

SACRED BEGINNINGS

Water Baptism



THE SANCTUARY

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Water Baptism

When it comes to water baptism, there are always a lot of questions. What is it exactly? Is baptism a requirement of salvation? Does a person have to be baptized to go to heaven? Why is baptism so significant? Why should a person be baptized? Who should be baptized? What about infants and children? What is necessary prior to baptism and what can we expect after baptism? When should a person be baptized? How should it be done? Who should do the baptizing—an ordained “professional” minister or can anyone do it? What about re-baptism?

Much could be, and has been, written about water baptism—the origins of the practice and how it relates to salvation in Christ. In this reader, we’ll explore the basic implications according to the Bible, utilizing a practical “Q & A.” The goal is to bring understanding and clarity about this significant celebration.

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

It is a celebration, commanded by Jesus, to be observed in the Church (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15–16).¹ Different church families (congregations) honor this practice in various ways, but all include the application of water to the body of a person. Essentially, it is a physical action, following repentance and faith, which indicates an obedient response to having Christ at the center of one’s life (Acts 2:38–39). Though there are differing interpretations of baptism among Christian groups, the importance of the practice is essential because Jesus commanded it to be done.

The word baptism comes from the Greek word² baptizo: to dip, immerse. This verb actually emphasizes the result of the act rather than the act itself. Baptism underscores the Christian’s identification with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection. It is a

¹ It is often referred to as one of the two Ordinances of the Church; the other being the Lord’s Supper (Communion). Ordinances are outward rites or symbolic observances commanded by Jesus, which set forth essential Christian truths. Some prefer to call them Sacraments. “The word ‘sacrament’ originally had a meaning ‘an oath of obedience taken by newly enlisted soldiers.’ The ordinances can be defined as ‘the outward sign of an inward work,’ or ‘the visible sign of an invisible work of grace.’” See *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, by Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, LIFE Bible College at Los Angeles, CA 1983 p. 435.

² The original language of the New Testament.

milestone in a believer's life—from acceptance of Christ to belonging in the Christian community.

There are four positions on the nature or essence of baptism and the early Church's practice (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 36–39; 9:18; 10:48). Because there are differing views, here is a brief explanation of each.

1. The **sacramental** view —The belief that it is the means by which God conveys grace. Those who hold this view, based on their interpretation of John 3:5, believe that through baptism people receive forgiveness of sins, are given a new nature, and are strengthened in their faith.
2. The **covenantal** view —The belief that it is a sign and seal of God's covenant or pledge to save man. On one end baptism is seen as the sign of the covenant; on the other, it is the means people enter into that covenant and its benefits are obtained. In this view, baptism serves the same purpose for New Testament believers that circumcision did for Old Testament believers; these two celebrations are linked in Colossians 2:11–12.
3. The **symbolic** view —The belief that it is a public testimony of an inner change that has already occurred in the believer's life. This position explains that the church observes baptism and the believer submits to it, because Jesus commanded it and gave us the example by being baptized Himself. Thus it is an act of obedience, commitment, and proclamation (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16).
4. The **dynamic** view —Though increasing numbers of Christians recognize elements of truth in the viewpoints above, there is yet another focus on the power (dynamic) that is inherent in the Holy Spirit's presence at baptism. While repentance and faith must precede it, water baptism is seen as a significant moment where:
 - The past bonds of sin are broken (1 Corinthians 10:2).
 - A commitment to separate from the past life of worldly indulgence is made (Colossians 2:11–15).
 - The fullness of the Holy Spirit's abilities may be given to enhance the believer's power for witness and ministry (Acts 2:38–39).
 - Those who hold this position see baptism as both a witness and as an encounter. It is symbolic (a burial to the past) but also empowering (an equipping for the future).³

IS BAPTISM A REQUIREMENT OF SALVATION?

Simply put, "No." Scripture makes it clear that salvation is based on one thing: that we believe in Christ!

³ The remainder of this reader is presented and substantiated in the Dynamic View.

- John 3:16: "For God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life."⁴
- Acts 2:21: "But everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
- Acts 4:11-12: "For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says, 'The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.' There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved."
- Acts 16:31: "They replied, '**Believe** in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household.'"
- Romans 10:9: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and **believe** in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." However, in the early church many believed and were immediately baptized—revealing the significance of this celebration, which we will cover below.
- Acts 2:37-41: "... Those who **believed** what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all."
- Acts 8:12: "But now the people **believed** Philip's message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized."
- Acts 8:13: "Then Simon himself believed and was baptized. He began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed by the signs and great miracles Philip performed."

DOES A PERSON HAVE TO BE BAPTIZED TO GO TO HEAVEN?

Salvation is the requirement for eternal life (John 3:16). The primary example to contradict the idea that water baptism is a requirement to go to heaven is seen in one of the criminals crucified next to Jesus. When he cried, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom," Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:39-43). It would have been physically impossible for this man to be water baptized; yet Jesus promised him eternal life. While water baptism is not a requirement for salvation, it remains a command for those who are capable of obedience to it.

WHY IS BAPTISM SO SIGNIFICANT?

The importance of baptism can be seen not only in the actions of the early Church, as mentioned above, but more importantly in the life of Jesus.

- **Jesus was baptized in water** (Matthew 3:13-15).
- **Jesus endorsed water baptism** (John 3:22; 4:1-2).
- **Jesus commissioned water baptism** (Matthew 28:19).

Because water baptism is so connected to Jesus Himself, as His disciples we must

⁴ All texts, unless otherwise noted, are from the NLT.

give it our undivided attention. Through baptism we identify with Christ and give testimony of our faith in Him, commitment to live for Him, and our availability to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

WHY SHOULD WE BE BAPTIZED?

- **To follow Jesus' example.** A Christian is a follower/disciple of Jesus. "Jesus came up out of the water . . ." (Mark 1:9-11).
- **Jesus commissioned it.** He instructed His disciples to: ". . . go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).
- **It is the pattern followed by New Testament believers.** "Many others in Corinth also heard Paul, became believers, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). Once again, the simple answer is: Jesus Himself was baptized and He commanded that His followers be baptized too. That alone is enough reason, but let's look at what He said when He gave this clear instruction. Matthew 28:19-20: "Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Ultimately, ". . . we can be sure that we know Him if we obey His commandments" (1 John 2:3).

**Baptism shows our devotion
and obedience to Jesus and His Word!**

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED? WHAT ABOUT INFANTS AND CHILDREN?

Christian groups differ as to who should be baptized. Is baptism reserved only for those who have come to a personal, conscious decision of faith or should babies and young children be included? There are basically two views regarding who should be baptized: Infant Baptism and Believer's Baptism. To help bring understanding, here is a brief synopsis of these two views.

Infant Baptism: Those who practice baptism of infants also baptize adults who have come to faith in Christ. There are several arguments in favor of this practice that are utilized by those who do:

1. Entire households were baptized in New Testament times (Acts 16:15, 33). Though it does not specifically say, some conclude that children must have been included and, therefore, this practice should extend to now.
2. Jesus cared for children. He commanded the disciples to bring the children to Him. When they did so, He blessed them (Mark 10:13-16). Because of Jesus' example, some feel it would be inconsistent to deny baptism of children. This text is also used by those who baptize children,

but only when they are old enough to have made a conscious/personal decision for Christ.

3. Children were participants in the Old Testament covenant (Genesis 17:7). Covenant theologians then say that since baptism has now replaced circumcision, it seems proper that it should be administered to children. Those who hold the sacramental view and believe in baptism regeneration, as mentioned above, argue that infant baptism is necessary otherwise if they
4. die they could not enter Heaven in this state. Other religious traditions apply baptism only to children of believers, and are careful to emphasize that this whole area is a mystery, known only to God.

The most generous view regarding infant baptism would be to: (1) honor the motivations without belittling the practice, and (2) emphasize the need for personal faith in Jesus Christ, at the earliest age of understanding, faith, and repentance.

Believer's Baptism: Those who hold to this view believe that only people who have actually expressed personal faith in Christ should be baptized. The only requirement is a person's ability to understand the need for repentance and salvation (and its connection to water baptism). Generally this means children under the age of puberty are not water baptized, unless there is a clear sign they understand their actions.

There are strong arguments in support of this view. In the New Testament, all instances of water baptism refer to believers expressing their faith in Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:12-17; 10:47-48; Matthew 3:6, Mark 16:16). Consistently the requirements for baptism were a personal, conscious faith: without this, baptism was not administered. This is especially evident throughout the book of Acts (in addition to the above references see 18:8; 19:4-5). In the New Testament church, repentance and faith came first, followed by baptism.⁵

WHAT IS NECESSARY PRIOR TO BAPTISM AND WHAT CAN WE EXPECT AFTER BAPTISM?

On Pentecost, the day that the New Testament Church was birthed, the Apostle Peter gave a powerful sermon to many listeners. His message was so convicting that 3,000 people were baptized, spontaneously, on-the-spot! Before their baptism, they asked, ". . . what should we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter's answer: "Each of you must repent of your sins, turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to show that you have received forgiveness for your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

⁵ This biblically-based view is held by The Sanctuary as well as our denominational family.

In this, we can clearly see the only prerequisite to baptism: **repentance!**

This biblical instruction to be baptized is clear. Acts 2:37 gives a straight forward, three-part pattern of baptism. It tells us repentance **must** precede baptism, and that the Holy Spirit is to be **expected** following baptism. The natural progression then is:

1. Repentance—turning away from sin, disobedience, or rebellion and a turning to God;
2. Regeneration—new birth, restored relationship with God by an act of the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ;
3. Water Baptism—identification with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection;
4. Baptism with the Holy Spirit—infilling of power for witness and ministry.⁶

Each step of obedience gives way for the next!

WHEN ARE WE TO BE BAPTIZED?

Perhaps the most detailed example is found in Acts 8 where Philip told the eunuch about Christ, “So Philip began with this same Scripture and then used many others to tell him the Good News about Jesus. As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?’ He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him” (Acts 8:35-38).

Upon recognition of the Good News of Jesus and the repentance of his sin-state, the eunuch made the decision to be baptized. The simplest answer to the question of “when” is: NOW! Upon salvation, water baptism is encouraged as soon as it is possible—as long as the person desires to be and understands its significance.

HOW ARE WE TO BE BAPTIZED?

Another predominant issue that surrounds baptism is the “how”—whether by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling. On this matter, Christians are organized into two major groups—those who strongly believe in the single use of immersion (the *immersionist* position) and those who permit and practice other forms (the *pluralistic* position).

The immersionist position — This position believes the answer to the proper way lies in the Greek word used for baptism in the New Testament, covered above, that is “to immerse” or “to dip,” implying that the person was literally plunged beneath the

⁶ There are cases where the baptism with the Holy Spirit precedes water baptism, but repentance and regeneration always take place first.

water. Also, the circumstances described in some of the biblical accounts strongly imply immersion:

- “At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was **plenty of water** there; and people kept coming to him for baptism” (John 3:23).
- “After His baptism, as Jesus **came up out of the water** . . .” (Matthew 3:16).
- “As they rode along, they **came to some water**, and the eunuch said, ‘Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?’” (Acts 8:36).

The symbolism that water baptism is an outward way of showing the internal washing and renewal that takes place when a person believes in Christ, gives strong evidence to immersion. Also, as indicated above, Romans 6:3-5 identifies baptism with the believer’s death (and burial) to sin and resurrection to new life, as well as the death and resurrection of Christ. Therefore, immersion truly and adequately depicts this meaning.

Or have you forgotten that when we became Christians and were baptized to become one with Jesus, we died with Him? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Jesus was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Since we have been united with Him in his death, we will also be raised as He was.

- Romans 6:3-5 -

Immersion would be used generally and other forms of baptism could be used only when immersion is not possible. In instances where water is insufficient to immerse a person, it would be acceptable to pour water over a person’s head several times—symbolizing a “washing.”

The pluralistic position — Proponents of this view believe that immersion, pouring, and sprinkling are all appropriate forms of baptism. They feel that the Greek word used for baptism in the New Testament is sometimes ambiguous in its usage. Though its classical meaning was to dip, plunge, or immerse, it also carried other implications.

These groups simply believe that immersion could not have been the exclusive method used in the New Testament. For example:

- Could John have been physically capable of immersing all the people who came to him?
- Did the Philippian jailer leave his jail to be baptized? If not, how would he have been immersed?

- Was enough water for immersion brought to Cornelius' house? Or, did Paul leave the place where Ananias found him in order to be immersed?

Those who use sprinkling or pouring also point out that if the major meaning of baptism was purification, various cleansing ceremonies in the Old Testament were performed by a variety of means—immersion, pouring, and sprinkling (Mark 7:4; Hebrews 9:10). In their view, true baptism required the symbolism of pouring rather than immersion.

Once again let us all be generous-spirited Christians and accept the validity of baptism wherever living faith in Christ is present, irrespective of how it is performed. God is looking at the heart and motivation of our actions rather than the method.

ARE WE TO BE BAPTIZED “IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT” OR “IN THE NAME OF JESUS”?

The Bible actually records *both*.

- The first example is what is considered the “Trinity” prayer (Matthew 28:19).
- The second example is a simple Jesus-focused prayer (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:44-48).

Ultimately, the “formula” for water baptism is given to us in Jesus’ “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:19). He instructed “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Statements about being baptized “in the name of Jesus” are simply omitting the longer formula.

Again let us walk “generously” with all our Christian brothers and sisters.

We are baptized regarding our faith in Christ, as granted by Father God, and empowered by His Holy Spirit.

DO THE BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND WATER BAPTISM GO HAND IN HAND?

There is biblical evidence that these baptisms occur together (Matthew 3:16-17; Acts 2:38; 19:1-6), but not always (Acts 8:14-17; 9:17-19; 10:44-48). The best posture with this question seems to be the anticipation of God doing the supernatural in response to our obedience in water baptism, while always trusting God for His perfect timing. It is an expectation of empowered fullness that is key. God wants to fill us with His Holy Spirit for power in service of Christ; when and where is up to Him.⁷

⁷ For more on the baptism with the Holy Spirit, see the reader *The Holy Spirit: Fruit & Gifts*.

DOES A LICENSED/ORDAINED PASTOR HAVE TO WATER BAPTIZE A PERSON?

There are some who believe the “sacrament” of baptism should be performed by a priest, bishop, or pastor. However, there is little biblical evidence to support this view. A sanctioned minister of the Good News historically performed baptisms, yet there is no scriptural mandate for such a restriction.

What truly matters are the seriousness of the act and the ability of the person baptizing to convey the truth and heart of God to those being baptized. For we are all called to minister and Jesus has made us priests (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10). That being the case, one or more people (male or female) who stand in agreement with the one being baptized can assist in a baptism celebration.

In Matthew 18:19 this agreement/gathering principle is reinforced when Jesus tells his disciples: “If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.” It’s about partnership in the process, not authorization of it.

WHAT ABOUT RE-BAPTISM?

In Acts 19, Paul traveled to Ephesus where he found several believers. He asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They replied, “we haven’t even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” They informed Paul they had been baptized in John’s baptism. He explained to them that John’s baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people who were baptized to believe in Him who would follow, meaning Jesus Christ. Clearly these believers had a valid baptism in John’s baptism. However, Paul rebaptized them anyway (this time in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ), and they received the baptism in the Holy Spirit on top of that!

Also, there are no biblical grounds to forbid it. Scripturally, there is room for baptism to be celebrated again under certain circumstances. Usually this involves a greater understanding on the part of the person and his or her desire to move forward in a deeper, more committed walk with Christ as Lord and Savior or to mark a spiritual milestone in one’s life. God always honors a heart that longs to serve Him to the fullest. If the motivations of being rebaptized were born out of such a person, then it seems that it would be more than appropriate!

CONCLUSION

Water baptism is the symbolic and public confession of a commitment to follow Christ in His death (our death to sin) and His resurrection (our being raised to new life in

Him). It conveys the truth that we, who are born again, are dead to the past and alive in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is an act of obedience, faith, and unity with Jesus.

What is most important, is to clearly understand the purpose for water baptism as opposed to the details surrounding it—that we understand and prioritize the why, rather than the who, what, when, where, and how.

For those who have committed their lives to Jesus, who are born again by His Spirit, and are physically capable, water baptism is not an option but a wonderfully intentional act of obedience and unity with Christ Himself in accordance with His command. There is no reason for delay. As soon as people declare their belief in Christ, they can be baptized.

If your desire is to be water baptized, I encourage you to do so. Don't put off for tomorrow what could be done today!⁹ According to your step of obedience, be prepared for a powerful encounter, not merely with water but with the Lord Himself!

Living as Loved!!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Marty Walker". The word "Pastor" is written in a smaller, more compact script, while "Marty Walker" is written in a larger, more flowing cursive style.

Pastor Marty Walker
The Sanctuary

If you would like to be baptized at The Sanctuary, stop by our Resource Center following any service or call our church office at 661-252-7255. We would love to assist you in this wonderful celebration.

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Notes

We exist as a *community*
to be a *safe place* FOR
each person to grow in
God's love + truth.



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