



What is Baptism?

A Profession of Faith

Baptism is the public profession of faith of an individual who has surrendered their life to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ entered this world—fully God and fully human—to rescue us from disobedience and death into a restored relationship with God through Him. The good news of Jesus declares that He “died on the cross for our sin, according to the Scripture, was buried, and rose again the third day, according to the Scripture” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Only by God's grace, through repentance of sin and faith in Jesus' death and resurrection, can a person receive God's gift of salvation and new life. Baptism is an act of going public to declare oneself a follower of Jesus.

A Picture of New Life through the Gospel

When an individual turns from their sin to trust in Jesus for salvation through His completed work, the Bible says we are a new person who has passed from death into life.

Every person born into this world is born spiritually dead in their trespasses and sins. The gospel raises the spiritually dead to new life. Because of His great mercy and love, God causes us to be born again. Baptism outwardly portrays the inner reality that the one baptized is now following Jesus as Lord and Savior, having come to new life and relationship through faith in Him. Therefore, taking a person under the water and raising them out of it signifies that God buried the former self living in rebellion against Him, raising them to new life.

Jesus underwent baptism as the sinless Son of God. He did not need the forgiveness of sin. His baptism launched His earthly ministry, showing the very mission Jesus came to complete. He came to secure our deliverance from sin and death through His sacrifice. His water baptism pictured the baptism into death only to be raised on the third day to new life for the redemption of humanity.

A Decision of Obedience to Jesus' Command

When Jesus instructed His disciples to make disciples, He included the necessity of "baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19-20). Furthermore, the message preached by the Apostles followed Jesus' teaching as they urged individuals to "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). Being a disciple of Jesus requires obedience to His commands. God's Word teaches that disciples should be baptized in the name of the Triune God--Father, Son, and Spirit.

An Entrance to Local Church Membership

John Hammett explains that in addition to baptism publicly professing faith in Jesus and showing that one's sins have been washed away, "baptism signals incorporation." He writes, "To be identified with Christ means to be identified with his body."¹

A person who has trusted in Jesus for salvation identifies with Jesus in baptism and the church. Therefore, baptism should not be understood nor practiced separately from a person joining a local church in meaningful, covenant, accountable membership. In the New Testament Book of Acts, we read how new believers followed their faith with baptism, and God added them to the local fellowship (2:41). Shawn Wright affirms this position, writing, "Baptism is closely tied to church membership. It is to be performed under the authority of a local fellowship, and it should be required of all those who seek membership in the church because of its connections to the gospel." Wright then goes on to say that "baptism is the entrance marker of a converted person into the membership and accountability of a local church."²

What baptism is not?

A Way to be Saved

Scripture teaches that we are not saved "because of works done by us in righteousness," but only according to God's mercy and grace (Titus 3:5). God calls us to faith, drawing us to salvation by His Spirit. We respond by repenting of sin and exercising faith in Jesus and His death and resurrection for salvation. Baptism is a decision of obedience, demonstrating we are saved, but it is not an act that has any power to save.

A Way to Have Salvation Completed

Some believe that baptism is required to finish or complete one's salvation. Two popular scriptures, Acts 2:38 and 1 Peter 3:21, are often appealed to as supporting this belief. However, in both places, the Apostle Peter is preaching and writing. Yet, in both instances, Robert Saucy points out that "faith is either imputed or explicitly stated along with baptism."³

For instance, in Acts 2:38, Peter preached the gospel message; many in the crowd experienced the conviction of sin, and then some asked what they must do to be saved. Peter responded, saying, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness

¹ John Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005), 264.

² Shawn Wright, "Baptism in History, Theology, and the Church," *Baptist Foundations* (Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman, eds.; Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2015), 124.

³ Robert Saucy, *The Church in God's Program* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1972), 197.

of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Repentance cannot be separated from faith in the scriptures. Faith leads to repentance, and repentance occurs only after genuine faith. Their faith in Jesus and repentance of sin leads to forgiveness. Furthermore, the Bible ties salvation and baptism together, showing salvation in Jesus leads to the public profession of faith in baptism and baptism occurring only after surrendering to follow after Jesus. J. Vernon McGee shares how their "water baptism would be the evidence that they had repented, that they had come to Christ and had put their trust in Him."⁴ Forgiveness of sin comes through faith and repentance. Baptism testified to the fact that forgiveness has occurred.

A notable story in the Bible shows a man receiving the promise of salvation even though he does not, even cannot, be baptized in water. As Jesus hung on the cross between two criminals, one of the men eventually realized Jesus was King, whose kingdom the man desperately wanted to enter. In a plea for salvation, the man said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus then promised, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:42-43). That man never walked through the waters of baptism but received Jesus' promise of salvation. Baptism was not needed or required to complete his salvation by faith alone.

Who Can or Should Be Baptized?

According to the New Testament, every person who has turned from sin and trusted by faith in Jesus Christ for salvation should be baptized.

The consistent witness of God's Word in the New Testament places baptism after belief. We see individuals baptized after trusting in Jesus Christ, not before. Often, this belief and practice is called "believer's baptism." Believer's baptism is for those who have made a conscious act of the will decision to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation and have exhibited a credible testimony of faith by their lips and lives.⁵

Because we hold to believer's baptism, we do not baptize infants or children who cannot understand the gospel, decide on their own to trust in Jesus Christ for salvation, and demonstrate evidence of saving faith.

Similarly, we ask adults desiring to join as members who experienced baptism before their decision of faith (i.e., as an infant or came to faith in Jesus Christ after their baptism) to obey the Bible by being baptized as a believer.

In some cases, physical limitations or other health considerations may hinder a person from following in baptism. But when possible, and at the earliest opportunity after trusting Jesus and demonstrating a steadfast commitment to Him, a person should be baptized.

How do you baptize?

Baptism in the Bible means "to plunge" or "to immerse."⁶ The practice of the New Testament believers was to baptize individuals by immersing them beneath the water and raising them back up. Because baptism is a picture of the gospel, this method of baptism best and most

⁴ J. Vernon McGee, *Acts Chapters 1-14* (Thru the Bible Commentary Series; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 39.

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 969.

⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 967.

biblically declares Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, as well as His powerful, life-giving work to raise us to spiritual life from the dead. Therefore, we believe and practice believer's baptism by immersion only. For this reason, individuals joining Calvary who experienced baptism by a different mode as believers (i.e., sprinkling or pouring) will be baptized by immersion as part of the membership process. However, individuals desiring to join as members of Calvary, even from another denomination, who have trusted in Jesus for salvation and followed that decision with baptism by immersion do not have to be re-baptized for membership at Calvary.

When Can I Be Baptized?

A person can be baptized at Calvary after they have trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, demonstrated a credible testimony of faith, completed the starting point membership class, and prepared their salvation testimony to be shared on the day of their baptism.