

Christian Baptism

What is baptism?

Baptism is a religious ritual used by many groups to show that someone is a member of their group and is following their teachings. It shows that a person wants to identify with the group that is baptizing them. It is usually performed with water. Even before Christianity was founded the Jews would baptize Gentiles who wanted to follow the Jewish religion. Christ commanded His followers to baptize new Christians.

*Matthew 28: 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*

What is Christian baptism and what does it mean?

For Christians, baptism identifies them with Jesus Christ in a very personal way. It doesn't just mean that one wants to follow Christ's teachings. It means they understand Christ's offer of eternal life and are trusting in Jesus Christ to wash away their sins and make them fit for heaven and able to meet God without fear of judgment. This is possible because Christ took our place and suffered God's punishment on our sin. On the cross God punished Jesus with the wrath we deserved. Jesus died in our place, was buried, and rose from the dead to show His payment for our sin was completed and accepted by God. God now offers Jesus' new life to sinners who are spiritually dead. Christian baptism means we believe we cannot come to God ourselves and we need Christ to bring us to God. So we identify with the death He died on the cross as the death we deserved, with his burial as the burial we deserved, and with His resurrection as the new life we accept as a gift of His grace. Being immersed in water symbolizes this death, burial and resurrection.

*Romans 6:3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were **buried with Him through baptism** into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

Who should be baptized?

Those who believe in Jesus Christ as their savior from sin. Those who want to identify with Christ and publicly show that they are following Him. In the New Testament the church leaders baptized those who heard the good news about Jesus Christ's death, burial and resurrection and believed it and received God's message as true.

*Acts 2:41-42 Then those who gladly received his word were **baptized**; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

*Acts 8:36-37 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being **baptized**?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may."*

This is a very personal matter and is something one decides in their heart. But when they choose to be a follower of Christ they often want to tell others about their new faith. Baptism gives people a way to show others that they have decided to believe in Jesus. It is a beautiful expression of their new faith in Christ.

How old should a person be when they are baptized?

Though many churches baptize infants, this is not the normal pattern shown in the Bible. In the Bible the one being baptized was able to understand the gospel and had repented and believed in Jesus Christ. The people baptized in the New Testament were adults. Notice who Philip baptized when he preached to the Samaritans.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

Philip baptized "men and women". What about children? The Bible doesn't tell us clearly what to do. So it would be wise to wait until a child is old enough to clearly understand the gospel, and able to make an adult decision about what direction his life is going to go (baptism shows one is a **follower** of Jesus Christ). Probably around twelve or thirteen years old is a good age for many children to consider baptism.

How is a person baptized?

The person is completely immersed in water by a church leader who declares that this person is being baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son (Jesus Christ), and of the Holy Spirit. Usually the ones being baptized will briefly tell those in attendance how they came to be believers in Jesus Christ. Traditionally they wear white to symbolize that Christ has washed away their sin. They are immersed in water to symbolize how Christ was buried but came out of the grave and gives His new life to those who believe in Him. Though some church traditions will baptize by sprinkling or pouring a small amount of water on a person's head, we prefer complete immersion for a number of reasons.

1. The word God used for "baptism" in the New Testament actually means "to immerse, dip, wash, plunge, sink, drench, overwhelm." All of these definitions indicate something is put completely under the water.
2. When people were baptized in the Bible they went into the water rather than having the water brought to them for sprinkling or pouring indicating they were put down under the water.
*John 3:23 Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because **there was much water there**. And they came and were baptized.*
*Acts 8:38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch **went down into the water**, and he baptized him.*
3. Putting someone completely under the water pictures the burial and resurrection of Christ more clearly than could sprinkling or pouring water.
4. In the early centuries of the Christian Church immersion was the accepted way of baptizing (in fact they immersed the person three times to symbolize the trinity of the Father, Son and Spirit).
5. Sprinkling began to be used when people on their deathbed wanted to be baptized, but if they recovered their health they were then immersed.

Does baptism wash away sins?

No, there is only one way to wash away sin and that is through the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross of Calvary. It is true there are some verses in the Bible that seem to teach that baptism washes away sin (Such as Acts 2:38 *Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Or Acts 22:16 Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*). But when you read carefully you see these verses agree with the teaching that a person is saved by repenting and believing in Jesus Christ. Baptism follows that act of faith but does not save. It is faith in Christ that saves. In other words, if you are saved by repenting and believing in Christ, then if you repent, believe and are baptized you are saved. If you repent, believe, and read your Bible you are saved. If you repent, believe, and sing in the choir you are saved. But it is not baptism, reading your Bible, or singing in the choir that saves, it is repenting and believing in Christ. So these verses do not really teach that you must be baptized to be saved. Baptism cannot save because:

1. Baptism is not a part of the gospel message. The Apostle Paul did not believe baptism was part of the gospel.
1 Corinthians 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...
2. Only faith in Christ is required for salvation.
 - Acts 16:30-31 *And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."*
 - John 3:36 *He who believes in the Son has everlasting life;*
 - Ephesians 2:8 *For by grace you have been saved through faith,*
 - 1 John 5: 13 *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life,*

These verses clearly show that faith saves, not baptism. Many people are expecting to go to heaven because they were baptized. If they have not personally repented and trusted in Christ as their savior they will not go to heaven. Baptism will not provide eternal life apart from faith and repentance.

Is baptism important?

Absolutely! Baptism is one of the most wonderful acts God has given to His people.

1. It obeys God's command.

2. It gives us a way to show our personal faith to others.
3. It pictures what God has done for us inwardly.
4. It will bless you beyond what you can imagine!

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