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# WATER BAPTISM

YOUR NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

# **Water Baptism**

by Michael d'Offay

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# WATER BAPTISM

## Sink The Ships

In the 1500's there was a Spanish pioneer called Hernando Cortez who sailed to South America with his many ships and men to explore and conquer the new world. Some of his men however longed to go back and even tried to commandeer the ships. Cortez caught them and punished them. What he then did was never to be forgotten. He purposely sunk his ships. He sunk his entire fleet, leaving his men with no hope of return. They now had only two options: Succeed with their mission or die. There was absolutely no turning back.

This story is a vivid illustration of what takes place when we become devoted followers of Jesus and enter the new world of the kingdom of God. When we come to Christ, there is a radical break with our old lives and baptism is the sign of this.

In this booklet, I will explain what baptism is and how it is an important step of obedience that defines and sets the tone for our Christian lives. I will also answer some common questions that often get asked in relation to baptism today.

## Immersed In Water

The word 'baptism' comes from the Greek word *baptizo* which means to immerse or dip into liquid. For example, the word was used in the ancient textile industry where people would immerse linen into liquid dye, and it would come out a completely different colour.

To be clear, *baptizo* doesn't refer to sprinkling but to submerging. In a biblical sense, to baptize a person in water means to put that person completely under the water, then immediately raise him or her up again. In the New Testament, baptism is firstly mentioned when John the Baptist baptizes people in the Jordan river as a symbol of repentance and forgiveness from sin (see Mark 1:4, ESV). John clearly did not sprinkle them but immersed them completely in the waters of the Jordan river.

## A Sign of Being a Disciple

Just before Jesus ascends to heaven, he gives the disciples a mission to

*"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" (Matthew 28:19 ESV)*

How are disciples to be made? By firstly baptizing people into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When reading the book of Acts which tells the story of the growth of the church, we see that baptism was often the first step the new followers of Jesus would take therefore putting into practice the command of Jesus.

### *For Example:*

- On the day of Pentecost, 3 000 new believers were baptized (Acts 2:41 ESV)
- The Samaritans that believed were baptized (Acts 8:12 ESV)
- Paul was baptized three days after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:18 ESV)
- Cornelius and some other Gentiles were baptized (Acts 10:47 ESV)
- Lydia and her household were baptized (Acts 16:15 ESV)
- The Philippian jailer and his household were baptized (Acts 16:33 ESV)
- Many Corinthians were baptized (Acts 18:8 ESV)
- The Ephesian disciples were baptized (Acts 19:5 ESV)

We therefore see that baptism is not an optional extra for some serious-minded disciples but is actually a step of obedience every follower of Jesus takes. It is one of the initial ways we show that God has transformed our hearts.

## The Spiritual Significance of Baptism

Let's have a look at three powerful spiritual principles we put into practice when we get baptized. We acknowledge that:

### *1. We Have Died with Jesus*

*"Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ... We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin." (Romans 6:3,6 ESV)*

At the cross, "*our old self was crucified with him*" it tells us. Before we were born again, we were so inwardly corrupted that God had to put to death our old impulses and sinful desires and give us a new heart see (Ezekiel 36:26 ESV) a new nature now able to love and serve him. When Jesus died as the substitute for every single one of us (taking our punishment and dying the death we should have died), spiritually our old life died with Christ on that fateful day. The baptismal pool is then a symbol of a watery grave- of death to our old life.

If we have died to our old lives, we no longer live as we used to- following our own selfish desires and impulses. God's purpose for us is that "*we would no longer be enslaved to sin*". In other words, we serve a new master, Jesus, and we obey and follow him now.

### *2. We Acknowledge That We Have Been given New Life in Jesus*

*"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" (Romans 6:4 ESV)*

*“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” (Colossians 2:12 ESV)*

Just as the water represents the grave (going under), so it also represents the new life in Christ (coming up). The water is a symbol of a washing and a renewal that takes place by the Holy Spirit when we get saved see (Titus 3:4-6 ESV) and the resurrection of Jesus has made this all possible. *“You were also raised with him through faith”* Colossians 2 says.

Mysteriously and wonderfully, as Jesus rose up and represented us all before God, so we were raised with him into his resurrection life.

The result of this new life, marked by our baptism, is that we have been given new identity, a new purpose, and a new spiritual family. What a God we serve!

### *3. We Publicly Identify with Jesus*

This acknowledging and identifying with Jesus is meant to be a very public act. It is a shout-out to friends, family and even spiritual powers that we now identify with the cross and the resurrection which has changed us. As we do this, the Lord made the wonderful promise that,

*“Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32 ESV)*

## What Can We Expect?

When Jesus tells us to do something like water baptism, he does not do this merely to give us a rule to follow. There is real spiritual significance in this wonderful act.

It is an act of obedience to the Father and when we obey the Lord He always pours out special favour and blessing, just like an earthly father would. Baptism can be a very daunting thing for a new believer, doing something so openly in front of so many people. The Father sees this, as well as your heart that wants to please Him, and He always blesses.

Because it is not just an action, but rather an action done in faith and an expression of our faith in the reality of Jesus’ powerful work on the cross, it can bring great victory and freedom. Faith must always be expressed in action; as we step out in faith in the cross, the blessings of the cross can be more powerfully imparted to us. We can trust for freedom from sin, addictions, wrong mindsets, etc; and we can trust for greater faith to be given.

Baptism is powerful not only for the person being baptized but also for the onlookers. As we witness people being baptized among us, we are encouraged as to the real, powerful work that God is doing amongst us. Faith is imparted as we see the reality of the God we serve in real faith right in front of our eyes.

## What About Infant Baptism?

Baptism is only for those who are old enough to have repented of their sins and put their trust in Jesus. A genuine faith is one of the clear repeatable principles shown in the New testament which must precede baptism see (Acts 2:38, 8:12 ESV), (Mark

16:16 ESV) as examples. Hence, we practice *believers* baptism, rather than infant baptism.

In the Old testament, Jews were circumcised as babies as commanded by God see (Genesis 17:10 ESV) and this was a sign of them being included into God's covenantal family as descendants of Abraham. Some Christian groups have adopted this kind of covenantal view and teach that in the same way, we can baptise babies as a sign that they belong to the community of faith. So infant baptism is then practiced in the place of physical circumcision.

This practice can be dangerously misleading since baptized children can grow up believing they were born as Christians, or that God accepts them because of their parents' faith. But God doesn't have grandchildren, only children of his own! In other words, each of us have to choose Christ for ourselves. A godly parent can have a sanctifying influence on family members see (1 Corinthians 7:14 ESV) but we can only be saved by a personal faith in God.

Under the new covenant, Christians are never commanded to baptise babies. Jesus commands us to make disciples who will be baptized and will learn to obey his commandments. This implies being old enough to follow Christ for ourselves.

## Is Baptism Necessary For Salvation?

The Bible teaches that there is a baptism necessary for salvation; however, it is not water baptism but rather spiritual baptism! A person must be baptized into Christ in order to be saved:

*"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ"*  
(Galatians. 3:27 ESV)

But what about Jesus' statement in John 3 where he says,

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."?* (John 3:5 ESV)

This verse cannot be referring to being saved through water baptism because Peter and the other disciples who walked with Jesus, along with Paul, made it clear that salvation is by grace through faith, not by anything we do see (Ephesians 2:8-10 ESV)

What does Jesus mean then about being born of water and the Spirit? Because Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus, a Jewish teacher who knew the scriptures, it seems most likely that he is referencing the Old Testament. Specifically, he refers to a well-known messianic promise in (Ezekiel 36:25-27 ESV) which speaks of water and washing as a symbol of a new age of the Spirit when future believers would get new hearts. Jesus was saying to Nicodemus that he had come to fulfil that promise and that through his ministry, the Spirit would come, and people would be born again.

But then we can ask, "Why are people in the New Testament so often told to repent and be baptized, as in (Acts 2:38 ESV), as though it is one action that we must perform in order to be saved?"

The apostle Peter gave this command on the day of Pentecost and he understood that baptism is a physical symbol of a spiritual reality. We know this because in

(Acts 10:47 ESV), Peter again acknowledges baptism as happening after the salvation experience- not as part of it. We do see however how important baptism is- that baptism serves as a public seal or sign of faith in Jesus.

There is also the well-known example of the criminal on the cross next to Jesus who could not be baptized yet Jesus said:

*"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43 ESV)*

So, we do not hold to the belief of baptismal regeneration (salvation through water baptism).

## Who Should Do The Baptism?

Anyone Who Is a Believer Can:

*"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." (Matthew 28:19 ESV)*

Although originally given to the disciples, this command is for all of us who are believers since the task to reach the world was always multi-generational.

In Acts we see Philip (not an elder or pastor) baptizing people. It is one of the most wonderful things to baptize other people, especially when they are friends or family in whom you have seen God doing a great work.

## When Should One Be Baptized?

There is no rule laid forth in Scripture, but after seeing how wonderful baptism is, the question would be, why wouldn't we want to be baptized immediately? Paul likens baptism to circumcision which was done at 8 days old. When we are born again, we are like babies. The idea seems to be that it should be done soon after salvation.

The important principle when being baptized is to firstly understand the meaning of baptism along with having a genuine faith in Jesus - or else we are merely going for a swim!

We also see that some believers take years to get baptized as they want God to convince them or speak to them in a special way. We actually don't need to do this because he has already spoken to us through his word. We need to then rediscover the early church culture of baptizing as soon as possible after salvation. However, sometimes it is a good thing to wait until family members or friends who are special to the people being baptized, are able to get to the baptism.

## Can A Person Be Baptized More Than Once?

A new believer should be baptized once in obedience to the command of Jesus.

Some people, however, may have been baptized earlier in their life (such as in the case of infant baptism) without understanding the significance of baptism.

Perhaps they did not truly repent and receive Jesus as their saviour. In such cases it is very important to be properly baptized as a public profession of faith.



What about someone who is saved, baptized and then backslides? Should they be baptized when they come back to Christ? In this case, it is not necessary to be re-baptized since if they sincerely trusted Christ at their original baptism, then it is still valid and authentic. Rather, they should recognize the faithfulness of God who has kept them through their wanderings.

## In Conclusion

Baptism is a powerful step of faith that reflects what happens to us inwardly when we get born again. Not only is it a sign to friends, family and spiritual powers that we follow Christ, but also the act of baptism by faith blesses the heart of God and brings his blessing to bear on our lives.

Just like Hernando Cortez whose radical act of burning his ships caused him and his men to forever break with the old world, so the act of baptism is our sign that we have broken with the old life and are moving into the new world- the kingdom of God where we serve a new master, with a new identity, a new calling and with a new family- the church.