

What is Baptism?

Baptism is a basic command of the Lord Jesus for all His followers. He said to baptize them "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," (Matthew 28:19 NASB). Believers are to be baptized when they are saved. The first Christians were taught this and faithfully obeyed (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 36-39; 9:18; 10:47; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 22:16). It was their first step of obedience. New believers, then and now, often expose themselves to persecution by this public declaration of their loyalty to Christ. They have become Christians and are willing to take this step of public identification in response to the command of the one they confess as Lord and Savior.

Who should be baptized?

There is no record of anyone in the New Testament receiving believer's baptism apart from at least professing faith in Christ. Baptism prior to salvation is a practice in many churches, and has been for centuries, but one cannot find such a practice in Scripture. In the Bible the order is first faith, then baptism. We see this in Christ's command: "Make disciples...baptizing them" (Matthew 28:19 NASB). At Pentecost, Peter told those seeking salvation to "repent, and be baptized, everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:27-28). The Ethiopian eunuch confessed his belief in Christ before Philip baptized him (Acts 8:36-37). The Corinthians believed and then were baptized (Acts 18:8). We are saved by believing the gospel (Ephesians 1:13, I Corinthians 15:1-4) of which baptism is not a part (I Corinthians 1:17). Repentance and faith in Christ must come first (Acts 20:21).

How old should someone be to be baptized?

Although there is no specific age designated in Scripture, the elders at WHCC recommend that a child who professes to know Christ be 12 or older. Children who are to be baptized must be able to clearly articulate the gospel on their own - without the coaching of parents. Further, they must be able to explain what their life was like before Christ and how their life has changed as a result of knowing Christ.

Why is baptism so important?

We may ask ourselves at this point, "If baptism does not wash away our sins, or join us to the church, or secure our salvation, then why is it so important?" Consider the following:

1. Baptism is a matter of obedience. Personal obedience to the Great Commission dictates that we obey the Lord in baptism and that baptism be taught and practiced among our disciples. We therefore obey the injunction to teach "all things that I [Christ] have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).
2. Baptism is a witness to the world. Baptism is one of the most effective witnesses of our faith to family and friends.
3. Baptism is a witness to other believers. Since baptism is an outward and public demonstration of the believer's identification with the person and work of Christ, it is also identification with other believers. In some countries where believers are persecuted

severely for their faith, believers are wary of a Christian who is not willing to make a public stand through baptism.

What does Believer's Baptism Signify?

The significant likeness or figure in baptism is death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5). While water is sometimes associated with cleansing, the believer can only be cleansed by the blood of Christ. Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification. In salvation, God reckons all this to our account and places us "in Christ". We have died with Him and have been resurrected with Him in the eyes of God (Colossians 3:1-3; Romans 6:6-11). Baptism is simply a picture or illustration of what has already taken place as far as the believer is concerned. The believer symbolically passes through death, burial, and resurrection in the waters of baptism. In baptism, the believer is identified with Christ, whose death, burial, and resurrection were on his behalf. He confesses that he is one with Christ. The believer is publicly saying, "Christ did all that was necessary for my salvation on the cross. I have believed it in my heart. I am expressing it outwardly in this way as He commanded. I identify with Him." This identification should carry with it the commitment to live what might be called a "baptized life," one in which we walk with Him.

Other terms are used by certain denominations to refer to baptism. These include "sacrament, rite, ceremony, initiation, ordinance, seal of grace, purifying symbol, and pledge."

How is one baptized?

1. Mode The first Christians were baptized by immersion (submersion). The practice of pouring or sprinkling seems to have arisen in the second century and to have become widespread about the thirteenth century. However, the practice of baptism in Scripture points to immersion, as seen in the examples of John (Matthew 3:16; John 3:23) and Philip (Acts 8:38-39). The symbolism of baptism also demands immersion. Burial with Christ (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:4) is better reflected by going totally beneath the waters than by sprinkling a few drops on the head. "A drop is as good as an ocean," it is sometimes said, but a drop hardly signifies a burial. The meaning of the word 'baptism' implies immersion, or dipping, since the root meaning of the Greek word is "to dip." Had the Spirit of God intended to indicate sprinkling, another word (*hantizo*) could have been used. Thus, practice, symbolism, and meaning point to baptism by immersion.
2. Formula The formula or pronouncement at baptism is "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19 NASB). The words "in the name of Jesus" or "in the name of the Lord" (or variant forms) are used in Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48. They seem to be an abbreviated reference, especially to distinguish it from John's baptism (Acts 19:3-5).
3. Baptizer The baptizer should come from the ranks of the believers, representing the Lord and then the church.

Does baptism save?

A large number of churches teach what is called "baptismal regeneration," meaning that baptism in water actually regenerates (causes the new birth) and brings forgiveness of sins. What Scriptures do they use?

1. John 3:5 The expression "born of water and of the Spirit" might suggest that regeneration comes from water baptism. First, note that the word "baptism" is not mentioned. Water does not always mean baptism. In context, Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus who is a Pharisee, a teacher of the Jews and an expert in the Law. When Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be "born of water and the Spirit" and Nicodemus doesn't understand, Jesus replies, "are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?". Since Nicodemus was a teacher of the Law, Jesus expected him to be aware of the key promise made in Ezekiel 36:25-26 which parallels Jesus' statement. "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and for all your idols. Moreover, I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." The water was symbolic of cleansing or the washing away of sin and the Spirit was given to aid the believer to walk in newness of life. See Titus 3:5 for a NT parallel.

2. Titus 3:5 "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit". This verse refers to "washing of regeneration," but again the word "baptism" is not used. The verse parallels Jesus statement in John 3:5 and Ezekiel 36:25 meaning that salvation is equated to a removal of sins and the indwelling by the Holy Spirit. Further, the word "washing" is not from the Greek word baptisimos, but rather from loutron, used of bathing.

3. 1 Peter 3:21 The statement, "...that baptism now saves you," seems to support salvation by baptism. The phrase which follows weakens this idea, however, by adding that it does not cleanse but rather is a response of conscience. The context of the verse speaks of the waters of judgment in Noah's day destroying the earth and lifting the ark of safety (v. 20). In the illustration, Christ is the ark of safety. He went through the waters of death in our place and we pass through the same with Him. He is a picture of safety and salvation from judgment. We are safe in Christ, not in water baptism.

4. Mark 16:16 The expression "he that believes and is baptized shall be saved" seems to make baptism essential for salvation. Yet this would ignore the next phrase, "he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." It does not say, "he that is not baptized shall be condemned." Baptism is the next logical step following belief. It is the outward symbol of what has miraculously happened inwardly.

5. Acts 22:16 This verse says, "be baptized and wash away your sins," seeming to teach that cleansing of sins is by baptism. If this were true, it would deny that forgiveness is only by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7; Hebrews 9:22). The verse is part of Paul's account of his conversion. Ananias exhorted Paul to be baptized, but also told

him that he was to call on the name of the Lord (cf. Romans 10:13). Baptismal waters do not wash away sins (Revelation 1:5).

Further, the Bible teaches that water is not our savior, as can be seen in the following examples:

1. The thief on the cross was saved without water (Luke 23:43).
2. Paul did not always baptize those he led to Christ, an inexcusable lapse if this brought new birth (I Corinthians 1:14-17).
3. Jesus Himself did not baptize, though He was the Savior (John 4:2).
4. The Gentiles received salvation and the Holy Spirit before they were baptized in water (Acts 10:44-48).

What about infant baptism?

Although there is no explicit reference to infant baptism in the New Testament, it has been the practice of many churches for centuries. Historically, these churches have baptized infants either: 1) to secure the salvation of the infant from hell, 2) to begin the process of salvation which was to be "sealed" / be "confirmed" at a later date, or 3) to impress upon the parents or godparents of the child, through the baptismal/dedication service, the importance of raising the child for Christ. The idea that the lack of baptism would condemn an infant to hell is, of course, a horrifying thought about God. Moreover, the concept of infant baptism as a part of the salvation process is equally indefensible from Scripture. The baptismal / dedication service, however beautiful, is foreign to New Testament practice. Nevertheless, many arguments for infant baptism have been advanced from the Bible.

1. Proposed Proof Texts Mark 10:13-16 and Matthew 19:13-15 are often associated with infant baptism. When mothers brought their children to Jesus, he said, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them: for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." However, Jesus did not baptize infants, He blessed them. Had Jesus and the disciples practiced the baptism of infants for salvation, they would hardly have been trying to drive them away. We see Jesus here, but no evidence of water baptism. Matthew 18:2-6 is another favorite text. Jesus said, "Unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." His object lesson was a little child, whom He set in their midst. But the example was the necessity of lowliness, not baptism. Another text is I Corinthians 7:14. Children of believers (either or both parents) are here called "sanctified". The word means "set apart" and refers to the position of privilege a child of believers enjoys. However, this position does not equal salvation, is not secured by baptism, and does not require baptism. No one is said in Scripture to be "born into the church" because of Christian parents. Salvation springs from the new birth, not natural birth (John 1:13-, 3:5-7).

2. Argument from Circumcision Jewish children were circumcised on the eighth day after birth (Luke 1:59), initiating them into the Jewish faith. It is sometimes argued from this that Christians have a right to baptize their infants. Colossians 2:11-12 is also cited,

which refers to the circumcision of Christ. Yet this is a reference to His death, not believer's baptism. There is no authorization to baptize an infant in this passage.

3. Argument from Household Baptism The salvation of Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:30-33), Crispus (Acts 18:8), Stephanus (I Corinthians 1:16, 16:15) are occasions where households are said to have believed and been baptized. It is reasoned by some that "there must have been infants" in these homes, or those too young to believe. Moreover, it is supposed that such were included in the baptisms, although there is no statement to this effect in the passages. It is just as reasonable to suppose that only those of sufficient age to understand and believe the message of Christ were baptized (as in Acts 16:34).

Conclusion

We are commanded by Christ to be baptized. From the first days of Christianity, believers in Him have submitted to baptism. Just as we are commanded to lead a moral life of good works, to remember Him in the Breaking of Bread, to witness to our faith in Christ, and to meet with fellow believers, so we are to be baptized. It is not necessary for salvation, but it is necessary for obedience. We should further demonstrate the reality of our confession of faith by leading a "baptized life."

Giving Your Personal Testimony

What is a Testimony?

The courtroom is the usual scene for terms like "witness," "testify," and "testimony." It is in the courtroom of this world that these same terms are used of believers in Christ as they witness, testify, or give their confession of faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Paul charged his young disciples Timothy, "Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate" (I Timothy 6:12-13 NASB). Confession of Christ before others is a great privilege which can be used of God to bring others to Himself. It can also be the occasion of persecution and even death. The words "witness" and "testify" are translations of a Biblical word which relates to our English word "martyr." It is used in that sense in Scripture (Revelation 2:13) as believers testified to their faith even to the point of death.

The Lord was clear in His call to His followers to be forthright about their relationship to Him, "Everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man shall confess him also before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8; cf. Matthew 10:32). The opening of our mouths before others is even linked to salvation itself. "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Romans 10:9 NASB). Our allegiance to the Lord should be no secret.

Content

A good testimony involves two elements. First, there must be a firsthand authentication of fact. Ananias told Saul of Tarsas upon his conversion, "You will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard" (Acts 22:15). A good witness deals with what he has seen or knows, not guessed or felt. A good witness for Jesus Christ tells how he met Christ, how his life has been changed, and on what authority he makes claim to being a child of God. Second, a witness makes a solemn declaration under oath in response to a question about the truth of matter. The believer is told, "always [be] ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you" (I Peter 3:15). The Apostle John, in his gospel, gave testimony of the things he knew to be true (John 21:24). Paul wrote for the benefit of doubters that he was truly testifying that Christ was risen from the dead. If it had not been so, he would have been found a false witness in the sight of God (I Corinthians 15:15).

The testimony of a child of God often begins with the needs which brought him to Christ, especially the problem of sin. "Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices" (Acts 19:18). These were evil in the sight of God. The Lord Jesus has brought relief to millions gripped with a sense of guilt, emptiness, lack of meaning, lack of peace, fear of death and loneliness. Joy and purpose have replaced them. Yet supremely Jesus came to save sinners (I Timothy 1:15), delivering them from the wrath to come (I Thessalonians 1:10). Believers therefore testify to the time in their experience when they heard the gospel of their salvation and believed it (Ephesians 1:13). They received "redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

Any good testimony is Christ-centered (Acts 5:31-32). It is rightly called "The testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:2, 9). Particular emphasis was given by first century believers to the fact that Christ has risen from the dead (Acts 2:32; 4:33; 13:30-31). Both prophetic fulfillment and the testimony of witnesses was cited by them. It is important to tell how Christ has changed our lives (I Thessalonians 1:9; I Corinthians 6:9-11). Paul once was a blasphemer and persecutor of Christians (I Timothy 1:13). He became their foremost champion. A good testimony often brings opportunity to solemnly challenge hearers as to the need of "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Remember that spiritual opposition is overcome by believers through "the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony" (Revelation 12:11).

General Outline

1. AS SEEN IN SCRIPTURE. The witness of Paul in Acts 26:1-29 is a Scriptural example of a testimony which deals with the Before, How and, After aspects of receiving Christ. Note this order in his appeal to King Agrippa:
 - a. Before Christ Was Received (26:4-11). Paul tells of his religious background and resistance to Christ.

- b. How Christ Was Received (26:12-18). He tells of his meeting with Christ on the Damascus road and how the Savior reproached him for his sins, yet called him to the service of the One he had persecuted.
- c. After Christ Was Received (26:19-23). He speaks of the changes in his life and how he became a preacher even among countrymen who sought to kill him.

2. AS REFLECTED IN YOUR TESTIMONY. When giving your own testimony, keep certain things in mind:

- a. Before Christ Was Received. What elements in your former life caused you to see the need for a change? Which of them are common to the needs of others?
- b. How Christ Was Received. Be specific so that others will not see this as a vague spiritual change, but rather an encounter with the living God. How, when, and where did this take place?
- c. After Christ Was Received. What clear evidences of a transformed life took place? What are the benefits of becoming a believer? What touches the longings in the hearts of others?

Guidelines for Preparing the Specific Content

1. Keep the Lord Jesus central, telling what He has done.
2. Use the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17). Mention the verses that God used in reaching your conscience. This lends authority and brings conviction (Mark 1:22).
3. Be personal ("I" and "my") and conversational, rather than unnatural and "preachy."
4. Be careful in using religious phrases and special Christian terminology unknown to your hearers, such as "born again," "repentance," and even the word "saved." If you use them, define them.
5. Think of elements in which people can identify with your story. Certain details may be interesting, but don't overdo the details. Use words that paint a vivid picture.
6. Stick to facts, rather than feelings. That makes a good witness.
7. Be gracious in your words (Luke 4:22), not bitter or condemning other groups. Speak with humility, not arrogance.

Sequence of Preparation

1. Pray for wisdom and guidance in making clear how you found new life in Christ.
2. Accumulate brief notes on three separate sheets of paper labeled: "Before", "How" and "After"
3. Write out a long, rough draft using your notes from the three sheets of paper. (It will usually take about ten minutes to read it.)
4. Make improvements on the long draft. Evaluate your testimony in view of the comments under "General Outline" and the 7 "Guidelines".
5. Cut your draft down to under 4 minutes to read.
6. Outline your 3 to 4 minute presentation on a 3x5 card. Learn to give your testimony using only your outline.
7. Learn to give your testimony in 3 to 4 minutes without the outline.