

SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

A Study on the Biblical Basis of Baptism



WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism is a subject that often raises a number of questions. This study will attempt to answer those questions, and, most importantly, help you gain a good Scriptural understanding of baptism.

There are a number of different faith traditions and ideas that influence our understanding of baptism today. Some say that it is a rite of passage or membership in a church. Some say it is only for those who have truly put their faith in Christ. Still others teach that it is necessary for the forgiveness of sins or that it provides a person with the “saving faith” that enables them to trust in Jesus. With all these different ideas, we need to have confidence that God’s Word will provide clarity and then do our best to find out exactly what the Bible is referring to when baptism is mentioned.

The word ‘baptize’ is an English translation of the Greek word, ‘baptizo’, which means “to dip repeatedly, immerse, or submerge.” Several translators have noted the difference between the words ‘baptizo’ and ‘bapto’. Theologian James Montgomery Boice notes that both words are used in a Greek text from about 200 B.C. The text is a recipe for making pickles and says that the vegetables should first be dipped (‘bapto’) into boiling water and then submerged (‘baptizo’) in the vinegar solution. (Bible Study Magazine, May 1989). The word, ‘baptism’, then, is best understood as a complete immersion in something.

This still doesn’t really tell us everything about what baptism is. When you start to consider what the Bible says about baptism and how it was understood by the people of Jesus’ time, you begin to see that “baptism” could mean different things depending upon the reason it was done.

The Greek term is derived from another word, “baptizein” that refers to ritual washings. By the time Jesus was born, there were a number of ritual washings that the Jewish people engaged in for both physical and spiritual purity. Some of these required full immersion in a spring or stream of water. These would be a type of “baptism” done for the purpose of ritual purity before a significant event such as converting to Judaism or preparing for the Sabbath. It was an outward sign of the cleansing of the person’s heart before God.

In Acts 19, Paul traveled to Ephesus and found some disciples of Jesus who had not received the Holy Spirit. He asked them, “into what then were you baptized,” and they replied that they had been baptized into John’s baptism. John the Baptist performed another kind of baptism. Paul called it a “baptism of repentance, telling people to believe in the one who would come after him, that it, Jesus.”

John’s baptism was done for people who wanted to confess their sins to God and be cleansed from those sins. It was another outward sign of the

repentant attitude of their hearts. It was also done to prepare people for the coming of Jesus. John prepared the way for Jesus; he prepared people to see Jesus and hear what He had come to do.

Since Jesus has now come, John's baptism is no longer necessary. Back in Acts 19, after hearing Paul's explanation of John's baptism, the Ephesians were baptized once again, this time in the name of the Lord Jesus. This is the baptism we, as Christians, are called to today: the baptism of Jesus Christ. The following questions will help to show what the Bible says about this baptism.

WHY SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

What three things did Jesus command His followers to do just before He left the earth? (Matthew 28:18-20)

What two things did Peter tell people to do in response to wanting forgiveness for their sins?(Acts 2:36-39)

Jesus wants those who become His followers to be baptized. It may not always be clear to us why he commands it, but he commands it nonetheless. It is important enough to him to include it in His final command to His followers. By taking action in obedience to Jesus, we **show** that our faith is real. Although it is faith in Jesus alone that forgives sin, provides salvation, and gives us a new life in Christ, living faith prompts us to action and not just words. (see James 2:14-19).

The primary reason for being baptized is simply because Jesus said to do it. Being baptized is an important way of asking yourself if you will act on your faith and do what Jesus asks you to do. As Jesus said in Luke 16:10, "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much."

Why was Jesus baptized? (Matt. 3:14-15) _____

The New Century Translation (NCV) of the Bible says it this way, "Let it be this way for now. We should do all things that are God's will."

Jesus didn't need to be baptized by John for his sins, but did it because the Father said to do it. In this way Jesus set the example for us. He was baptized out of obedience to God. We should follow His lead and be baptized out of obedience to Jesus.

WHAT DOES BAPTISM DO?

There are a few things that baptism can represent in the life of a follower of Christ:

Read Romans 6:1-6. What does Paul related baptism to? _____

It is important to understand the context of this passage about baptism. Throughout chapters 5-6, Paul is making a point about the grace of God and how it affects the way we live. We do not actually die and raise to new life through baptism, but it is a way in which we can identify with Jesus' death and resurrection for us.

Baptism can represent for you the "death" of your sinful nature before you knew Jesus, and coming out of the water can be like the beginning of your new life in Christ. It is a physical representation of the spiritual reality declared by Paul in Galatians 2:20: *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me!"*

Read Galatians 3:23-29.

The point of this passage is that we are all made children of God through our faith in Jesus, and we are all equally valuable to Him. Verse 27 provides another image of baptism. The NIV translation says, "you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves in Christ."

Through baptism we identify ourselves with Jesus. It is a visible sign to others near us that we have chosen to put our trust in Christ, and "clothe" our lives with Him.

Acts 22:6-16 provides one final image of the meaning baptism can have. What does verse 16 say? _____

This passage illustrates how important it is to understand the context of a statement. Some might take this verse to mean that baptism takes our sins away, but that does not fit in the context of the rest of the New Testament.

We know from many other places that being forgiven is only accomplished by placing our faith in Jesus as the Son of God who died to pay the penalty for our sins. (John 3:16, Eph 2:8-9, John 1:12, Gal 3:1-4).

What, then, does it mean in Acts 22 when Paul talks about being baptized and having his sins washed away? Before being baptized, Paul already had a miraculous encounter with Jesus and put his faith in Him. (In Acts 22:10 Paul was already asking Jesus what He should do.) Baptism, however, can represent a washing away of the old self, guided by sinful desires. As you are immersed in water, you can envision your previous sins being washed away.

Baptism is typically done out of obedience to Christ, and the meaning it holds for a person is often very personal and powerful. We sometimes feel that symbolic acts are not a necessary part of our lives, but their value become apparent as you continue through life. Your baptism into Jesus Christ will stand out as important reminder of a moment when you stepped out in faith and obedience to Jesus. The memory of that moment will be an important marker to keep you grounded in Christ throughout your life.

HOW SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

Whenever possible, we recommend baptism by immersion in water. As explained earlier, “immersion” is our best understanding of the original Greek words and the method used in the early church.

In addition to this, immersion is an appropriate image of what you are doing when you accept Jesus into your life and put your faith in Him. You are not merely “getting wet” with Jesus; you are diving in to a new and amazing life.

If there are reasons why you cannot be baptized by immersion, we can discuss other methods.

Before being baptized we encourage you to talk to your pastor and share your desire to be baptized. We will then schedule a time with you; either at special baptism worship service or at a time more appropriate for you.

We do encourage you to be baptized with people close to you in attendance; members of your church family, relatives, and friends will celebrate with you and will be witnesses to your step of faith. You will also be invited, if you wish, to share a brief personal testimony of your faith in Christ.

WHEN SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

This is often the question people wrestle with the most in our culture. When is the right time to be baptized, and should I be “re-baptized” if my parents had me baptized as a baby?

Begin by examining these examples of baptism into Jesus Christ:

Acts 2:38-41, Acts 8:12, Acts 8: 32-38, Acts 10:34-48, Acts 16:30-34, Acts 19:4-5.

At what point were these people baptized? What happened before they were baptized?

In every example we have in the Bible, people being baptized into Jesus Christ did so after they heard about what Jesus did for them and made a personal decision to accept His sacrifice and put their faith in Him.

Being baptized into Jesus Christ is an expression of your personal faith. If you were baptized as a baby, your parents were acting on their faith and made a commitment to teach you that faith. This is the same as our infant "dedications." Both the parents and the members of the church commit to doing all they can to support that child's spiritual growth and leading them to personal knowledge of Jesus Christ.

There is nothing wrong with a new baptism that is an expression of your personal faith in Christ. This really is an affirmation of what your parents started when you were young. You honor the commitment they made by taking personal responsibility for your faith in Jesus and expressing it through baptism.

Some of these passages refer to whole households being baptized. Some people use these passages to justify baptism of infants. We cannot honestly draw that conclusion, however, because we do not know the ages of everyone in the household, and a general statement like this does not necessarily refer to every single person in the household. In these cases, everyone heard the message and believed first. In Acts 16:31, Paul says, "believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household." The only thing we know for certain is that people who heard the message of Jesus and put their faith in Him were baptized throughout the New Testament. We conclude, then, that regardless of age, everyone who was baptized in these households was someone who believed in Jesus.

The right time to be baptized into Jesus Christ is after you have personally decided to accept Christ and live by faith in Him.

WHEN SHOULD MY CHILD BE BAPTIZED?

Parents often wonder when their child should be baptized. The simple answer is that they should be baptized when they make a personal decision to put their faith in Jesus.

There is no specific age at which a child is ready to make this kind of decision, and there really is no way to simply teach them certain things and expect them to make that decision. As with all of us, we cannot “program” acceptance of Jesus and personal faith.

We can, however, commit to teaching our children who Jesus is and what He has done for them, and to pray for them to know Jesus personally. As your child starts to express an understanding of Jesus, their sin, and a desire for God’s forgiveness, you can guide them to personally pray and receive the gift of forgiveness and eternal life Jesus offers.

As a parent you are the best judge of when your child truly understands personal faith and desires to express that faith through baptism. It is not uncommon for a child to make a personal decision to follow Jesus at an early age, but then wait a few years before they are ready to be baptized and let people know they want to commit to Jesus (ie. “be on Jesus’ team from now on!”).

If your child asks about baptism, engage them in a conversation about what they think baptism is and why they want to be baptized. You may find that this opens the door to have further conversation with them about their faith before they are baptized. You may also be surprised at the depth of their understanding and know that they are ready!

Don’t be overly concerned about whether your child fully understands all there is to know about faith in Christ. We expect everyone to grow in their understanding throughout their life! The very basic foundation of our faith is this: Do you know you have sinned against God? Do you know that Jesus is the Son of God who gave his life so you can be forgiven of those sins? Do you want to receive that forgiveness, accept Jesus into your life, and follow Him?

Don’t hesitate to ask for additional help in talking to your child if you are still uncertain. As a church, we all desire to see our kids know Jesus personally and you will find others who have insights to help guide them.

WHAT ABOUT BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT?

This is one final question that needs to be addressed because the Bible does speak of “baptism in the Holy Spirit.”

John the Baptist speaks about this: Read Luke 3:16 & John 1:32-33.

Jesus also mentions this in Acts 1:5.

Remember that “baptism” simply means immersion and that there are

different kinds of baptism. Baptism in the Holy Spirit refers to being immersed in the Holy Spirit. This refers to the promise of the Holy Spirit Jesus made for those who put their faith in Him. (John 14:26, Acts 1:8) Throughout the book of Acts we read about people receiving the Holy Spirit after putting their faith in Jesus. Sometimes this happened before they were baptized into Jesus (Acts 8, Acts 10:44-48), and sometimes it happened after they were baptized (Acts 19:1-7). It is different from baptism in water in response to Jesus.

If you have put your faith in Jesus, you can be confident that you have been given the Holy Spirit and immersed in Him. As you live by faith in Jesus, you learn to live by the Holy Spirit and to open your life to Him even more.

WHAT NEXT?

I hope this study has been informative and useful. If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Now that you have taken a look at baptism, it is time to ask yourself a few questions:

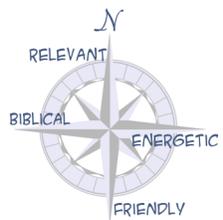
Have you put your faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins?

Are you willing to demonstrate that faith by doing what Jesus has asked you to do?

Are you willing to demonstrate your faith by letting people know you are a follower of Jesus Christ?

If the answer to these questions is, "yes," and you have never made a personal decision to be baptized, then let's make plans to do that now!

"FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE
GOSPEL, FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD
FOR SALVATION TO EVERYONE WHO
BELIEVES..."
ROMANS 1:16



TRUE NORTH CHURCH

Come As You Are, Leave Different!

*Sharing God's Love & Inviting People Into A Life-
Changing Relationship With Jesus!*

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