

BASIC DISCIPLESHIP

# WHY BAPTISM?

Matthew Black

# Why Baptism?

By Matthew Black

Jesus commands true believers to seek to be baptized once they come to faith in him. “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” (Mt 28:19).

There are various ideas regarding baptism. You can learn the truth about baptism or any subject by carefully studying and following the Scriptures. Set aside any preconceived notions and be willing to see exactly what the Bible teaches.

## What is Baptism?

The Lord commands us to be baptized. Why? What does it mean? What exactly is baptism?

### *Baptism is an Assimilation*

In Acts 2 we have the first baptisms into the local church.

Acts 2:41 | Those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

The New Testament method for new believers to demonstrate their new faith and become connected to that local assembly is baptism. Every believer needs the love, accountability, warmth, care, fellowship, and pastoral ministry of the local church. That is God’s plan for every believer. This connection to God’s forever family begins with baptism. Through baptism we are assimilated into the local church. The proper next step after baptism is church membership.

## *Baptism is a Drama*

Baptism is an outward sign of an inward reality. The Holy Spirit baptizes us into the spiritual body of Christ. We are united with all true born-again Christians everywhere when we are “baptized into Christ.”

**1 Corinthians 12:13** | For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

Water baptism is a picture and drama of that spiritual baptism. It is also a picture of our unity with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.

**Colossians 2:12** | Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

**Romans 6:4** | 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.

In baptism we picture the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We enact the reality that we have put on Christ and are now walking in the resurrection power of the new life. Baptism is the outward act that symbolizes the inward phenomenon of coming to and accepting Jesus Christ as real, as God incarnate, as the sacrificial means by which those who believe in him can be forever reconciled to God.

## *Baptism is a Ceremony of Commitment*

**Galatians 3:27** | For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

The purpose of baptism is to give visual testimony of our commitment to Christ. Also, from Jesus’s teaching in Matthew 28:19 it’s clear that baptism is how someone publicly commits to follow Christ.<sup>1</sup> Baptism a public confession of Christ, like a public wedding ceremony. We put on a wedding ring as a symbol of our commitment and devotion. In the same way, baptism is a picture of devotion and commitment to Christ. A wedding ring reminds us and tells others that we belong to someone special. In the same way, baptism reminds us and others that we are devoted to Christ and belong to him.

## **Who Should Be Baptized?**

Baptism is not a mere religious ceremony, but an outward confession of an inward reality. How do we measure that inward reality? Through repentance and faith.

### *Those Who are Repentant*

Only those with repentant faith should be baptized. Repentance is required before baptism. When John the baptizer saw unrepentant religious leaders coming to be baptized, he had a few words of rebuke for them.

**Matthew 3:7-8** | When he [*John the Baptist*] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

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<sup>1</sup> Bobby Jamieson, *Why Should I Be Baptized?* (Church Questions) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 12-13.

## *Those Who Have Faith in Christ*

We saw already that “those who gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:41). A person must believe first and then be baptized.

**Acts 8:12** | When they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

**Belief was required before the Ethiopian’s baptism.**

**Acts 8:37, NKJV** | Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

A person must hear the truth about Jesus’ life, death and resurrection and believe, and then be baptized.

**Acts 18:8** | Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.

Peter tells the story of Noah’s flood and how the ark saved Noah and his family in the waters. He then says something interesting.

**1 Peter 3:21** | Baptism, which corresponds to this [*Noah’s flood*], now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Peter tells us the baptism that saves is not the kind that removes dirt from the body, but the baptism that gives us a clear conscience, i.e. being baptized with the Spirit by putting our faith in Christ. We have a good conscience as a result of Christ’s death and resurrection. Jesus saves! Baptism is a testimony of our faith that Jesus saves.

## *Those Who Have the Holy Spirit*

People who have believed first and as a result have received the Holy Spirit should be baptized.

Acts 10:47 | Peter declared,<sup>47</sup> “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”

This implies they already had the Holy Spirit even though they had not been baptized. Faith is the sign that we have the Holy Spirit, not baptism. Baptism is an outward sign of the inward reality that we already have.

Have you turned in repentance from your life of sin to Jesus in faith? Have you heard and believed the gospel that Jesus took your condemnation and lived the righteous life you could not, and freely wipes your record clean? Do you believe that Christ died for you and rose again? Is the Holy Spirit giving you comfort and assurance that you are God’s child? If these things are true, then you should be baptized if you have not followed the Lord in that way already.

## **Why Should We Be Baptized?**

People may have various reasons for being baptized, but the greatest motive is to confess your faith in Christ.

## *The Motives of Baptism*

In confessing our faith in baptism, there should be three basic motives: obedience, love, and joy.

### *Obedience*

After salvation God gives us a wonderful command—to follow Christ in baptism. Jesus’ marching orders were to proclaim the gospel to all nations and then to assimilate them into local assemblies

through baptism, helping them to grow and change into his image by teaching them all things from the whole counsel of God.

**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.

Baptism is the first step of obedience for the new believer in Christ. Be sure to take this blessed step of obedience. In order to grow in Christ, every Christian should begin by obeying God in believer's baptism.

### *Love*

Another motive is love for Jesus Christ. Love has no meaning unless it is put into action. Jesus tells us that our obedience flows out of a heart of love for him.

**John 14:15** | If you love me, keep my commandments.

If we are really saved and we love the Lord, we will not hesitate to follow the Lord in baptism as soon as possible as a proof of our love.

### *Joy*

The third motive is for personal joy. The Bible records the story of the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. Notice what it says:

**Acts 8:35-39** | When Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. <sup>36</sup> 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?" <sup>38</sup> And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. <sup>39</sup> And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

Baptism is one of the means of grace. Just like Bible reading, prayer, the Lord's table, fellowship, and innumerable other means of grace, we are helped to grow and be strengthened in our faith through baptism. In fact, when a believer expresses his or her faith through baptism, it strengthens the entire congregation. Baptism inspires everyone by your story of repentant faith in Christ. As we experience God's grace in love and obedience, overwhelming joy follows.

## *The Method of Baptism*

Baptism can only be performed in one way. In the Bible no one was ever baptized except by immersion of the body under water. The very word baptism literally means “to dip, to plunge, to submerge, or to immerse.” Nowhere in the Bible is sprinkling of babies or adults taught, though historically sprinkling and also pouring were permissible if there was a lack of water, or if the baptismal candidate was elderly or infirm. These small exceptions were allowed in the *Didache*,<sup>2</sup> the earliest discipleship manual of the church, dating during the time when some of the apostles were still living. Most importantly, the Scriptures teach baptism by immersion beginning with Jesus' example in the River Jordan.

**Matthew 3:16-17** | When Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; <sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

You may ask, where would people go to be baptized? Most often, they would go to the local synagogue. Outside of most synagogues would be a *mikveh*, or what we would call a baptistry. A mikveh

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. “Didache: The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations.” Early Christian Writings, April 8, 2012. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html>.

would have “living” or running water coming from a spring below. There were usually a number of mikvehs outside of each synagogue. Even today, if you visit an ancient synagogue or even the Temple itself in Jerusalem, there are mikvehs with running water from natural springs below. When I visited the synagogue at Magdala in Galilee they found dozens of mikvehs which had been buried for almost 2000 years from a mud-slide that occurred in A.D. 70. When they uncovered them, because they are connected to underground springs, they started running again. In fact, they are still running to this very day.

Baptism at the time would not normally have been a sprinkling or pouring but immersion since this is the very form that God’s people in Israel used for their ceremonial cleansings. It is therefore proper to baptize people just as Jesus commanded, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19) upon a testimony of faith in Christ. This is to be done by dipping the person under the water, as if the water were a grave. Being “buried” in the water, they are to come up out of the water to “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).

## *The Meaning of Baptism*

When we are baptized, we are confession our faith in Christ publicly, and we are picturing and acting out the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism pictures the death of the old life before we were saved, burial of the old life, and the resurrection of a new life to be lived for the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice again Romans 6:3-5 and see how God speaks of baptism.

**Romans 6:3-5** | Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?<sup>4</sup> 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.

When you came to faith in Jesus, you were united with Jesus. When Jesus was condemned, your sins were condemned and paid for. In his death you die. And when he was raised, you were raised to walk in newness of life. That all took place when you placed your faith in Christ. Baptism allows you to picture and celebrate your union with Christ.

### *Conclusion*

I came to know the Lord at the age of fifteen at an evangelistic outreach in Louisiana called “Strike Force.” A year later, I was in a church service, and the pastor asked if anyone was unbaptized wanted to come for baptism. I realized at that moment, that though I had been sprinkled as an infant, I had never been immersed in water as a public confession of my faith in Christ. I gladly went forward and was baptized the following week. Baptism didn’t save me. But it was an act of obedience that showed my love for Jesus and encouraged the entire congregation.

At our church, we ask for everyone who is baptized to first give their testimony before the entire congregation. It’s a wonderful opportunity to show the congregation how God saved you, and, how anyone who is lost can be saved as well.

Have you been baptized since you have been born again? If not, why not? Would you like to confess your faith in baptism? If you would like to schedule your baptism, talk to an elder or pastor at your church about it. If you are a young person, talk to your parents about it.

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