

B A P T I S M

TAKING THE PLUNGE

Understanding why Baptism in Water is so Important



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Why Should I be Baptized ?

As followers of Jesus the Bible makes it clear that we are responsible to build our new lives on a firm foundation.

Just as the structural integrity of a house is dependent on the integrity of its foundations, so our lives will never achieve the purpose God has for them, unless we lay a strong foundation.

The writer to the Hebrews in chapter 6 laments the fact that they as leaders have to re-lay the foundations in the lives of some of the believers. They go on to say that by this time they should be mature and helping to instruct others, but instead they have to re-teach them the basics. The writer mixes metaphors to doubly make the point and says that by this time they should be eating *“meat and solid food,”* but instead like babies are still only on *“milk.”*

One of those basic foundations is water baptism.
(Hebrews 6:1-2)

So why be baptised in water? Does it really make any difference to my life and faith? What if I was sprinkled in a traditional church as a baby, or even baptised as a child? What if I feel shy and don't want to do this publicly, instead couldn't I have just a couple of friends in a private home? Who should baptise me and when should it happen?

These are all great questions. So, let's take the time to look into the whole teaching on Baptism, and cover some of the main reasons we should be baptised by full immersion.

Firstly, we need to discuss the language in which the Bible was written. Even though we have many English Bibles, the original New Testament was mostly written in the Greek language that was used across much of the Roman Empire two thousand years ago.

Our English Bibles are all translated from the Greek and here's where we get some discrepancies and differences in teaching on vital topics, such as baptism.

The Greek language was very colourful and rich. It had many words that had very specific meanings, whereas in English we might only have one or two words to express a wide range of thoughts and emotions.

For example, we have the English word "love." This word can have different meanings for us depending on the context of the sentence it is in. However, the Greek had six main words for love and several others that carried different shades of meaning. They had one word for sexual love, another for the love of friends, another for deep affectionate love and so on.

Now to Baptism.

Baptizo is the Greek word which is translated into English as baptism. It is used 76 times in the New Testament.

In the Greek language of the day, it had a very clear definition of fully immersing something in a liquid, to bring about internal change. It was used in both religious and secular settings.

For example, when material was being dyed it was “baptizo” into the dyeing medium. It was fully immersed until the dye had penetrated into every fibre. That material was never the same again.

Another example was the tempering of iron. An item was heated to red hot and then plunged (baptizo) into salty water to temper or harden the metal. The very molecular nature of the iron was changed and strengthened.

Another example was where vegetables were sprinkled or washed with water (bapto), but then were immersed (baptizo) in a pickling solution and were kept in that solution until the vinegar had done its work of preserving the vegetable.

Jesus in Matthew 28 commands His disciples to go out into the world and teach people about Him. The importance of baptism is clear.

“Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptising (baptizo) them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you....”

Matthew 28:18-19 CEV

so firstly we see that **Jesus Himself** commands us to **be baptised**. He uses a word that was always used when something was fully immersed in liquid, and as a result was changed on the inside.

The second reason we are baptised is that it is a public declaration of our faith in Jesus. A declaration of our decision to trust Him with our lives, and our decision to leave behind old habit patterns of sin and selfishness.

Jesus died a public death to restore our relationship to Himself. When compared with that, our decision to be publicly baptised in His name is a small request.

“Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and everyone in his household believed in the Lord. Many others in Corinth also heard Paul, became believers, and were baptised.”

Acts 18:8 NLT

In many different cultures the issue is not so much about what people believe.

For example, in the Hindu faith people are able to add Jesus to the many gods that are worshipped, prayed to, and sacrificed to.

However, when a person decides to forsake all other teaching and philosophy and doctrine to become an exclusive Jesus follower, and they make a public declaration of that through water baptism, then for those people there is often a high price to be paid.

Much of our faith as Jesus followers is internal. We think, we read, we pray, we listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. However, Jesus and the New Testament make it clear that there are a number of external activities that are integral to our faith and should never be left behind. These include meeting together on a regular basis to worship, pray and listen to teaching from the Bible, anointing the sick with oil, sharing communion, telling others of our faith, and of course a public declaration of faith through water baptism.

The **third** reason we are baptised is that it cuts off our past, often a past that is always trying to drag us back to a selfish and destructive lifestyle.

“Remember our history, friends, and be warned. All our ancestors were . . . taken miraculously through the Red Sea. They went through the waters, in a baptism like ours, as Moses led them from enslaving death to salvation life.”

1 Corinthians 10:1-2 MSG

Here Paul the apostle, the greatest church leader of the New Testament, brings an Old Testament picture of what New Testament baptism is like.

The story he refers to is when God’s chosen people had been kept in slavery by the Egyptians for hundreds of years. They were oppressed and treated harshly and were the slaves of their Egyptian masters.

In response to their prayers God sends His servant Moses to set His people free and to lead them to their own promised land. After a series of miraculous events where God’s judgment comes against the Egyptians, Pharaoh reluctantly decides to let God’s people go, but then has a change of heart and sends his army after them.

The final showdown between the Egyptians and Moses happens at the Red Sea, which is blocking their escape. With water in front and high mountains either side, and an angry army coming up behind them, God’s people seem to be doomed to return to their slavery.

That is until Moses stretches out his hands and the waters of the Red Sea miraculously part allowing God's people to walk across on dry land.

When the Egyptians see this they decide to follow, but Moses lowers his hands and the waters rush back together destroying the Egyptian army.

I believe this is a picture of the power of baptism. As you have become a follower of Jesus you have left behind slavery to sin. You have left behind the oppression of an enemy who hates you and would like to keep you enslaved all your life. You have embarked on a journey to inherit the promises of God for your life. To find peace and joy and fulfilment like never before.

However, our enemy the devil is not content to just let us get on with this new life. He wants to use old habits, old thinking patterns, old sins to pull us back into the lifestyle we had before we met Jesus.

Just as the waters of the Red Sea cut off the pursuing Egyptians from God's people, so the waters of our baptism cut us off from our past. As you prepare for baptism you can be believing God for freedom from a sinful habit, a bad attitude, for destructive thinking patterns, for issues of depression, anger, and unforgiveness.

I've seen people go into baptism struggling with an addiction to nicotine and come up out of the waters with the desire for cigarettes completely taken away.

I've seen people make a list of things that they want to see an end of in their life, and that list empowered through baptism.

I believe baptism is not just a ritual that we go through, it is a powerful life changing experience.

Fourthly, baptism always follows repentance and never precedes it. In Acts 2 the people hearing Peter preach of Jesus for the first time are so moved that they cry out “What must we do to be saved?” Peter responds, “repent and be baptised for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2).

There is not one New Testament example of someone being baptised before they believe. In every case people came to a revelation of who Jesus is and what He did on the cross. Then as a demonstration of their faith they are baptised.

One of the questions we can ask is at what age can a person understand what Jesus has done and make an informed decision to follow Him?

My personal feeling is that infants and small children are covered by the faith of their parents and that there comes a time, usually in their primary school years, where they will make a personal decision. Often young children are happy with that and then in their teenage years as they begin to pursue their faith more, they come to a decision to be baptised.

It is important that children do not feel coerced or pressed into making a decision to follow Christ or be baptised. They should be able to look back at their decision and feel it was one they made for themselves.

Sometimes a person will come and say they were baptised by immersion as a child, but it didn't really mean anything to them. The request is to be re-baptised. Usually with these requests it is an issue of evaluating each one on its individual merits, however I often encourage these people to re-baptise themselves in the truth of water baptism. We can look through the scriptures together, apply the truth, and then pray together.

The **fifth** aspect of truth about water baptism is that it is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

“That’s what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so that we can see where we’re going in our new life.”

Romans 6:4 MSG

There are 3 parts to the physical act of water baptism. Firstly, we stand in water deep enough to cover us when we are lowered back. We stand with a pastor from our church on one side and a trusted church friend or relative on the other. As we stand we identify with Jesus and the public life He lived.

Secondly, we are gently lowered back by the person on either side of us until we are completely covered by the water. We are held there for the briefest of moments. In this we identify with the death and burial of Jesus, who was laid in a tomb and left for dead.

Thirdly, we are lifted up from the water and we again stand on our feet. This is a picture of the resurrection power of God who reached down and raised Jesus from the dead on the third day of His burial. It is a picture of the resurrection power of God, who gives us new life in Christ.

Sixthly, Jesus was our example. At 30 years of age Jesus began His public ministry by going to John the Baptist to be baptised in water.

“So Jesus was baptised. And as soon as he came out of the water, the sky opened, and He saw the Spirit of God coming down on him.”

Matthew 3:16 CEV

If it was good enough for Jesus to be baptised, it is definitely good enough for each one of us to follow Him in obedience. He was giving us an example to follow.



Some final thoughts.

A. Baptism is never a solitary, individual experience. We are being baptised into a local body of believers. A local expression of Jesus Himself. A church body that will help us to grow and mature. A place where pastors and leaders care for us.

B. When Jesus was baptised in water there followed for him an intense time of spiritual attack and temptation. Sometimes after our water baptism there can also come a time of intense temptation and attack as the devil makes a last effort to turn us from our faith.

Doubts can come, old sinful habits can suddenly become appealing, old friends can suddenly re-appear with invitations to join them.

When Jesus faced these temptations He simply answered with the words from the Bible. He answered with truth because He knew what the Bible said.

Once you are baptised in water it is a great time to start some structured Bible study. Most local churches have introductory Bible courses that will give you a great overview of Biblical truth and will help you to understand your life from God's point of view.



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