

Baptism

1. WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Christian baptism is an act of obedience to the Lord Jesus, and identifies a person as a follower of Jesus. According to the Bible, baptism is an outward expression of what has occurred inwardly in a believer's life. Christian baptism illustrates a believer's identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. The Bible declares, *"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"* (Romans 6:3-4 NIV). Christian baptism is important because it is a step of obedience – publicly declaring faith in Christ and commitment to Him.

Requirements to be eligible for baptism

In Christian baptism, there are two requirements before a person can be baptized: (1) the person being baptized must have trusted in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and (2) the person must understand what baptism signifies.

Jesus commanded his disciples to: *"go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matthew 28:18-19). In the early church, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, new Christians were baptized immediately upon their coming to faith (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 36-39; 9:18). Often then, and now in some countries, it was after being baptized that Christians face persecution. At the time of Christ baptism was used by the Jews as an initiation for Gentiles who became proselytes to Judaism. Jesus took this symbolic action and used it as an initiating rite (though it is far more than that) for those who committed their lives to Him.

Baptism is a symbolic rite

Baptism is an outward expression of an inner faith. It is the symbolic action to accompany an inner reality and has no saving or meritorious value in itself. To become a Christian a person must turn from sin, and trust in Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and Lord. They then receive new life in Christ, which is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. These three events are symbolized in baptism.

In Romans 6:3-5 Paul shows that baptism is a picture of death, burial and resurrection. Going down under the water pictures the end of your old life (both in terms of repentance and forgiveness). Coming up out from under the water pictures the beginning of your new life (both in terms of a new direction of pleasing God and the new power to live that way).

Death, burial and resurrection

When a person trusts Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, an inner spiritual baptism occurs: *"having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead"* (Col. 2:12). Just as Jesus Christ died, was buried and rose again, so we who are "in Christ" are united with Him in His death, burial and resurrection. In baptism we identify ourselves with Christ – He died for (our) sin, and we die to sin (repentance) – He rose to new life and we have been raised to enjoy the power of the new life of the Spirit.

Dead to sin

Going down under the water pictures the end (death) of your old life. The Bible teaches that as baptized believers we are to live our lives based on the truth that we are dead to sin: *"Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus"* (Rom 6:11). Being dead to sin does not mean being unresponsive to sinful desires or temptation. It relates to our legal standing before

God. It means we are 'legally' dead to sin – free from the power and demands of sin, though we are still able to follow sin's desires should we choose to.

Raised to new life

Coming up out from under the water pictures the beginning of your new life. It is a life with a completely new direction – that of seeking to please God, and it is also a life of experiencing a new freedom and power by the indwelling Holy Spirit who enables us to live that way. The word 'baptize' means to dip or immerse, and so we follow the New Testament guidelines of fully immersing the person in water. This also accords with the symbolic concept explained in Romans 6:3-5. There Paul shows that baptism is a picture of death, burial and resurrection. Just as Jesus Christ died, was buried and rose again, so we who are "in Christ" are united with Him in His death, burial and resurrection. In baptism we identify ourselves with Christ – He died for (our) sin, and we die to sin (repentance) – He rose to new life and we have been raised to enjoy the power of the new life of the Spirit.

An understanding of New Testament baptism can be condensed to a simple acrostic:

- B** **B**elievers only – baptism is only for those who have already come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ.
- A** **A**ll believers are to be baptized – there is no thought in the New Testament of an unbaptized Christian. There is no level of growth or time line to adhere to before being baptized.
- P** **P**ublic Confession – baptism is the public confession of a person's belief in Christ as Saviour and Lord. That is why it is important to invite friends and relatives to your baptism and also share your testimony.
- T** **T**rinity – Christian baptism is in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19), implying a belief in the trinity.
- I** **I**dentification – baptism expresses our identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. It is a sign of your commitment to leave the old life behind and follow Christ in the power of the Spirit.
- S** **S**ymbolic – baptism is a symbol only. Baptism does not save a person, put them right with God, bring forgiveness, give the Holy Spirit, or bring any benefits or rewards.
- E** **E**veryday experience – we are called to live the baptized life.

2. SUGGESTED PROCEDURE FOR A BAPTISM

Date of baptism:

Please bring a set of clothes that you will wear just for the baptism and change into them at the church. Ladies should wear swimwear or similar under the clothes to avoid embarrassment when getting out of the baptistery with wet clothes on.

Your involvement in the baptism should be as follows:

- Arrive at the church about 30 minutes before the service begins.
- Get changed into baptism clothes and be ready for final instructions and prayer.
- Sit in/near the front seat with one or two of your close friends or relatives.
- When invited to go to the microphone and share your testimony (you can either share it verbally with notes to guide you, or have someone else read it out on your behalf). A testimony is simply your personal story of how you came to put your faith in Jesus Christ and what has happened in your life since that time. Your testimony should be submitted to the pastor at least a

week before the baptismal service in case any tidying up or suggested changes need to be made. It should only take 3 minutes.

- After your testimony, have an appropriate person ready to come forward and share a verse from the Bible for you.
- When it comes time for you to be baptized you will proceed down into the water where the person doing the baptizing will position you correctly. He will then ask you the following:
“(Your name), do you believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, that He died for your sins, and rose again; and have you trusted in the Lord Jesus to be your Saviour?”
(your answer should be spoken out clearly)
“On the confession of your faith, and at your request, I now baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
- After being baptized, you will go up out of the water and someone will put your towel around your shoulders. You can then stand and watch any others being baptized before getting changed and returning to the congregation