

## Understanding Baptism

Baptism can be a confusing thing if one does not understand the scriptural meaning behind the act. As such, this information sheet is intended to help people understand the significance of baptism.

The primary reason that churches practice baptism, is because of the command of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Baptism, therefore is an act of obedience to Christ.

### The Meaning of Baptism:

Water Baptism is an act of identification. When a person is baptized, they are identifying (or associating) themselves with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is why Matthew 28:19 speaks about being baptized in (or into) “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”.

More specifically, the act of baptism signifies your identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. (Romans 6:1-10) Going under the water, you identify yourself with the death and burial of Christ. It is a physical representation of the fact that you have accepted Christ’s death as your death to sin and your former way of life. In other words, baptism represents the fact that you have found forgiveness through Christ’s death. Rising up from the water you identify yourself with the resurrection of Christ. It is a physical symbol of the fact that you have found new and eternal life in Christ. In other words, baptism represents the fact that through God’s strength, you can live a life pleasing to God and are guaranteed an eternal home with Him.

Water baptism is a physical symbol of what occurs spiritually, when a person becomes a Christian by placing their faith in Jesus Christ. The act of water baptism itself does not accomplish the spiritual work. Ephesians 2:8-9 makes it clear that our salvation is not dependent on our works. The spiritual work is accomplished by Christ and received by faith. When you place your faith in Christ you die to sin and become alive to God. Baptism is a testimony to the fact that your salvation is based on the work of Christ. Therefore, the act of water baptism does not itself produce salvation, but rather is a testimony to salvation already received from Christ by faith.

With all of this in mind, baptism plays a significant role in the life of the individual Christian as well as the life of the larger community of faith.

1. **Baptism is a physical expression of faith and obedience to Christ:** In being baptized you are acting out physically what you have already done spiritually. You are giving physical expression to the spiritual commitment that you have already made.
2. **Baptism is an act of proclamation before others:** By publicly submitting to Christ in baptism, you are declaring your desire to follow Christ and are encouraging others to find new life in Christ.
3. **Baptism is a submission to the Christian community:** 1 Corinthians 12:13 indicates that all Christians are baptized by the Spirit into one body. As you publicly declare your desire to follow Jesus, you are asking the Christian community to encourage, support and keep you accountable in this pursuit.
4. **Baptism is a source of encouragement from God:** As a physical representation of the Spiritual change that God has worked in your life, baptism serves as a reminder of God's grace. When you remember your baptism, God reminds you of our new identity in Christ. He reminds you that you have died to sin, and are alive to God. You are forgiven, you have the power of the Holy Spirit to live a life pleasing to God and you have eternal life with Christ.

#### Who May Be Baptized?

In light of the meaning of baptism, it is only appropriate for people who have already by faith experienced the spiritual realities to which baptism testifies. Baptism is only for believers, those who have come to Christ in repentance and faith. That is why it is often called believer's baptism. This is confirmed by Matthew 28:19-20 which indicates that baptism is part of discipleship (which means following Christ). Therefore, baptism is for followers of Jesus.

#### How Should Baptism be Done?

In light of the meaning and symbolism of baptism discussed above, baptism should be the full immersion of the body in water. Immersion symbolizes death, burial and resurrection. Furthermore the word baptize itself means to immerse.