

UNDERSTANDING BAPTISM

Baptism is Important

- Jesus was baptized. He said it was the right thing to do.
- Jesus told his disciples (loyal followers) to baptize all new disciples.
- Jesus' first followers demonstrated the importance of baptism by their example.

The Bible stories behind each of these statements are on page 2 of this document. You might take a moment to read them now.

What Does Baptism Mean?

1. I Confess Christ

You can repent and trust Jesus in the privacy of your own room, but you can't have a "private baptism." In Bible times it was done in rivers and city pools. It's no hush-hush affair. It's like an enlisted soldier putting on the uniform.

Arthur Wallis, in his book **Living God's Way** writes...

In non-Christian lands, people don't always take a lot of notice when a person of another religion professes to believe in Christ, but when he follows this by being baptized the opposition breaks out. Everybody understands that baptism is the outward sign that you mean business.

As you read the NT epistles you will find that nowhere are believers exhorted to get baptized. It is taken for granted that this happened when they were born again. We don't come across unbaptized Christians in New Testament churches.

2. I Am United With Christ

We become one with Jesus by joining him in his death and resurrection. (See Romans 6:1-11 on the next page.)

Repentance is death to self and self-will. Picture your life up to this point as a corpse. Picture the baptismal water as your grave. Bury whatever you were apart from Jesus. Then be "Raised with Christ to live a new life."

Baptism marks your initiation into Christ. It is the visible sign of your union with Christ and his church. You are not baptized into a particular church or denomination, but are "baptized into Christ" (Rom. 6:3), which means you are also baptized into his body, the church.

3. I Am Born Again

Becoming a Christian is like being raised from the dead, but it is also like being born again. Like a new baby comes out of amniotic fluid, so new Christians are "born of water" (John 3:5). Baptism marks your birth into new, eternal life.

4. I Am Cleansed

Here are a few passages about our cleansing from sin.

Titus 3:5 – He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

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

Eph. 5:25-26 – Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.

Heb. 10:22 – Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Clearing Some Confusion

1. Methods of Baptism

Sometimes people are baptized by having water sprinkled or poured over their heads. But originally, baptism was by immersion in water. The original Greek word means to dip, immerse, or submerge. Furthermore, the image of baptism as a burial only works with immersion.

We read that, "John was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water" (John 3:23). Jesus "came up out of the water" after his baptism (Mark 1:10). So did Philip and the Eunuch (Acts 8:38-39).

2. Infant Baptism

In the Bible, the only babies baptized were "babies in Christ" because in the Bible accounts, baptism always follows repentance and faith.

Mark 16:16 – Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.

Acts 2:38 – Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

You must first become a disciple. Then, be baptized. We never find this order reversed. Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

What Should I Expect?

You will still have problems. You will struggle with sin. But baptism is more than a symbol. It is more than "an outward sign of an inward grace." God responds to your obedience. Something happens. Peter is able to say, "Baptism saves us. Not as a washing of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a clean conscience" (1 Peter 3:21 NAS).

Confidence Before God

As circumcision was a mark of Abraham's relationship with God, so baptism marks the believer. Because baptism is a confession acted out in physical obedience before witnesses on a specific day, baptism should confirm and strengthen your faith.

The Holy Spirit

You should also expect to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

- The Spirit came at Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3)
- The Spirit was promised at Pentecost (Acts 2:38)

Tertullian (about AD 160-200) wrote...

Therefore, blessed ones whom the grace of God awaits, when you come up out of that most holy bath which brings about new birth and for the first time raise your hands within your Mother, the church, with your brothers, ask the Father, ask the Lord to make you subject to the riches of grace, the distribution of the gifts.

HELPFUL BIBLE PASSAGES

Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

Jesus replied, “Let it be so now. It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Acts 2:36-41

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Acts 8:26-39

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road — the desert road — that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

“How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

*He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.

The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

Acts 16:25-34

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody’s chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God — he and his whole family.

Romans 6:1-11

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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.

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.