



RAISED
to Life

**A GUIDE TO
BIBLICAL BAPTISM**

PART 1

**WHAT DOES
THE BIBLE
SAY ABOUT
BAPTISM?**

WHERE DOES BAPTISM COME FROM?

Our study of baptism begins by examining some of the evidence of the practice of baptism in the Bible and in the world. The Old Testament speaks of ceremonial cleansing rituals in which a person would wash his or her body before offering a sacrifice (i.e., Leviticus 17:15). But the specific act of baptism first appears in the gospels with John the Baptist. In fact, in the ancient world, no other form of baptism predates John's ministry in the way that John performed it; the evidence suggests John did this first. Let's begin our look at what baptism is all about.

JOHN'S MINISTRY OF BAPTISM

Read *MATTHEW 3:1-17; MARK 1:1-11; LUKE 3:1-22; JOHN 1:19-34*.

- Where is John baptizing the people who come to him?

- What else is John doing while he's baptizing people in the wilderness?
(See Matthew 3:1) Why is this significant?

- What is John calling people to do prior to being baptized? (Matthew 3:2,8,11)

- What does the word 'repentance' mean?

- What happened immediately after Jesus was baptized?

If John's was a baptism of repentance but Jesus had no sin from which to repent, why is Jesus baptized by John?

This is a puzzling question and one with which John himself seems to struggle. John says to Jesus, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" (Matthew 3:14). Jesus' answer to John's question is straightforward: "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

Jesus' baptism is his public association with the lost people he came to save. Rather than identifying himself as a sinner in need of repentance and salvation, he identifies himself with the people who need the forgiveness and righteousness only he can provide.

HOW DO I GET BAPTIZED?

Throughout church history there have been various methods used to baptize people. The primary methods used have historically been called *sprinkling*, *pouring*, and *immersion*. Perhaps you come from a church tradition where the method of baptism is closely connected to membership in the local church. Maybe you come from a church tradition that cared little about it. Or it could be that you have no history with this at all and you're wondering what the big deal is. The method of baptism is an important question we must consider, so let's do that now.

How does the location where John baptized people help us understand the importance of the method of baptism?

Read *MATTHEW 3:16; MARK 1:9-10; JOHN 3:23; ACTS 8:36-39*

- What is the common element in each of the above passages?

- What method of baptism is practiced in these passages? What indications are there that it is more than just sprinkling or pouring?

Read *ROMANS 6:3-4; COLOSSIANS 2:12*

- What does baptism symbolize?

- Which method best captures that symbolism?

What is the biblical word for 'baptism'?

The New Testament was originally written in a form of ancient Greek. The human authors of the New Testament had several choices of words to describe baptism and depending on which word they chose, it would've given the act of baptism different meanings. In every instance, however, each New Testament author deliberately chose the same word when discussing baptism: *baptizo*. The word literally means "to plunge, to dip, to dunk." This word was also used in literature outside the Bible to describe the process of dying fabric by immersing it into the dye, and as a nautical term to describe a sailing vessel that completely sunk under the water.

I accepted Jesus at a church where I was baptized by sprinkling. Does that count? Or do I need to be baptized again?

If you were baptized as a professing believer in Jesus Christ and your heart at the time of your baptism was to be obedient to him, then you do not need to be baptized again. Our main concern is your heart before Christ rather than the method by which you were baptized.

So, what does this mean for me?

It is clear from Scripture that believers were baptized by immersion in water. Therefore, in seeking to follow the teaching of the Bible, we will baptize believers by immersion—by dipping completely under the water—at Mission City Bible Church.

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

Our church family is made up of people who come from a variety of church backgrounds. Perhaps you come from a tradition that baptizes infants. Maybe your previous church had certain requirements that accompanied it. Regardless of your background, the Bible speaks clearly regarding the kind of people who should be baptized.

Read ACTS 2:36-41, 8:12, 8:35-36, 16:25-33, 18:8.

- In each of these passages, what happened prior to people being baptized?

- How long did people wait to be baptized after this first requirement had been met?

So, what does this mean for me?

From these passages in the book of Acts, it appears that baptism is a step of obedience that followers of Jesus are expected to take shortly after they are saved. According to Scripture, the only requirements for this public profession of faith are a deliberate turning *from* sin and a turning *to* Christ in faith. These two requirements, repentance and faith in Christ, are all that is necessary for a person to be baptized.

But what if I don't think I'm ready?

This is a common objection to pursuing obedience to Christ through baptism. People often hesitate because they think they're not ready or that certain areas of their lives need to change first. However, the Bible says that if you have received Jesus Christ by faith and desire to follow him with all your life for the rest of your life, then you are ready to be baptized. The examples we studied above from the book of Acts prove that the people who were baptized didn't have time to "get their lives together." Baptism is not a call to be perfect; it's a call to be obedient. You are ready to be baptized as soon as you understand the responsibility you have to do it.

A Helpful Illustration: "The Hockey Jersey"

Imagine you are a talented hockey player who has just been signed by a professional team and given a contract to play. Shortly after you sign the contract, you attend a press conference with cameras and reporters where the General Manager announces you have agreed to play with the team. Then, the GM hands you a new uniform with your name and number on the back, and you put it on as cameras snap your picture.

Now consider this question: *At what point did you officially become a member of the team?* Was it when you put on the jersey for the reporters at the press conference? Or was it when you signed the contract with the GM? Of course, you became a member when you signed the legal document with the team. One

of your first acts as a member of the team (at the press conference) is to declare your allegiance to the team.

We can think of baptism in a similar way. Rather than saving you or making you part of the kingdom of God, baptism is a symbolic way of declaring that the Lord Jesus Christ has saved your life. He has secured your participation as part of his team, and publicly declaring your allegiance to him is one of your first acts in your new role.

I was baptized as an infant in my previous church. Does this mean I need to be re-baptized?

Yes, you should be baptized by immersion as a believer in Jesus Christ.

Colossians 2:11-12 says:

*In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 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.*

Notice, the key qualifier for baptism is *through faith*. In the New Testament, the question that matters is: *Does a person have saving faith in Jesus Christ?* Has Jesus Christ performed the spiritual act of renewal whereby the body of the flesh is put off and we are freed from the control of sin in our lives? Infants are unable to make this sort of personal decision and are equally incapable of articulating

this eternal change of the heart. As we learned earlier, faith and repentance—two sides of the same coin—are necessary prior to baptism.

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WHY SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

Is baptism necessary? Perhaps you've put off being baptized for some time and even tried to justify why you don't need to be baptized. Maybe your personal opinions, lack of understanding, pride, or indifference have distracted you from taking this step of obedience. God's word must be the final authority in our lives as we consider this question of baptism. So, what, if anything, does the Bible say about the necessity of being baptized?

Does the Bible say I need to be baptized as a follower of Jesus?

Yes, it does! Time and again, the Bible calls believers in Jesus Christ to be baptized. Read the following passages and write one sentence to describe the reasons the Bible gives for being baptized.

Read *MATTHEW 3:13-17*.

Read *ACTS 2:38, 10:48, 22:16*.

Read *MATTHEW 10:32-33*.

Read *MATTHEW 28:18-20*.

Getting baptized publicly associates me with Christ’s work.

Read *ROMANS 6:1-4*.

- In baptism, what three parts of Christ’s work does the believer associate with when being immersed into the water? (See verses 3-4)

- How does immersion into the water and coming up from the water illustrate those three parts of Christ’s work?

I’m terrified of being baptized and I don’t enjoy speaking in public. Is there some other way I could be baptized?

Many people feel this way. If you’re anxious, frightened, or even panicked about standing in a tub of water and speaking to a room full of people, you are in the company of almost everyone who has gone before you.

However, your baptism is not a ‘normal’ public speaking opportunity. You are intentionally testifying to the reality of God’s saving work in your life and declaring your allegiance to Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Holy Spirit promises to give you the words to say and the courage to say them as you “bear witness

about him” (see John 15:26-27). You can have full confidence that the Spirit of God will strengthen you to speak with boldness about the love of God and the mercy of Jesus Christ upon you. Furthermore, because baptism is your effort to declare these realities in your life, and to do so in the presence of the church community, it is necessary to do it this way.

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WHAT DOES BAPTISM ACCOMPLISH?

Does something special happen when a person is baptized? We can answer this question in two ways: what *doesn't* happen at baptism, and what *does* happen at baptism.

What doesn't happen at baptism . . .

Read *EPHESIANS 2:1-10*.

- According to verses 1 and 5, what was our spiritual state before God saved us?

- According to the second part of verse 5, what is our new spiritual state? Who accomplishes this work in our lives?

- According to verses 3-4, what in the character of God compels him to act on our behalf?

- What key word is repeated three times in verses 5-8? What does that word mean?

- According to verses 8-9, what role do we play in our salvation?

- Verse 9 contains the phrase, “not a result of works.” Is baptism considered a work? Why or why not?

- From your study of this passage, would you say that baptism provides salvation in any way?

What does happen at baptism . . .

Read 1 JOHN 5:1-5.

- In verses 1 and 5, John states the foundation of our salvation. What does it mean for us to “believe that Jesus is the Christ”?

Read ROMANS 6:1-11.

- How many times do these verses refer to the word “die” in any form?

- Summarize verse 11 in your own words.

- This passage emphasizes our need to die to sin. According to verses 3-4, how does baptism relate to that?

But what about people who say baptism washes away sin? Doesn't the Bible say something like that?

First Peter 3:21 says,

Baptism, which corresponds to this, 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.

In the verse before this, Peter refers to the global flood in Genesis 6-9, during which Noah built an ark and “eight persons were brought safely through water” (1 Peter 3:20). Referring both to that illustration and to verse 21, the ESV Study Bible notes,

In both instances, believers are saved through the waters of judgment, since baptism portrays salvation through judgment. The mere mechanical act of baptism does not save, for Peter explicitly says, “not as a removal of dirt from the body,” meaning that the passing of water over the body does not cleanse anyone. Baptism saves you because it represents inward faith, as evidenced by one’s appeal to God for the forgiveness of one’s sins (for a good conscience). Furthermore, baptism “saves” only insofar as it is grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹

¹ ESV Study Bible, study note on 1 Peter 3:21.

Baptism, therefore, does not wash away sin. Instead, baptism is the symbolic act of the church whereby those who have been regenerated by the power of God in Christ testify to the cleansing work that has already happened in their life.

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PART 2

TELLING YOUR STORY

How do I tell what God has done in my life?

Your personal testimony is a natural introduction into sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ and the work of God in your life. Using the following guidelines will help develop your own story of what God has done in your life. Remember:

1. You are fearfully and wonderfully made by your Creator God! He has given you a story to tell of his work in you, and no one else has a story like yours. Work to tell your story in a way that exalts Jesus in the telling.
2. God's power shows up best in "weak" people. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Acknowledge your weakness before God, and ask for his power to work through you for his glory.

3. Ask God to give you insight into how he has worked in your life.

4. Try to avoid Christian terminology and cliches. If you must use some of them, be sure to explain them. Unbelievers who are listening to you tell of God's work in your life may not be familiar with our "insider language."

Writing Your Testimony

In Acts 22, 23, and 26, we can identify a pattern in how Paul effectively shared his testimony. It's the "Before – How – After" guide to telling others about God's work in your life.

Before I received Christ, I lived and thought this way . . .

The first section is "Before." Spend a brief time in this section outlining what your life was like before God revealed to you your need for Christ. This section is not meant to be a biography dating back to your birth but rather a "setting the stage" for why God needed to save you. We often think the most exciting testimonies are from people who were dramatically delivered from all sorts of sin. But the fact that God saves anyone—regardless of the details of our sin—is a miracle and a story worth telling . . . so tell the story for his glory!

How I received Christ . . .

What were the circumstances God used to bring you to saving faith in Christ? Who were the people God used? What were the Bible verses God used? Be as specific and succinct as possible. For some people, they cannot remember the exact time or circumstances in which they received Christ. That's ok. Usually, though, we can remember some details. Share as much as is appropriate and

remember that the *when* is not as important as having the lasting assurance that you have been eternally saved by the grace of God and the mercy of Christ upon you.

Now, as I trust in Christ, I live and think this way . . .

Again, be specific and be practical. How are you still growing as you learn to follow Jesus as Lord of your life? Don't give the illusion that you now have life all figured out because you have Jesus. Instead, talk about how Jesus helps you in your day-to-day life, your challenges, your suffering, etc. Perhaps you've seen some changes in some of these areas: *relationships; family life; habits broken; adjusting to change; dealing with anxiety, worry, or fear; inner peace; changes in life goals; priorities; relinquishing control to God; love and forgiveness; assurance of eternal life.*

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Key Questions to Include in Your Testimony:

1. Why did Jesus need to die for me?
 - a. Because God is holy, my sin separates me from him, and Jesus, the Son of God, is the only One who can reconcile me to God.
 - b. Because I was dead in my sin (Ephesians 2:1-10)
 - c. Because I was “separated from Christ . . . alienated . . . strangers . . . having no hope . . . without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12)
 - d. Because every part of me was corrupted by sin (Romans 3:10-20)
 - e. Because I had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)
 - f. Because I was an enemy of God who needed to be reconciled to him through Christ (Romans 5:10-11)
 - g. Because only Jesus could take the full wrath of God against my sins (Romans 3:25; 5:9; 1 John 2:2)
 - h. Because Jesus is the only sacrifice God will accept for my sins (Hebrews 9:12-14, 26-28; cf., John 14:6)

It is not necessary for you to include all the above reasons in your testimony. But it is necessary to address this question of why Jesus needed to die for you. Again, baptism symbolizes the saving work of God in your life through faith in Christ. The hero of your story is Jesus, not you. Therefore, the greatest focus of your testimony should be Jesus, not you.

2. Why am I being baptized?

At this point, it may be helpful to review your earlier study in *Part 1: What Does the Bible Say About Baptism?* Include in your testimony some of the reasons the Bible says we should be baptized.

Your Testimony in Review

Now, as you write your testimony, try to capture what we've just covered in 1½-3 minutes:

1. Before Christ . . .
2. How I came to Christ . . .
3. Since Christ . . .
4. Why did Jesus need to die for me?
5. Why am I being baptized?

Once you have written your testimony and it comes time for your baptism, it will be best for you to simply read your testimony but to read it with the appropriate personality and passion God has given you. Don't go off-script and don't "wing it." By this point, you will have spent time prayerfully writing your testimony and your clarity regarding God's work in your life is of utmost importance in encouraging believers and in testifying to unbelievers. Take the time up-front to write your testimony clearly and to speak it plainly when you're in the tank.

A Special Encouragement for Parents with Young Children Who Want to be Baptized

As a parent, perhaps you've wrestled with the question of whether your young children are ready to be baptized. Most often, this is not an easy question to answer because there is great significance to what is taking place. How do you know if the time is right to say, 'yes' or 'not yet'?

As a church, we take this question seriously. It's important to understand that it takes two parties to answer the question of readiness: the one being baptized (i.e., the follower of Jesus) and the one baptizing (i.e., the church). This is always the case regardless of age. Furthermore, in relation to children specifically, there must be a right understanding of baptism as it has been explained in this booklet. So, as parents and as a church, what are some things we can look for in your kids who are asking about baptism?²

Regeneration

This is undoubtedly the most important and obvious sign. Is there clear and lasting evidence of heart change in the child's life? Can the parent(s) testify (based on an honest and extensive interaction with their child) that regeneration has taken place? Has the parent(s) spoken at considerable

² This section has been adapted from *The Disciple-Making Parent* (Chap Bettis), and from the Watermark Church website (watermark.org).

length with their child about salvation and spiritual things in an age-appropriate way?

Readiness

Due to the personal nature of baptism as a testimony of God's work in a believer's life, it is expected that the desire to be baptized is initiated by the child and not by the parent. It could be that the parent has taught their child about baptism and encouraged them toward it, but the decision to pursue it should rest with the child. Is this a growing spiritual conviction of the child? Is your child ready to stand before the church and publicly share the story of God's work in their life?

Reasoning

The child must have a clear understanding of the gospel and the meaning of baptism and be able to articulate that in some form. Can the child share the gospel in their own words (i.e., in a way that goes deeper than "Jesus died for me so I could be forgiven and go to heaven," etc.)? Is there depth of understanding concerning what the gospel is and what the gospel does? Does the child understand the symbolic nature of baptism? Does the child understand what baptism does not do (i.e., provide salvation, special favour from God; it's not just a "cool" thing to do, etc.)?

Some Questions to Prompt Discussion with Your Kids about Baptism:

- Why do you want to be baptized?
- How did God save you?
- What do we need to be saved from?
- How do you know for sure that you're going to heaven? How might you explain that to one of your friends?
- How do you feel about telling people at church what God has done in your life?

To get the best idea of where your children are in this journey, try not to ask “yes” or “no” questions and avoid “leading questions” (i.e., Do you believe that only Jesus could die as a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins before God and that baptism is your symbolic and public display of saving faith in Christ as your Lord and Saviour?)

While we depend significantly on your assessment of your child's relationship with the Lord, our pastors and/or elders will take these things into consideration and will prayerfully reflect on your child's readiness to be baptized.

When the Church Says, “Not Yet”

After speaking to your child about baptism, it may be clear they are not quite ready to take this step. There is no shame in that. This is an important part of their relationship with the Lord that should be given serious consideration. Here are a few things to keep in mind if the church says, “not yet”:

- Keep praying for your child to understand more deeply what God has done for them in Christ and how they can articulate it clearly. Ask the Lord for wisdom to know how to shepherd your children toward these things.
- Keep the discussion going. Look for evidence that this is a growing spiritual conviction in your child’s heart to follow the Lord in baptism.
- Understand that “not yet” is not a judgement on your child or on you as their parent. Again, due to the significance of this step and all it represents, we want to help your child be ready. Remember: the answer is not “no,” it’s “not yet.”
- Keep in mind that perfection is not required to be baptized. But the testimony of God’s work in their life must be clear—that’s why this matters so much. Clarity is what we seek, not perfection.
- If the answer is “not yet,” it is because our desire is to shepherd your children well with you and to give them time to develop a fuller understanding of salvation and baptism and, Lord willing, lead them toward a more meaningful baptism experience later on.

Your Baptism Prep-List:

Before You Get Baptized:

- Work through this booklet in its entirety
- Write your testimony and send it to your *Baptism Leader*
- Meet with your *Baptism Leader* to discuss your testimony and confirm further details regarding your baptism

What to Bring with You to Your Baptism:

- Your written testimony
- Your bathing suit:
 - **MEN:** Please wear a shorts-style bathing suit
 - **LADIES:** Please wear a one-piece suit with shorts over top
 - A special baptism t-shirt will be provided for you (to keep) prior to your baptism service
- A change of clothes (if needed)
- A towel

What to Do Before:

- **Pray:** As we get closer to your baptism, ask God for clarity as you speak and peace for any anxiety you feel.
- **Practice:** Read over your testimony several times. Pay careful attention to the words you have written and speak clearly.

Thank You for Investing in this Study

As your pastors and elders at Mission City, we count it a great blessing to walk with you through this milestone in your discipleship journey with Jesus. It is a time worthy both of somber reflection and great celebration. May the Lord Jesus Christ be exalted through you as get baptized!

You are loved.



MISSION CITY
BIBLE CHURCH

