
CHAPTER 3 : WATER BAPTISM

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”
(Matthew 3:11)

A. What Is Baptism?

A.1. Outward Symbol

Baptism is the outward and visible symbol of an inward and unseen, rebirth. At conversion we are “baptised into Christ” (Gal 3:27), signifying a spiritual baptism into the body of Christ. Water baptism graphically depicts what has happened to a person who has become a Christian. As they go down under the water they depict Christ’s death and their own death to self. As they come up out of the water they depict Christ’s resurrection and their own rising to a new life (Ro 6:1-14).

In the Old Testament the crossing of the Red Sea was a type of baptism through which the Israelites were cut off from Egypt and slavery (1Co 10:2, 1Pe 3:21).

A.2. Public Confession

Baptism is a public confession of a private commitment. In many cases it is only when Christians are baptised that persecution becomes heavy, because of the public nature of this confession of faith.

B. Why Must We Be Baptised?

B.1. Obedience

Jesus commanded it: “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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”. (Mt 28:19-20a)

B.2. Jesus' Example

Jesus set the example by being baptised by John (Mt 3:13-17). When John the Baptist tried to deter Jesus from being baptised he replied, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

- Baptism indicated He was consecrated to God and "officially" approve by Him (seen in the Holy Spirit's descent, and the Father's words of affirmation).
- At Jesus' baptism, John publicly declared Him to be the Messiah.
- Jesus identified with man's sin although He had no need to repent Himself.
- His baptism was an example to His followers.

B.3. The Early Church's Example

- The first converts in Jerusalem (Ac 2:37-41).
- The Samaritans (Ac 8:12-13).
- The Ethiopian eunuch (Ac 8:36-38).
- Paul (Ac 9:17, Ac 22:16).
- Cornelius and his household (Ac 10:33-48).
- Lydia and her household (Ac 16:13-15).
- The Philippian jailer (Ac 16:31-34).
- Crispus and other Corinthians (Ac 18:8).

It is important to understand that baptism, in itself, doesn't save anyone, but for those who repent and believe it is outward obedience necessary for proving inward repentance.

C. Who Must Be Baptised?

All believers must be baptised: It is not infant baptism or adult baptism, but believers' baptism. Only believers can be baptised. Baptism is the symbol of existing change, not the cause of change.

C.1. What About Infant Baptism?

Babies cannot repent. Jesus was not baptised as an infant. He was dedicated to the Lord in Lk 2:22. Children who are old enough to understand the gospel and able to exercise personal faith can be baptised. This can happen at a very young age because the gospel is simple enough for a child to understand. Backsliders who return to Christ should not be "re-baptised" as baptism is a once-for-all act, just as being born again is not a recurring event.

D. When Must We Be Baptised?

Upon conversion. In the early church people were baptised as soon as they believed. On the day of Pentecost, "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." Paul was baptised as soon as he believed. Conversion and baptism were almost simultaneous in the early church, often happening on the same day.

E. Where Must We Be Baptised?

Anywhere! We don't need baptismal fonts etc.. The nearest water after conversion will do. See, for example, Ac 8:38-40.

F. Who Can Baptise?

Any believer may baptise. It does not need to be an elder or leader. Philip, who baptised the Ethiopian eunuch, was an evangelist.

G. How Are We Baptised?

G.1. By Immersion

We baptise by immersion not by sprinkling (Ac 8:38-39). Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him. "When they came up out of the water." (Ac 8:39a)

G.2. Into The Name Of The Father, Son And Holy Spirit

We baptise into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:18, Gal 3:27). The emphasis was that this is Christian baptism, not Jewish, pagan or John's baptism.

H. Summary

In conclusion, baptism is a simple act of obedience to the Revealed word of God. It invites God's blessing and establishes us on a godly foundation. "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock." (Matt 7:24)