

Why Be Baptized? Is It Really That Important? by Dave Detwiler

Baptism, to put it very simply, is a symbol of beginning the Christian life, and it has been practiced since day one of the church. It is a decisive moment of commitment to Jesus Christ where a person gives public expression to their personal faith in him. If you have received Jesus into your life, that is, if you believe that he died for your sins and was raised from the dead to be your Savior and God, here is why you should now be baptized:

1. To obey the word of God as you begin living the Christian life.

Jesus could hardly have been more clear about the importance of baptism. At the end of his life on earth, he said to his followers, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...”* (Matthew 28:18-19 NIV). The early church picked up on this immediately. On the very first day of sharing the good news about Jesus with a large crowd of people, the apostle Peter declared, *“Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ”* (Acts 2:38, NLT). The point here is unavoidable: baptism is not an optional extra; it’s a matter of obedience.

2. To follow the clear example of believers in the New Testament.

This obedience to the word of God is evidenced in the lives of those who came to faith in Christ during the first century. The pattern is consistent and overwhelming: people *“believed and were baptized”* (Acts 1:8, NIV; see also Acts 2:41; 8:12, 35-38; 10:47-48; 16:14-15, 30-33; 19:5). And in all cases, baptism occurred as soon as possible after people believed. What’s more, when the apostle Paul wrote to churches, he could safely assume that every single believer had been baptized—no exceptions! (See, for example, Colossians 2:11-12 and Romans 6:3-4.) In fact, the only unbaptized believer that we know of in the New Testament is one of the criminals who died on a cross next to Jesus—and obviously he was unable to be baptized (Luke 23:39-43).

3. To publicly confess your personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Becoming a Christian is not merely a decision to be made privately; it is a commitment to be declared publicly, and baptism provides for this. Paul clarified, *“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”* (Romans 10:9, NIV). Now, this is not to say that the physical act of baptism somehow saves you; it doesn’t save you any more than the physical movement of your lips saves you when saying “Jesus is Lord.” Rather, salvation comes through faith, that is, through what you “believe in your heart,” as Paul put it (see also Ephesians 2:8-9). Baptism is simply a public expression of your faith in Christ—and something that we have been commanded to do (point 1 above).

4. To graphically illustrate the truth about your new life in Christ.

Baptism is not only a public expression of your faith in Christ; it is a powerful picture of your salvation in him. And this picture provides you with reassurance and resolve as you begin the Christian life. Further, it serves as a compelling testimony to any unbelievers who are present. Here is what you are communicating when you get baptized:

- **That your sins have been washed away** – Baptism is a vivid reminder that you have been washed clean, that your sins have been forgiven because of what Jesus has done for you. When Paul came to faith in Christ, he was told, *“What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on [Jesus’] name”* (Acts 22:16 NIV). Once again, this is not to say that the physical act of baptism actually washes away your sins. Rather, it is through faith, through “calling on Jesus’ name,” that you receive forgiveness of sins (see Acts 2:21; 3:19). Baptism in water is simply a powerful illustration of this life-changing truth.
- **That you have been united with Christ** – Paul told the Galatians, *“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ”* (Galatians 3:26, NIV). In other words, baptism shows that you now belong to Jesus, having thrown out the dirty clothes of your old life, so to speak, and “clothed yourself with Christ,” who is now your life. And this picture just gets better. . .
- **That you share in Jesus’ burial and resurrection** – Paul asked the believers in Rome, *“Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life”* (Romans 6:3-4 NIV). Your baptism by immersion is the clearest possible picture (just short of the use of dirt!) of the fact that, through faith, you were buried with Christ and raised to a new life (see Colossians 2:11-12).
- **That you now follow Christ as Lord of your life** – The new life that you have been raised to is one of following Christ, and you are declaring as much in your baptism. This is essentially what it means to be baptized *“in the name of Jesus Christ”* (Acts 2:38; see also 8:12, 16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16). You have come under new ownership; you have a new Master. In your baptism you are in fact saying, *“I follow Christ”* (I Corinthians 1:11-13).
- **That you have received the gift of the Holy Spirit** – Baptism is also a reminder that you have been given the Spirit as God’s power for living a life of following Christ. As Paul said, *“[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewed by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior”* (Titus 3:5, NIV; see also Acts 2:38).

- **That you belong to the body of Christ, the church** – Finally, Paul reminds us that *“We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body”* (1 Corinthians 12:13, NIV). In other words, baptism is not only a picture of being united with Christ, but also of being united with his body, the church. So we’re in this together, and we need to live accordingly. And this takes us back to day one of the church: *“Those who accepted [Peter’s] message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer”* (Acts 2:41-42, NIV).

Any Questions?

“What if I don’t feel that I’m ready for this?”

Given the fact that baptism in the early church was practiced as soon as possible after someone believed the good news about Jesus, there is really only one valid reason to put off being baptized: if you haven’t yet put your faith in Christ! But if you have believed, you don’t need to delay being baptized until you know your way around the Bible, or have a deeper understanding of its teachings. Nor do you have to hold off until you can prove that you are a committed follower of Jesus Christ. Nor do you have to wait until your life’s all cleaned up and under control (would we ever get baptized?!). Baptism is the first step in a life of following Jesus. If you have received him as your Savior and God, *go for it!*

“What if I’ve been a Christian for a long time?”

While baptism should be encouraged and pursued as soon as possible after someone becomes a believer, *it’s never too late to be obedient to the word of God.* Now, you might argue that over the years you’ve done many things that were public expressions of your personal faith in Christ, so maybe baptism isn’t all that important at this point. Nevertheless, the command of your Lord stands. Why try to reason your way out of obeying it? Is it possible that being baptized even at this later stage in your Christian life will actually strengthen and encourage your faith?

“What if my family won’t like my doing this?”

If you happen to come from a family that holds to a different understanding and practice of baptism—or perhaps a family that is not Christian at all—they may not be too excited about your being baptized as a believer by immersion (the practice here at Bethel...The Church @ Franklin Mills). First, remember that Jesus said *“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me”* (Matthew 10:37 NIV). In other words, your primary allegiance must be with Christ and not your family, and baptism is, in a sense, a pledge of allegiance. But be praying that God would help you lovingly share with your family what you’re doing and why. And let them know that being baptized won’t change your love for them in any way other than increasing it as you grow as a committed follower of Jesus.

“What if I was already baptized as an infant?”

This may be at the heart of the prior question. Must you be baptized as a believer—that is, must your baptism be a public expression of *your* faith rather than your parents’ faith? What you’ll need to wrestle through is this: *“Did my baptism as an infant adequately fulfill Jesus’ command and reflect the practice and meaning of baptism revealed in the Bible?”* If your answer is “no,” make it a point to share with your family that you are not rejecting what they did for you as an infant. On the contrary, celebrate the fact that your parents were concerned about your spiritual well being! But let them know that you’re doing this now as *your* decision, expressing *your* faith in Christ, as you seek to be faithful to *your* understanding of the Bible. And invite them to be there with you for your baptism as a believer.

“What if my baptism wasn’t by immersion?”

If you were baptized as a believer, but not by immersion, no problem. While immersion provides the clearest picture of the fact that you were buried and raised with Christ, and it appear to be the practice of the early church, this specific mode of baptism is not commanded in the Bible.

“What about my kids? Should they be baptized?”

Because we believe that infant baptism does not adequately fulfill Jesus’ command nor reflect the practice and meaning of baptism revealed in the Bible, we do not practice it here. We do however offer Parent/Child Dedications. More importantly, we believe that a child *should* be baptized when he or she is old enough to genuinely understand and respond to the good news about Jesus and then personally chooses to receive him (see John 1:12). That age will vary from child to child but you should pray for wisdom and discernment as you examine and encourage the faith of your children.

“What’s the next step?”

If you have further questions about being baptized or would like to know when the next baptism preparation class is, contact the church office at (215) 824-3000 or via email at office@Fmchurch.net.



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