

WATER BAPTISM – What the Bible Teaches



- Do I need to be Water Baptised?
- What every believer should know about Water Baptism
- What about Infant Baptism?

These and similar questions are answered in this topical booklet, specifically designed for those seeking to know more about God and looking for answers to some of the deeper questions of life and eternity.

INTRODUCTION TO WATER BAPTISM

When a believer commits their life to the Lord Jesus Christ, they are usually eager to make this known to others. Water Baptism is a public representation of the sincerity of their decision (Rom 1:16). It is a divinely appointed way by which we may openly declare our faith in the risen Saviour, and is a public declaration of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 6:1-11). The early church considered it essential to repent, be water baptised for the forgiveness of sins, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Baptism comes from the Greek word ‘*baptiso*’ and was in regular usage in the days the Gospels were written. The word refers to something that has been *completely immersed* and completely changed by that immersion. A good example of this is the dyeing of cloth. When being dyed the cloth is completely immersed and its colour is changed. The Greeks would have said that the cloth was ‘*baptised*’ in the dye.

In New Testament times, when a Gentile became a Jew, apart from male circumcision, which is a more private matter, he signified his transfer of allegiance to the God of Israel by publicly submitting himself to water baptism. Therefore it was understandable that when Jews or Gentiles became Christians they should want to submit themselves to the waters of believer’s baptism.

Identification

Important truths concerning water baptism are explained in part in Rom 6:3-14. It is clear from this passage of scripture that one of the prime purposes of water baptism is identification with Jesus through his death, burial and resurrection, which broke the power of sin and death. We identify with this in baptism and recognise that sin no longer has the power of death within us.

Water baptism symbolises burying our old way of life and rising to new life in Christ. It is actually “circumcision made without hands” (Col 2:10-12) and it points back to the inner transformative work of God and forward to the life of faith. It is an opportunity for the new believer to make a public statement that a deep inner change has taken place. The act of water baptism can be a real faith enhancing experience, often followed by prayer and the laying on of hands after the person being baptised rises out of the water (See: Acts 8:38-39; 16:33-34; 19:5-6)

Obedience

Jesus was baptised, not as an outward evidence of repentance as He had no sin to repent of, but in accordance with His Father’s will. In doing so He deliberately set the pattern for water baptism for all Christian believers to follow, as described in Matt 3:11-17.

“As soon as Jesus was baptized ... the Spirit of God descended like a dove and alighted on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matt 3:16-17)

Jesus was always perfectly righteous, which was an inward condition of heart that He always possessed. By allowing Himself to be baptised Jesus set the course for His earthly ministry in that through His death, burial and resurrection he would break the power of sin and death in our lives.

This act was an outward sign of his inner obedience to the will of His heavenly Father. Baptism is both a sign and a seal of a spiritual transaction (Rom 4:11). In the Old Testament this was by circumcision, but in the New Testament it is water baptism.

Separation

When man rebelled against God, he chose to live according to his own strength and power. This attitude is called '*the flesh*' by Paul in his epistles.

In the Old Testament, to enter into God's covenant men had to be circumcised. It was an outward sign of an inner commitment to follow God's law. It was also prophetic of the work God was to perform through Christ in separating us from darkness and bringing us into His light.

The circumcision of the New Testament, as previously stated, is found in our obedience to God in water baptism. See Rom 2:28-29; 1 Cor 7:19; Gal 5:6 & 6:15.

It is also important to note outward signs are not enough in themselves. While the very act of baptism *can* bring an impartation of life, it does not change our heart. It is our obedience and continuing faith in what God has done, and will continue to do, that gives this act real meaning.

MINISTERING WATER BAPTISM

In the New Testament people were invariably baptised the same day they believed, as seen in the Book of Acts (2:41; 8:12, 37-38; 16:33; 18:8; 19:4-5).

Biblical examples of how believers were baptised can be found again in the book of Acts in the following passages: (Acts 2:41; 8:12-13, 38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5).

Ministering water baptism is a relatively simple process. It can be administered in a river, the ocean, a swimming pool or even a bath! The truly important aspect is the faith and heart attitude of the person being baptised.

If you have not yet been baptised, let this booklet be an encouragement to you. If you have, then let it remind you that what has taken place has significance for you as a believer. Water baptism is not an **option**, it is a **command**!

So far we have learned about **identification**, **obedience** and **separation** from the world, which are important truths that must be adhered to throughout our walk if we are to see and experience God's best, and fulfil his divine purpose for our lives.

Three Good Reasons To Be Baptised

1. Jesus himself was baptised by John and is our example (Matt 3:13-17).
2. Jesus commanded we be baptised, and baptise others also (1 Pet 3:21,22; Matt 28:18-20).
3. It was the practice of the disciples and the early church (Acts 2:37-38; 10:48)

The only qualification you require, allowing you to follow our Lord Jesus Christ through the waters of baptism, is that you fully repent (Acts 2:38), having believed and been convicted that this step is of God and for you personally (Mark 16:16), for the scripture records in Acts 2:41:

“They that gladly received his (Peter's) word were baptised, and there were added about three thousand souls that day.”

What About Infant Baptism?

Infant Baptism, or Christening, is not the same as full immersion water baptism. Water baptism is for those who have repented of their sin, believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and are saved. Such a decision is not possible for a new-born or infant child, so it cannot realistically be called “*Believer's Baptism*”.

Baby Dedication

We do, however, dedicate our children to God, and commit their parents to bringing them up in the “*discipline and instruction of the Lord*” (Eph 6:4). In this regard it is reasonable to view christening as a form of Baby Dedication.

If you were christened as a baby we strongly encourage you to be water baptised as an adult believer. Paul even commanded those who had been baptised under the baptism of John to be re-baptised (Acts 19:1-5).

WATER BAPTISM SUMMARY

Jesus Was Baptised

Although Jesus had no need to repent of sin, He was nevertheless baptised in the Jordan by John the Baptist, setting an example for us to follow (Mark 1:9)

Jesus Commanded His Disciples To Baptise

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20)

Early Believers Were Told To Be Baptised

After Jesus had ascended to the Father, and the Holy Spirit had come down on the day of Pentecost, many people were drawn into the kingdom by the power of God, and the witness of Jesus’ disciples. Peter told them when they asked what they must do to be saved, “repent, **be baptised**, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

The Disciples Practised Water Baptism

Throughout the book of Acts we see the disciples witnessing in the name of Jesus and under the anointing power of the Holy Spirit. Everywhere they went they practised water baptism and commanded all new believers to follow Jesus’ example (Acts 8:12; Acts 10:47,48).

The Apostle Paul Was Water Baptised

As soon as Paul realised he had been persecuting the Church of God he repented of his sin, was water baptised, and received the infilling baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:18).

Qualifications For Being Water Baptised

There are two simple qualifications for water baptism - **Repentance** and **Faith**:

Repentance is a necessary requirement for water baptism because it is an outward act that refers to an inward change. Repentance happens when a person, sorry for their sins and disagreements with God, completely changes within, stops making excuses, turns from their sin and becomes obedient to God. This is also referred to as being “converted”, “born again”, or “saved”. Without true repentance baptism is a hollow sham and offensive to God.

Faith is necessary for baptism because baptism is in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. If a person does not have faith in Christ, then their baptism is a meaningless ritual.

