

The image features a blue background with a white horizontal line representing the water surface. Above the line, the words "water baptism" are written in a dark blue, sans-serif font. Below the line, the same words are written in a larger, white, sans-serif font. A blue wavy line representing water ripples is positioned between the two text elements.

water baptism

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The Next Step in Your Faith

As disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we want to obey His desires for us. One of the first commands of Christ to new believers is that they be baptized in water. This has always been recognized as an important act by the Church. Why is water baptism important? Why should we be baptized? What happens when we are baptized? These are the questions we hope to answer in this study.

1. Why should we be water baptized?

(Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:16)

The primary reason we should be water baptized is because Jesus commands us to be water baptized. In both Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-18 Jesus commands believers to preach the Gospel and to baptize. Water baptism is an integral part of the Great Commission. It is part of the disciples experience, and is a normal part of salvation.

In addition to the clear commands of Jesus, we also have clear examples from the early church. When the Jews asked Peter on the day of Pentecost what they must do, he told them they had to repent and be baptized, a command which over 3000 of them obeyed (see Acts 2:36-41). When Saul was converted on the road to Damascus, he was baptized (see Acts 9:17-19). When the Philippian jailer was saved, he and his family were baptized in the middle of the night (see Acts 16:33). Many more examples could be given, but the point is clear. The early church obeyed the command of Jesus and baptized all new converts.

2. What is the purpose of water baptism? What happens when we are baptized in water?

(Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:11-12; Galatians 3:26-27; 1 Corinthians 12:12)

The primary purpose of water baptism is to identify with the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. In following Jesus' command to be water baptized, we publicly testify that we are His people, and that we place our trust in Him to one day raise us from the dead.

Water baptism is more than a symbol. It is a sacrament. Like the Lord's Supper, it is an event that through which Jesus actually does a work of grace in our lives. The identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus actually causes a change in us.

In Romans 6:1-6 the apostle Paul says that when we were baptized we were baptized into Jesus' death, and that, as a result, we are free to live a new life. In water baptism, our old man, our sin nature, which was crucified with Christ, is buried. This is more than symbol. It is actually frees us from the power of sin.

In Colossians 2:9-12 Paul also likens water baptism to circumcision. He says that in water baptism our old nature is circumcised, or put off, from us. He says that it is a circumcision done by Jesus Himself, and that in baptism we are buried and raised with Jesus through our faith in the power of God.

Finally, in Galatians 3:26-27, Paul says that we are baptized into Christ. He says that in baptism we were clothed with Christ. In I Corinthians 12:12 he also says that we were baptized into one body, the body of Christ. Baptism is an experience which clothes us with Christ, and unites us with one another in His Body, the Church.

Thus the total picture of what happens when we are water baptized is that the old nature, which dominated us before our conversion, but which was crucified with Christ when we were born again, is circumcised or cut off from our new nature, and then is buried. We go down with a dead old man clutching on and trying to exert influence, and we arise from the waters of baptism with the freedom to live a new life by the power of God. The old man is buried forever. Additionally, we are clothed with Christ and His nature, and united with His Body, the church. This is truly a vital experience no believer should miss!

3. Who should be water baptized?

(Matthew 28:19; Acts 8:12)

Anyone who is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ should be baptized. Jesus commanded that when the church preaches the Gospel, new disciples should be baptized and taught (Matthew 28:19-20). When Philip saw that the people of Samaria believed, he immediately baptized them in water (Acts 8:12). This pattern is repeated throughout the book of Acts (see Acts 2:36-41; Acts 8:35-38; Acts 9:17-18; Acts 10:44-48; Acts 16:14-15; Acts 16:30-33; Acts 18:8; Acts 19:4-5).

As a side note, it should be noted that none of the people baptized were unbelievers. Water baptism is for believers only. For this reason, and in view of the purpose of water baptism, there is really no reason to baptize a baby. Water baptism is an act whereby a believer identifies with his Lord. Since infants are not believers, it is of no value for them. While it is proper for a baby to be dedicated to the Lord, this is a separate act from water baptism. Although there may seem to be some relevance to this practice since it is likened to circumcision, and circumcision was for 8 day old infants, upon closer examination this is not true. Under the old covenant, circumcision was necessary for someone to enter union with the people of God. This was done for an infant. Under the new covenant, however, we may only become part of the people of God through faith. Since this is not possible for an infant, water baptism is of no use. Although there is no command that we should not baptize an infant, to do so serves no purpose, and only causes confusion over the true purpose of water baptism.

4. When should we be water baptized?

(Acts 16:25-34; Acts 8:34-39)

As soon as possible after becoming a believer. In view of the great work that God does in us when we are water baptized, we should not delay this important event. In Acts 16:25-34, the jailer and his family were baptized in the middle of the night. In Acts 8:34-39, the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized in the middle of the desert immediately after believing. In fact, throughout the book of Acts, baptism usually took place on the day someone was converted. The issue is not having a big ceremony. Rather, the issue is obeying the Lord Jesus and letting Him do His work in us.

5. In whose Name should we be baptized?

(Acts 2:38; Acts 8:16; Acts 10:48)

This has caused great controversy in the church. The scripture seems to be clear, however. In the book of Acts, every reference to baptism is linked with the name of the Lord Jesus. In Acts 2:38 we are told to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. In Acts

8:16 we are told that the Samaritans had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. In Acts 10:48 Peter orders that the household of Cornelius be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. In Acts 19:5 Paul baptizes the Ephesians in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The reason there has been so much controversy is that in Matthew 28:19 Jesus commands the disciples to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Shouldn't we baptize "in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"? We believe that the apostles did obey this command. In the book of Acts we have the record of how they did this. They baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is because the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the Lord Jesus Christ. We are told in John 17:6,12,26 that Jesus revealed the Name of God to us, and that He protected the disciples by the Name of the Lord. We believe this is the Name of Jesus. It is by the Name of Jesus that we are saved (Acts 4:12) and healed (Acts 4:10) and baptized (Acts 2:38; Acts 8:16; Acts 10:48). It is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus that we are identifying with so, like the apostles, we should baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It should be noted that this does not deny the Trinity, a doctrine to which we strongly subscribe. Jesus is not the Father or the Spirit, but He is a member of the Trinity, equal in authority and Divinity with the Father and the Spirit. It is by His Name specifically, though, that we are saved, healed and baptized. Truly, whatever we do, whether in word or deed must be done in the Name of the Lord Jesus (see Colossians 3:16).

6. Is water baptism necessary for someone to go to heaven?

(Ephesians 2:8-9; Luke 23:43)

No. The only thing necessary for us to be justified and redeemed and to go to heaven is to repent and place faith in the Lord Jesus. This is the Gospel. To add anything to this, even something as important as water baptism, is to change the Gospel into justification by works. This is tantamount to denying Christ (see Galatians 2:15-21). Justification is by faith alone (see Romans 1:16-17). This is why Jesus said the thief on the cross would be in heaven with Him, even though the thief was certainly never baptized. Thus, baptism is **NOT** necessary to go to heaven.

Why do Mark 16:16 and 1 Peter 3:21 say we are saved by water baptism? We believe there are two reasons for this. First, the scripture seems to expect that all believers will be baptized. If someone is a believer, why would they want to disobey the clear command of Jesus to be baptized? If we truly love Jesus, we will obey His commands (see John 14:21). If we do not obey Him, if we do not live by His commands, there is no evidence we know Him. We are not saved by works, but works show our faith. Faith without works is dead (see James 2:14-26).

Second, we must differentiate between being saved and going to heaven. Strictly speaking, there are at least 3 stages to salvation revealed in the scripture. The first stage of salvation, known as justification or redemption, is the forgiveness of our sins. It is freedom from the penalty of sin. The second stage is known as sanctification. It is freedom from the power of sin. The final stage, glorification, is freedom from the presence of sin. Justification has been fully accomplished in the past. There remains no work to be done for our justification. Glorification will primarily be accomplished in the future, at the return of Christ when our bodies are redeemed and the dead are judged. Sanctification, however, is a present work. It deals with the present work of the Spirit in our lives. It is entirely possible that we may be justified, yet be

struggling in the process of our sanctification. Justification is accomplished once and for all by the finished work of Christ, independent of anything other than our response of faith.

Sanctification, however, is a present work of the Spirit, and is dependent not only on our faith, but also our obedience to the work of God in our lives. If we are disobedient, we remain under the power of sin. This is where baptism “saves” us. It does not save us from the penalty of sin, but it is part of our being “saved” from the power of sin.

This dichotomy may be seen in several places in the Scripture. In Romans 5:8-10 Paul makes a distinction between our being justified, and our being saved from God’s wrath. In Philippians 2:12-13 Paul commands the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God Who is working in them. They were certainly all justified, yet there remained a further work of God to be done. Thus, their salvation, specifically their sanctification, still needed to be brought to completion. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 Paul prays that the Thessalonians entire spirit, soul and body would be sanctified. He assures them that God was faithful and He would do it. Once again, they were justified, but there remained a further work to be done in them. This work of sanctification would be done until the return of the Lord Jesus, when our spirit, soul and body will all completely experience the fullness of the salvation we have now received.

Many more examples could be given, but hopefully the point is clear. The term “salvation” has many shades of meaning in the scripture. This is important when considering the passages in Mark and 1 Peter. In Mark 16 we are told that those who believe and are baptized will be saved, but that those who do not believe will be condemned. Certainly it is to be expected that those who believe will be baptized, but notice that those who are condemned are not those who are not baptized, but those who do not believe. What happens then to those who believe but are not baptized. They are neither saved nor condemned. What are they? We believe they are justified. They WILL go to heaven, but they also will experience problems in this life. Without following the Lord in baptism, they will never experience the full freedom from sin which God desires for them.

7. Is baptism by sprinkling or immersion?

Although there is no definitive answer given to this question in the Scripture, we believe the proper mode of baptism is by immersion. In baptism we are identifying with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We are burying our old nature. In a physical burial, the body is not sprinkled with dirt; it is immersed in it. The spiritual burial of our old man should be done the same way. Also, since we are identifying with Christ, immersion is a more fitting method. We do not want to be sprinkled with Christ; we want to be completely covered with Him. Thus, symbolically, immersion seems to be a much more satisfactory method for water baptism.