may live a new life!" (Rom. 6:4)

Some important considerations:

** Baptism doesn't make you a believer – it shows that you already believe.*

** Baptism does not "save" you, only your faith in Christ does that.*

** Baptism is like a wedding ring – it is the outward symbol of the commitment you make in your heart.*

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith...it is the gift of God– not by works, so that no one can boast." (Eph. 2:8-9)

Q: WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

A: Every person who believes in Christ and commits to strive to live in obedience to His teachings (as presented in Scripture)

"Those who believe and accepted His message were baptized..." (Acts 2:41)

"... When they believed Philip as he preached the Good News...and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." (Acts 8:12)

Q: WHEN SHOULD ONE BE BAPTIZED?

A: As soon as a person accepts Christ into their heart as Savior and Lord

"Those who believed...were baptized...that day!" Acts 2:41

"As Philip [talked with the Ethiopian]...and told him the Good News about Jesus...they came to some water, and the man said, 'Look, here is water! Why shouldn't I be baptized right now?' Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' The man answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So...Philip baptized him." (Acts 8:35-38)

The History of Baptism:

Though not specifically mentioned in the Old Testament, extra-biblical historical writings verify that water baptism has Old Testament period origins. *Note that John the Baptist came on the scene (Matt. 3:1-2) and began his work without any explanation about what baptism was. There must have been some understanding and cultural reference point concerning baptism.* Historians note that during the period of the building of the second temple, there was widespread conversion (of the Gentile world) to Judaism. During this period the Hebrew word, 'ger' (stranger), came to be synonymous with a proselyte (new convert). Rabbinical instructions for receiving a proselyte called for an immersion basin filled with about 100 gallons of water. Into this water went the new convert—Jewish elders were present to serve as witnesses. Following the baptism, the proselyte was considered 'newborn,' as if he had been born of Jewish parentage.

Jewish proselyte baptism references the exodus experience and Israel crossing the Red Sea. The Apostle Paul notes, "Israel was baptized in the cloud and in the sea..." (1 Cor. 10:2). Thus, converts to Judaism in effect belatedly reenacted Israel's exodus, vicariously sharing in the experience of

crossing over from bondage to freedom, through the waters of the Red Sea, appropriating this history as their own and thereby becoming part of the covenant people produced by this historic event.

The exodus story is a grand prototype for New Testament baptism—first instituted by John (the Baptist) and later developed by the apostles. It is important to note that John located his ministry in the wilderness at the Jordan, the point where Israel crossed over from the desert into the Promised Land.

In the first century, there was a transition in how the term baptism was understood. The Old Testament baptism of the Jews centered on a desire to identify with the Hebrew nation. The baptism of John centered on a desire to identify with righteousness and a commitment to forsake sin. The baptism of the New Testament Church (in Acts) centers on a desire to identify with the risen

Lord and the gift of the Spirit (*which believers have access to through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ*).

In the first century BC, most Jews did not believe baptism was important for those of Hebrew heritage, nor was it considered an act that associated one with repentance or righteousness. According to tradition, righteousness was a birthright. The baptism of the New Testament Church reminds individuals that it is not our bloodline, but the blood of Christ that assures our salvation.

“It is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham.” (Gal. 3:7)

The baptism of John the Baptist focused on repentance a commitment to God and righteous living.

After Pentecost (Acts 2), baptism took on another dimension.

In Peter’s sermon (Acts 2:38-42), baptism signified repentance and reception of the Gospel message of Jesus. Those baptized were, “added to the church...[and] they devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and Christian fellowship...” No longer were individuals baptized to join with Israel and the Old Covenant of Law; believers were baptized to identify as followers of Christ and the New Covenant of grace.

In Phillip’s ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 8:12-17), baptism followed *‘believing the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ’* (Acts 8:14).

Linking baptism to believing in Christ as the Son of God is evident in the story of Phillip’s baptism of the Ethiopian (Acts 8:37).

In the epistles, baptism centers on faith in Christ, a belief in His death and resurrection, and is associated with a commitment to walk in ‘newness of life’ (Rom. 6:4,7; Col. 2:12)

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT BAPTISM:

Baptism comes from the Greek verb *baptidzo*, which means to immerse. Strictly speaking, *baptidzo* is a technical term which speaks to the method, not the meaning of the act.

Baptism emphasizes unity. According to Scripture, baptism is ‘by one Spirit’ and ‘into one body’ (1 Cor. 12:13). Baptism unites believers who share one faith, have one hope, and live to serve one Lord.

As the baptism of John represented a desire to turn from sin toward righteousness, baptism was not necessary for Jesus as there was no sin in his life. But just as Moses, who lived a privileged life, forsook the privileges of Pharaoh’s court and became one with the Hebrews (the oppressed), walking with them through the Red Sea to freedom, so too Jesus identified with the Jews by being baptized.

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT: The fact that baptism in water and baptism in the Spirit came in two stages for some in the early chapters of Acts (see Acts 2, 8, 10) was a consequence of living through a transition period. Between 20 and 60 AD, the meaning, focus, and nature of baptism changed as the world transitioned from being under the Old Testament Covenant of Law to the New Testament Covenant of Grace. However, before the close of the New Testament, it was understood that:

1. the believer receives the Spirit at the moment of salvation
2. baptism is a testimony to one’s faith in and desire to follow Christ
3. the fruit and gifts of the Spirit are given to aid in “Great Commission” work and developed as one grows in Christ.

When one becomes a believer in Christ, they receive the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit:

“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” (Eph. 1:13-14)

The Holy Spirit is the “seal” of our salvation. Baptism does not “seal” nor save—it serves as a testimony to our commitment to Christ. The Apostle Paul would not neglect to baptize any new convert if it were necessary for salvation (as is noted in 1 Cor. 1:17).

The fruit (Gal. 5:22-23), attributes (Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, 28) and working of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-13) can develop and become more evident in our lives as we mature in Christ. However, the idea of receiving new or higher-level infilling of the Holy Spirit via a human ceremony (i.e., the laying-on of hands) does not have a strong Biblical foundation.

To facilitate our effectiveness in His “Great Commission” work, God blesses believers with spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12). There is a variety of spiritual gifts, and all gifts have equal value (1 Cor. 12:21-25). The gift of tongues evidences a wondrous working of the Spirit but does not evidence spiritual maturity or salvation.

REGARDING THE BAPTISM OF CHILDREN:

- The act of infant baptism is called *pedobaptism*. The precedent for baptizing infants or young children is not in Scripture. Scripture does note that some ‘families’ were baptized (Cf. Acts 16: 29-33), but the guiding principle is that those baptized must first believe (Cf. Mark 16:16) and be old enough to understand and accept the Gospel Message.
- Church Father Tertullian (writing about 200 AD) noted that “believing children” could be baptized, but specifically prohibited the baptism of infants.
- Church Father Gregory of Nazianzus (a bishop in 390 AD) defended the baptism of children, but set an age limit, and noted that “individuals being baptized should have some understanding and memory of the experience.”
- Church Father Origen (250 AD) suggested that proto baptism (the baptism of infants) may date back to the time of the apostles. However, it is important to note that in the late 3rd century, the ‘Church Fathers’ who came from well-established Christian families, whose members had been believers for multiple generations, were **not** baptized as infants. For example, the ages of these church leaders who were born into strong Christian families are as follows:
 - Ambrose: age 34
 - Jerome: age 20
 - Augustine: age 30
 - Gregory of Nazianzus: age 30

The Serious and Solemn Nature of Baptism:

An excerpt from the writings of Church Father Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386 AD) provides some insight into how important and serious the early church viewed baptism:

“First the candidates gathered in the vestibule of the baptistery and, facing west with outstretched hands, formally renounced the devil and all his works... then, turning to the east they said, ‘I believe in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, and in one baptism. Candidates then went into another chamber and were anointed with oil. Then, one by one, they were led by the hand to the ‘holy pool of divine baptism,’ where after a second profession of their faith they were immersed three times...to symbolize the three day’s burial of Christ...”

Baptism is an **Ordinance**, not a **Sacrament** (a '*grace-earning event*'). A sacrament is an act which leads to receiving a blessing or reward. An ordinance is viewed as a *command of God*. The Protestant Church teaches that believers are to pursue baptism first and foremost out of a desire to faithfully and obediently follow the commands of God (*rather than from a motivation to receive a reward or special measure of grace in heaven*). The two ordinances in the Protestant Church are *Baptism* and *Communion*.