

Scripture Reading: Acts 8:26-38

Title: Everything You Need to Know About Water Baptism, 2nd ed.

Application: Every Christian should be baptized.

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Introduction: Spirit Baptism and Water Baptism

A. Spirit Baptism

1. There are two types of baptism in the Bible: **Spirit baptism** and **water baptism**. Spirit baptism is the most important, though most Christians know next to nothing about it. Why? A very slim knowledge of the Bible is to blame, based on lack of personal study and weak Bible teaching and preaching. But Spirit baptism is clearly in the Bible:

In Matthew 3:11, John the Baptist said: "'I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit** and fire. (ESV)"

2. It is this Spirit baptism that places a believer into the church (1 Cor. 12:13).¹ It also places the believer into union with Christ (Gal. 3:27). It is a one-time, spiritual event (not a ritual) in which Jesus Christ uses His Holy Spirit to accomplish the unification of a new believer into the body of Christ. It is not wet; it is not felt; it is a work of the Holy Spirit on all believers (1 Cor. 12:13) at the moment they are saved.

B. Water Baptism

1. Water baptism follows at a later point in time and is a symbolic ritual that pictures salvation. It was first taught by Jesus before He ascended to heaven:

Matthew 28:19-20 "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, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age."

2. Nothing actually "happens" to a person who gets water baptized. This baptism is wet; it is felt; it is done with the help of a pastor.

¹ The church is the body of all believers from the beginning of the church (Pentecost, Acts 2) until today.

3. It is important to understand very plainly what water baptism means—and *that* is the subject of the rest of these notes. We will examine it with six questions: “who, what, where, when, why, and how.” In short, water baptism is commanded by Jesus. It expresses our union with him by immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit. It is for believers only. It is one of two ordinances, in which are pictured saving truths of the gospel (the other is the Lord’s Table).

1. Who? Only Those Who Are Christians (“Born Again,” “Saved”).

A. What does it mean to be saved?

1. First, being saved means that you *were* lost. Though not stated in detail, the Ethiopian official understood that he was separated from God and needed salvation because of his sinfulness. He knew he needed to turn away from his sinful life to please God. This is “repentance toward God” (Acts 20:21).
2. Second, being saved means you were rescued or delivered from that lost state. God does the rescuing. He does by grace through the channel of “faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21 again). Why faith? A deep trust is the foundation of any true relationship. Christian belief is entrusting our souls to Jesus, turning away from other trusts (in ourselves, in works, in other gods, etc.). Why Jesus? Because He stood in your place as a substitute, taking the penalty on Himself that *your* sins deserved. He died for our sins, was buried, and on the third day rose again. He is *able* to save you from the penalty of sin, which is everlasting death. He invites and commands you to believe in Him so that you will not be judged among those who reject Him (Acts 16:31). If you do so, you will become a disciple = follower of Jesus.

Then, like the Ethiopian, you can say, “What hinders me from being baptized?” If you really trust in Christ, then nothing hinders you.

3. Third, being saved means you are a follower of Jesus Christ. This is important because it tells us the nature of the faith that is exercised. Christians **love God** with all their heart, yet recognize that their love is imperfect. They desire to walk in **holiness**, yet recognize that God has not perfected them in behavior. They **hate sin**, yet recognize a tendency toward sin in their flesh. They **follow Christ** and want to do so with all their strength, but they recognize that they sometimes fail. They are disciples. They want **spiritual maturity**, even though they are not yet perfect. This is the kind of person a Christian is.

- B. Beware of false assurance. If you think you are a Christian *just* because you recited some prayer or assented to some facts about Jesus, I cannot give you any assurance today of your standing before God. If you do not love God above everything else, then there can only be serious doubt about your faith.
- C. In Jesus' words about baptism, we know that baptism is for disciples because He tells the apostles first that they must make disciples. *Then* they baptize them. Baptism is not for the unsaved. It is not for infants. It is not for unbelieving adults. It is not done on behalf of dead people, unbelieving or otherwise. It is not done vicariously for other people, whether unbelieving or not.
- D. Notice that since baptism is only for those who are saved people, baptism cannot save you. It is an error to say that baptism saves a person because only already-saved people can be baptized! The idea that baptism saves is called *baptismal regeneration*. Various churches believe in baptismal regeneration, but remember—salvation comes by God's grace through faith only, not through any work (Ephesians 2:8-10).
- E. We do not baptize young people "automatically" when they turn 12 or any other age. This is because not all 12-year-olds are saved or show any spiritual interest. Also, though I encourage every believer to be baptized because the Bible tells you to do it, I do not push you to be baptized. You must express your own interest in baptism. In that way, I know that you are serious and that the Spirit is at work in your life.
- F. I do not have a minimum age, but there is a minimum condition: a young person must be able to express in some basic but accurate way what it means to be saved. They too must believe in Christ. There is no exception to the rule that baptism is for believers just because a person is young. Personally, I believe it is better to wait awhile and let the fruit of salvation develop to be sure it is genuine.

2. Why? To Obey the Command of Jesus.

- A. Many people think that we do water baptism to follow the *example* of Jesus when He was baptized. The problem with such a thought is that, since Christian water baptism is only for those who are saved (previous point), it doesn't fit for Jesus since He was not saved, and never needed to be saved! The baptism of Jesus signified His identification with John's message (which was about Jesus), with John's audience (which needed repentance) and marked His entrance into public ministry.

- B. Instead of following an example, we are following a *command*. Matthew 28:19-20 has to do with Jesus commanding his followers as to what they need to do after Jesus leaves the earth. He tells them to make disciples, to baptize them, and to teach them. This means that if you are a Christian today and you have not been baptized, you *need* to be baptized. You need to confess Christ before men (Matthew 10:32-33).
- C. There is a serious problem for those who refuse to obey this command. The Bible says that is not a burden for a believer to keep God's commands (1 John 5:3). In fact, if someone says they have come to know Christ and do not obey His commands, that person is lying about their relationship with Jesus (1 John 2:4).

3. How? By Immersion in Water in the Name of the Triune God.

- A. The very word itself, *baptize*, comes from the Greek word βαπτίζω. It means to dip or immerse. This so-called "mode" of baptism is integrally connected to the symbolism of baptism (to be mentioned in #6 below).
- B. Along with the person be submerged under water, the Lord Jesus commanded that the baptism be done in the name of the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is significant because it connects the person to the **Christian God**, not some other god of another religion. It is also an indication of the authority upon which the pastor baptizes the person. I can baptize with the authority of Jesus Christ, because He told us to do so. The believer is just as baptized as if the apostle Peter or some other famous Christian had baptized him/her.

4. Where? Usually in a Local Church.

- A. We could answer this question with: "anywhere there is enough water." But it does not do any good to have someone baptize himself, or even with one or two other people. Baptism is a public profession, not a private one!
- B. There is an emphasis on the local church in the NT. Consider that Acts is about the starting of local churches all over the Roman empire, and the epistles are largely written to local churches. Given this emphasis, it seems clear that baptism would be exercised in and by local churches. The local church is where believers are, and where people are who care about a newly saved soul testifying of God's grace.

5. When? Soon After Salvation.

- A. The Bible does not give any regulation as to how long after someone is saved that they must be baptized. It just indicates it must be *after*. It is

not proper to do it *before* in a provisional sense or a preparatory sense or “just in case” or to gain any favor with God.

- B. However, all examples that we have in the Bible show baptism happening immediately after a person is saved. For an adult who knows he has been transformed, this is totally reasonable. It forms a demarcation point, a public testimony of leaving the old life and starting the new. The close timing of baptism after salvation is, I think, the reason why sometimes baptism is confused with salvation or made into a way to get saved.
- C. Young people who are baptized are in a common situation in our kind of churches. And that is, they understood the gospel to some extent at a young age, and their parents and they themselves have waited for a while to determine the reality of their profession of faith. This delay is not a problem. It can reduce “re-baptisms” of children who later are unsure of their salvation, which is also a common experience. Some young people have accepted what they understand of the gospel, but are not ready to be baptized for one reason or another. It may be that they have not made a firm decision to follow Christ. Or they may not understand the importance of baptism. Or they may be fearful. I experienced the latter two circumstances in my own life.

6. What? A Symbol That Reminds of the Past, Present, and Future.

A. Past: A Memorial of Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ.

1. In Romans 6:3-4, it talks about baptism connecting back to the death of Christ. When the believer goes down into the water, this pictures the death of Christ and the waters of God’s judgment against sin. The waters of baptism are like the judgment waters of the flood (1 Peter 3:20-21).
2. When the believer comes out of the water, this pictures the physical, bodily resurrection of Christ on the third day.
3. These two events, the death and resurrection of Christ, form the core of the Christian faith. Without them, Christianity does not exist; without them, faith is useless; without them, there is no payment for sin, no forgiveness of sin, no eternal life, nothing in which we believe as Christians.

B. Present: A Symbol of Believer’s Union with Christ.

1. Water baptism is a symbol of Spirit baptism. Water baptism symbolizes what Spirit baptism did in uniting the believer with Christ.

2. Water baptism is a symbol of identification with Christ. The baptism candidate is proclaiming his identification and connection with Christ in that he has died to sin, been buried with Christ, and risen to new life in Jesus (Romans 6:4). This is why we say baptism is a public testimony of our previous saving faith. The union is *made* by Spirit baptism; it is *pictured* water baptism.
3. Water baptism pictures cleansing from sin. It is *not* the cleansing itself.
4. I enter into the water = I have died to sin!
I go below the water = I have been buried with Christ!
I come up from the water = I am raised to new life and live that life!
5. The symbolism of baptism is another reason why our baptism is not the same as Jesus's baptism. He had not been reborn; nor is he picturing His own death, burial, and resurrection; nor is he symbolizing becoming united with Himself; nor did re require cleansing from sin.

C. Future: A Prophecy of Future Resurrection.

1. Romans 6:5 goes on to connect baptism with a future life, and that is indeed what water baptism pictures—it looks forward to the time when the believer will have a resurrected body like that of Jesus. Coming up out of the water symbolizes the believer's future hope of resurrection.
2. Everyone has an appointment with death. But every Christian also has an appointment with resurrection. Baptism symbolizes that future appointment.

Conclusion

If you are a believer in Jesus, He commands you to be immersed in water in the name of the Triune God soon after you are saved to symbolize your connection with Him and your new life. This is done in connection with a church family like ours.

The New Testament did not even consider an un-baptized Christian. Such a thought would have been indecent and unheard of. If baptism is at all possible, it is displeasing to God to *not* be baptized.

Far worse than the circumstance of an unbaptized person is a non-Christian person. The Bible commands all people everywhere to repent of sins and turn to Christ, and to love God with all their hearts. Have you come to recognize that you need God—that you need Jesus to cleanse you and make you new?

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