

Why Should I Get Baptized?

The noun and verb forms for baptism are used over 100 times in the New Testament. John the Baptist brought a baptism of repentance to Israel, which was an affront to the Pharisees because they didn't feel they needed it. But John was prophesied about beforehand and his ministry was absolutely vital to prepare people for the coming of Christ. Jesus was baptized by John and started baptizing converts himself through his apostles. I say all this to bring to your attention the importance of baptism. It is not an afterthought of the Christian. It is not a minor issue. The New Testament church did not even consider the possibility of getting saved and not getting baptized; in fact baptism was the normal outward expression of faith (not walking an isle or saying a prayer). Let's look at some important passages on baptism and see what they reveal about baptism. Some specific questions we want to answer are: "Does baptism save you?" "When do I get baptized?" "Why is baptism important?"

Does Baptism Save You?

First let's answer the question, "Does baptism save you?" This is a very important question. There are several different beliefs in the church concerning baptism and whether it saves you or not. Some believe in baptismal regeneration; this is the belief that baptism regenerates us; at our baptism we are born again. Lutherans and Catholics believe in baptismal regeneration. The Church of Christ believes in something similar to this view; they believe that baptism is the act of faith that brings salvation. None of these groups believe baptism is a work. Catholicism seems to believe there is something magical about the baptism itself; even apart from faith the baptism cleanses the person from original sin (*ex opera operato*). Lutherans believe the parents need to have faith before it is affective, but the baby does not need faith. The Church of Christ believes the recipient must have faith, otherwise the baptism is just a bath. Baptists reject baptismal regeneration and state that baptism is an act of obedience; it is a picture of salvation but does not bring salvation. Sometimes in their zeal to counter baptismal regenerationists they speak of baptism as an option that you can decide to participate in when you feel like it; Baptist theologians would never sanction this caricature of baptism. I believe that the doctrine of baptism is not a doctrine worth dividing over; in other words we can agree to disagree agreeably on our beliefs concerning baptism. But I do believe it is very important, and false beliefs can have adverse affects on our lives. God didn't talk about baptism over 100 times and institute it as one of the two ordinances of the church for nothing. We want to get this doctrine right and the only way that is possible is to come to the Scriptures to see what they reveal without letting our preconceived ideas and cultural background get in the way.

In Acts 2:37 it says, "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.'" Baptism is not an option. Notice the people did not ask "What must we do to be justified?" or "What are the steps of salvation?." They just said "What must we do?" Peter said "Repent and be baptized." Repentance is one aspect of true faith in Jesus, which is what Peter was discussing with them when they were cut to the heart. Baptism is our declaration to the world that we have decided to follow Jesus. It is the first work of a Christian, the first act of obedience according to Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The repentance as a part of true faith brings the forgiveness of sins, not the ritual of baptism, but baptism is essential to our Christian walk. Jesus could say in Mark 16:16 "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." The Bible doesn't even consider the possibility of a person getting saved and not baptized, but it is the belief that saves not the baptism, which is why he didn't say "but whoever does not believe *or is not baptized* will be condemned." If Baptism was essential for our justification Paul would have mentioned in his two great books on salvation (Romans

and Galatians) that baptism was necessary for salvation, but the only thing he mentions is faith. Baptism is assumed and it symbolizes what takes place in our hearts (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27), but it does not save us. God didn't just forget to throw in baptism in all the passages on salvation that say faith alone saves us because faith alone is what saves us. Acts 10:44-48 proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that baptism doesn't save you and is not essential for justification. In this passage the people were saved and even received the gift of the Holy Spirit before they were baptized. Baptism is important and so Peter immediately baptized them but he didn't say, "Oh no, God made a mistake. He filled them with the Spirit before baptism; we better correct that mistake." Someone once told me, "Well that is only one place in the Bible." My response was, "One place is enough if you believe the Bible is without error and completely sufficient for our lives" (2 Peter 3:16-17). If it is in the Bible once it is true. The thief on the cross also proves that baptism doesn't save you (Luke 23:39-43). Some say that the thief was still under the Old Covenant so this doesn't count as a proof. But the thief didn't die until after Jesus died and he trusted in Jesus not the Old Covenant (which wouldn't have done him any good because under the Old Covenant he would have had to offer a sacrifice). His trusting in Jesus saved him which puts him in the New Covenant and therefore he is an excellent proof that baptism doesn't save you. No, baptism doesn't save you but it does symbolize the cleansing that comes through repentance. It is a wonderful picture of what takes place in our heart when we are saved. We die to sin (we are saved from sin), pictured by the burial in water and we are raised to a new life, pictured by our coming out of the water. When a person has seriously considered the ramifications of salvation and counted the cost (Luke 14:25-33), he or she then places his or her faith in Christ and outwardly expresses that faith in baptism. Baptism doesn't save you, but it is not an optional addendum to your Christian walk.

When Do I Get Baptized?

There are three major positions concerning the question, "When do I get baptized?" First much of the church has embraced infant baptism (paedo-baptism). The Church began to practice baptizing infants early in its history and it became the standard by the fourth century, but in the first two centuries there are no records of the church endorsing or practicing infant baptism. It appears that the Church began to practice infant baptism about the same time it started to believe in baptismal regeneration as well as the idea that babies go to hell if they die apart from baptism. We have seen that baptismal regeneration is not true, and we must also recognize that according to the Bible all babies go to heaven if they die before the age of accountability (see my paper on "Do All Babies Go to Heaven?" and 2 Samuel 12:23; Romans 7:9). We do not need to baptize our children because of fear that they will go to hell if we don't; this is an unbiblical and unloving doctrine we should reject. Usually those holding to infant baptism suggest that the doctrine of infant baptism is true even though the Bible does not mention it specifically, because it is the New Testament counterpart to Old Testament circumcision. Under the Old Covenant believer's children were circumcised (actually only the males), even though they did not have the capacity for faith yet. Though there are some similarities concerning the Old and New Covenants, there are also some striking differences. If under the New Covenant we are to practice infant baptism, the Bible would have made this very clear in light of the importance of this doctrine. The Old Testament made it very clear that infants were to be circumcised, but this is not the case for the New Testament. Some say the "household" passages must indicate that babies were baptized (Acts 16:15, 33). But we should notice that the gospel was presented to the whole household and the whole household believed. Also the passage never says anything about sprinkling infants, only baptizing believers.

The second major position concerning the timing of baptism is that a person should be baptized when he or she personally put his or her trust in Christ; this position is known as believer's baptism. Acts 8:36 reports the instance when Philip witnessed to the Ethiopian eunuch. After Philip presented the gospel it records: "And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?' And he commanded the chariot to

stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.” Some manuscripts add verse 37: “And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he replied, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’” This verse was probably not in the original manuscripts which is why most new translations don’t include it, but it does represent early Christian thought concerning baptism and it is implied in the actual text. When you believe you get baptized; this is the example throughout the Bible (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 8:38; 9:13; 10:47-48; 16:15; 16:33; 18:8; 19:5). Ephesians 4:5 speaks of “one Lord, one faith, one baptism...” The earliest of church history solidly backs the belief in believer’s baptism. To baptize infants without any Scriptural warrant is to add to the Bible and it completely misses the importance of baptism. Once infant baptism began to be practiced, sprinkling became the norm even though the Bible only endorses submersion. When Jesus was baptized Mark 1:10 naturally remarks, “And when he came up out of the water...” When Philip baptized the eunuch it says in Acts 8:39, “And when they came up out of the water...” This was the normal mode because that is actually what baptism means. *Baptidzo* literally means to submerge. When the English translations came out they transliterated the word rather than translate it because they all practiced sprinkling at that time. To translate *baptidzo* as “submerge” would be admitting they were practicing the wrong method. The early Baptists recognized the true meaning of *baptidzo* and began to practice the correct mode of baptism and the correct timing – believer’s baptism by submersion.

The last position concerning the timing of baptism is the belief that it is no longer necessary. The Quakers believe that both the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are no longer necessary, because we now have the experience of the Spirit and no longer need the signs. There is no Scriptural warrant for this position. As we have seen above, when a person gets saved he or she is immediately baptized. There is no prolonged waiting, no delay due to a lack of feeling. When a person is ready to place his or her faith in Christ he or she is ready to be baptized.

Why Is Baptism Important?

Baptism is important first and foremost because Jesus commanded it. Matthew 28:19 gives the imperative to baptize all believers. It is simply disobedience not to get baptized. As followers of Christ we are to obey him, even when we don’t feel like it. In Acts 2:38 Peter also gives the imperative, “Repent and be baptized every one of you...” It is also important because it so beautifully pictures what takes place in the heart of a believer. Romans 6:3-5 states:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Our baptism pictures the truth that when we are saved we die to the old way of life and receive resurrection life, eternal life from God. It portrays our union with Christ in his death and resurrection. It is a testimony to the world that we have decided to follow Jesus. It is also important because sometimes it is the time when we experience a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:5-6). We receive the Spirit at the moment of salvation, but we are filled with the Spirit throughout our Christian walk. Why not at baptism?

Baptism is important. It is the normal, Scriptural outward expression of our faith when we receive Christ. Believer’s baptism by submersion is the only Biblically sanctioned mode of baptism. It should be the first act of obedience of the believer. I will never forget my own baptism. I was baptized with my brother whom I led to the Lord. The pastor likened us to Andrew and Peter. Baptism is meant to be a special time with your church family, publically proclaiming that you are a follower of Christ. If you

have not been baptized yet and you have repented of your sins and placed your faith in Jesus, then what are you waiting for?