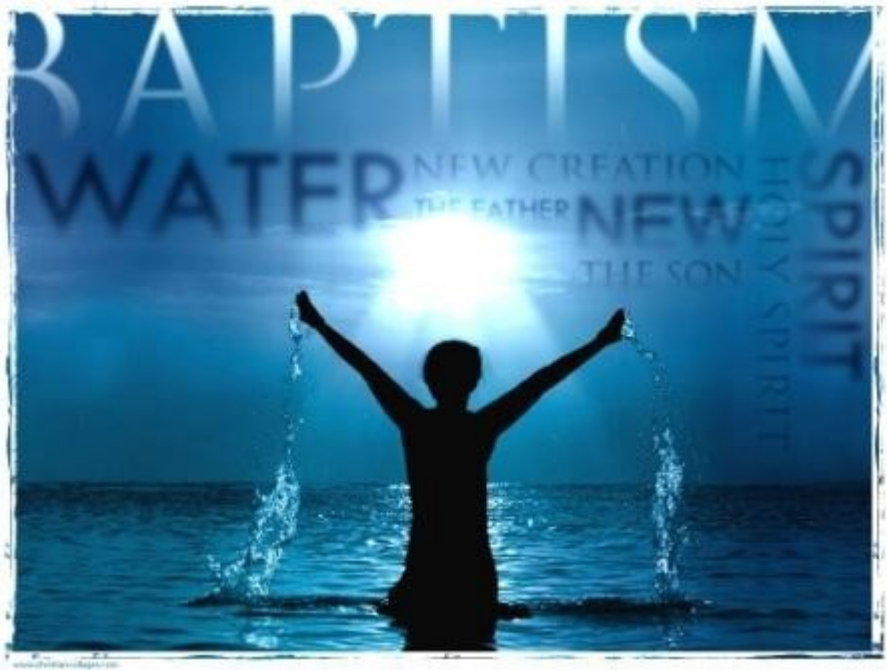




**COMMUNITY
CHURCH**

A Guide to Believer's Baptism



**“Repent and be baptised, everyone of you,
in the name of Jesus Christ for the
forgiveness of your sins. And you will
receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
Acts 2:38 (NIV)**

THIS BOOKLET IS FOR YOU

- ◆ IF you have recently become a Christian, it will explain why being baptised is an important step for you to take.
- ◆ IF you have not been baptised as a believer, prayerfully consider, as you read these pages, what you ought to do.
- ◆ IF you have already been baptised, maybe many years ago, there is always more to learn - even about baptism!

As with any other Biblical truth, the more we dig into the subject of baptism the more there is to understand. In a little booklet like this we cannot hope to cover every issue or every scripture reference to baptism. If you find something puzzling, or you want to know more, don't hesitate to ask.

When all is said and done, the Bible's essential teaching about baptism is very simple:

“Repent, and be baptised ...”

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

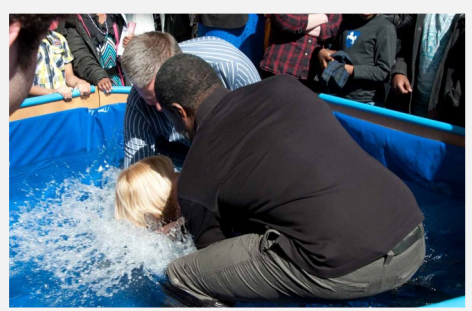
The verb “to baptise” is a Greek work—“baptidzo”, which means to immerse, to plunge, to sink or to drown!

It involves a lot of water!

To baptise someone is, therefore, to immerse, plunge or sink (*not drown!*) him or her in water and, of course, to bring that person up again.

So, John 3:23 tells us that John the Baptist, the one who prepared the way for Jesus, was baptising in a certain place because “there was plenty of water”.

For this reason, and others that will become apparent as you read on, the way we baptise people is by “total immersion”. It is the biblical method!



BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

A quick look through the book of Acts shows us that *the only people who were baptised* at that time were those who had *believed in the Lord Jesus*.

- ◆ Acts 2:41: Those who accepted his message were baptised.
- ◆ Acts 8:12: They believed Philip as he preached the good news....and....they were baptised, both men and women.
- ◆ Acts 8:36: (He) said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptised?”
- ◆ Acts 10:47: Peter said, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptised with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have”
- ◆ See also Acts 9:18; 16:15,31-33; 19:5; 22:16

It is sometimes said that we practise *adult baptism*. No! In the New Testament it is *believers* who are baptised. Age alone does not qualify anyone for baptism; it is faith in the Lord Jesus that is absolutely necessary.

WHY BE BAPTISED

There are FOUR foundational reasons for being baptised:

1. It is a COMMAND TO OBEY

Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus told his followers to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptising *them...*” (Matthew 28:19). So, on the Day of Pentecost, when people responded to the word Peter preached and accepted what he said about Jesus, what happened? They were baptised (Acts 2:41).

Today, when there is a baptism, both the person who is baptised and the one who baptises are being obedient to the command of Jesus.

2. It is an EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW

Jesus does not ask us to do what he has not already done himself. He was baptised by John the Baptist, although he did not need to be. (See Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21,22.)

When we are baptised we are literally following Jesus’ example. If Jesus was baptised how can we refuse?

3. It is an **ACT OF COMMITMENT**

Peter's challenge to the crowds in Jerusalem was that they must repent and be baptised "in the name of Jesus Christ", Acts 2:38. Baptism is to be the first step in their life-long commitment to Jesus who, though he had been crucified, is now both Lord and Christ, verse 36. Those who are baptised submit to his authority over their lives. They become part of the company of people who have also made this commitment, see verse 42.

Baptism is a pledge of our loyalty to Jesus and to his people.

4. It is a **WITNESS TO OTHERS**

Interestingly, the New Testament does not explicitly give "witness" as a reason to be baptised. But, how did Peter and the other disciples, and the crowds *know* that anyone had repented and made a commitment to Jesus? Baptism was a clear demonstration that this had happened.

Baptism is a witness to the church and to the world that you are now one of Jesus' people!

Your baptism is an act of obedience and commitment to Jesus and a powerful witness to friends and family of your new life in following him. It is therefore a very public occasion!

GOING DEEPER...

(Excuse the pun!)

The four reasons for being baptised that we have given are very much about what we do in baptism - we obey the command, we follow Jesus' example, we commit ourselves to him and to his people, and we witness to our friends, family and the church. However, there is much more to baptism than this. Baptism is not just about what we do; it is also about what *God does for us* when we are baptised.

REMEMBER (very important!)

This is *believer's* baptism. In the New Testament belief - *a personal faith and trust in Jesus* - ALWAYS comes first; *then* a person is baptised.

There is nothing automatic or magic about being baptised. What God does for us in baptism is *always* on the basis of faith in him. We are not "born again" because we have been baptised; we are "born again" and *then* we are baptised. That God can, and does, do certain things in baptism is always in response to the faith of the one being baptised. God has much to give in baptism to those who reach out in faith to him.

Keep this very important fact in mind as you read on...

BAPTISM AND... FORGIVENESS

Acts 2:38: Repent and be baptised ... in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...

- ◆ Forgiveness, says Peter, is known when we repent - that is when we turn from our own way, admit that we have done wrong in God's sight and turn to Jesus to save us.
- ◆ As we are baptised, having already believed, we experience the assurance that our sins are forgiven.

Acts 22:16: Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name.

- ◆ Baptism is literally a washing. Just as the water cleanses us on the outside so we know, in those moments, that inner cleansing the forgiveness of sin brings.
- ◆ This happens as we “call on his name”, i.e. As we look to Jesus in faith and trust.

As we are in the water the Lord will meet us and grant us a deep assurance of his forgiveness and acceptance. This is an inner cleansing and renewal that nothing and no one else can give.

BAPTISM AND... THE GOOD NEWS

Read Romans 6:1-14

In these verses Paul refers to baptism. There are those who believe that he is not talking about water baptism at all here, but rather about baptism by (or in) the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is implied in these verses, but the way Paul talks about baptism - being buried, rising - draws us naturally to water baptism. Paul uses baptism to teach about the Christian's position in Christ; on the way we learn a lot about baptism itself.

Romans 6:4: We were therefore buried with (Christ) through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

At the simplest level:

- ◆ Just as Jesus was buried in the tomb, the one being baptised is buried under the water.
- ◆ Just as Jesus rose again out of the tomb, so the believer rises out of the water.

Baptism is thus a dramatic visual aid to the unbeliever of the triumph of Jesus over death. Baptism preaches the good news.

BAPTISM AND... A CHANGED LIFE

Romans 6: 1-14

There was a teaching around in Rome that went something like this:

→We all sin. →We know the grace of God when he forgives us. →Therefore, the more we sin, the more he forgives and the greater God's grace. →So, let's go on sinning in order that we'll know more and more of God's grace.

Paul is horrified at this (v2). We have *died* to sin (v2) and to prove it Paul points to baptism.

- ◆ When we are buried under the water *our old life dies*. For the believer this has already happened - we've been born again - but baptism seals this in our experience and understanding. We are baptised into Christ's death (v3); we died with Christ (v8). Dead people don't sin (vs7, 11)!
- ◆ Coming out of the water we rise to a *new life* (v4). From now on our life is going to be different. We are going to do things Jesus' way (v11).

Baptism means a changed life! Our old way of life has gone; it is dead. We must live out the new life we have. See verses 11-14

BAPTISM AND... UNION WITH CHRIST

Romans 6:1-14; see also 1 Corinthians 15:3,4

“Christ died for our sins.”

- ◆ Jesus died on the cross; in baptism we are baptised into his death (v3).

“He was buried.”

- ◆ Jesus was laid in the tomb; in baptism we are buried with him into death (v4).

“He was raised on the third day.”

- ◆ Jesus is alive; just as Christ was raised we live a new life (v4).

When we are baptised we are united with Jesus in his death and resurrection. As we enter the water God reckons us dead with Christ. For the moments we are under the water God sees us buried with Jesus. Rising out of the water the resurrection life of Jesus is ours also.

As we are baptised all the benefits of the death and burial of Jesus (known already because of our repentance and faith) are applied to us again. United to Jesus we now live in the fullness of his resurrection life. By faith, baptism makes these truths real to us and in us.

BAPTISM AND...

THE FUTURE HOPE

Romans 6:1-14

Romans 6:5 If we have been united with him like this is in death, (which we have) we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:20: Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

1 Thessalonians 4:16: The dead in Christ will rise first.

Baptism points to the past

- ◆ To the death and resurrection of Jesus and to our own death and resurrection with him.

Baptism refers to the present

- ◆ We are dead to sin now; we live a new life now.

Baptism looks to the future

- ◆ Jesus has defeated death; as he rose from the dead so will his people. Where he has blazed the trail, we will follow.

Rising out of the water assures us that physical death is not the end. One day we shall rise and be with Jesus forever.

BAPTISM AND... COVENANT

Colossians 2:11 and 12: In (Christ) you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

This passage is quite difficult! There is a violent transition from the image of circumcision to that of baptism. The verses essentially say the same as Romans 6. Just as circumcision means the cutting off of flesh, when Jesus died your old nature that caused you to sin was cut off (the meaning of "the circumcision done by Christ"). It is dead. You were buried with Christ in baptism. Now, by God's power, you have a new life.

Baptism replaces circumcision as a sign of the covenant (agreement) between God and his people. But there are great differences:

- ◆ Circumcision was administered to Jewish (male) infants on the basis of Law; it was purely an outward rite.
- ◆ Baptism is administered to believers on the basis of faith; it signifies both an inward and outward change of life.

In baptism God reaffirms his covenant with us. It is a covenant of grace and love. He will never leave us.

BAPTISM AND... THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 1:5: John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised in the Holy Spirit. (The words of Jesus).

Acts 2:4: They were all filled with the Holy Spirit...

Acts 2:38f: Repent and be baptised, every one of you ... and you will received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord your God will call.

(The words of Peter)

There is a dynamic link in between being baptised in water and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the believer.

- ◆ John (the Baptist) baptised in water.
- ◆ Jesus promises that his people will be baptised in the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ On the day of Pentecost the first Christians are filled with (or, baptised in) the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised.
- ◆ Peter then holds out the same promise to those who will repent and be baptised in water - they will receive (or, be baptised in) the Holy Spirit.

Full Christian baptism is not just total immersion in water; it includes total immersion in the Holy Spirit. We are plunged by Jesus into the Holy Spirit.

BAPTISM AND... THE HOLY SPIRIT (continued)

Baptism in water and baptism in the Spirit belong together. However, they may not always happen at the same time.

- ◆ Acts 8:15-17 - the Samaritans received the Spirit *after* water baptism.
- ◆ Acts 10:44-48 - the Spirit came upon the people and *then* they were baptised in water.
- ◆ It is *possible* that the crowds in Acts 2 received the Spirit *as* they were baptised in water.
- ◆ In Acts 19:1-7 Paul met a group of Christians who showed no evidence of the power of the Spirit in their lives. They had not even heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul asked them about their *baptism*. They had not been baptised in the name of Jesus. They were baptised in water and then received the Holy Spirit - full Christian baptism!

Never been baptised in water as a believer or baptised in the Holy Spirit? One is a command to obey; the other is a promise to receive.

Been baptised in water but not in the Spirit? Jesus is waiting to complete your baptism and to fill you with power.

Been baptised in the Spirit but not in water? You can complete your baptism and receive even more from the Lord!

BAPTISM AND... THE CHURCH

In the New Testament there are 3 expressions of the church - the local church (congregation) with its leaders, the wider, universal church composed of all believers in Jesus and the church in heaven.

Acts 2:41: Those who accepted (Peter's) message were baptised, and about 3000 were added to their number that day.

Back on page 5 we said that baptism is a pledge of loyalty to Jesus and his people. From the first, baptism was seen as a clear indication that the person baptised now belonged to the company of those who believed in Jesus - the church.

In pioneer situations, where no local church existed, those who were baptised became part of the wider church, which was spreading out from Jerusalem. They also became the first people in a new, local congregation. So, for example, Lydia and her household members became the first baptised believers in Phillipi, and from that beginning the local church grew.

See Acts 16:13-15, and Philippians 1:1.

It is through the ministry and witness of the local church that Jesus builds his (universal) church.

BAPTISM AND... THE CHURCH (continued)

1 Corinthians 12:13: We were all baptised by (or, in) one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Baptism in this verse is viewed in its totality - in both water and Spirit. It is not merely a personal event; it is a corporate event also. Baptism in water is a statement of our unity and one-ness with all Christ's people (see also Galatians 3:27f; Ephesians 4:5). Baptism in the Spirit enables us to function effectively, and in unity, within the body of Christ (see also 1 Corinthians 12:7-11). Paul was writing to a local church in Corinth. Such realities have to be worked out in the context.

- ◆ Baptism is the way in to “membership” of the church. Baptism says that you are in the body of Christ, that you share in the same Spirit as other believers, and that you will exercise whatever gifts and ministries God gives to you.
- ◆ Equally, those who witness the baptism are saying to the baptised, “You belong to us and are part of us. We accept you and will care for you. We are committed to you and will honour your ministry amongst us”.

Being baptised into the body (of Christ) means being baptised into the local expression of that body.

BAPTISM AND... THE NAME

Matthew 28:19: Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in (Greek: into) the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...

Acts 2:38: Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ...

After his resurrection Jesus called together his followers and commissioned them to go and make disciples out of all nations. How? To start with, by baptising the new disciple in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yet, when we read the book of Acts we see that believers were baptised (only) in the name of Jesus. Is there a difference?

- ◆ Luke begins the book of Acts by saying that he had previously written about all that Jesus *began to do and teach* (1:1). Now he will write about what Jesus continued to do and teach. Although the book is about the earliest church it is actually an account of what Jesus *continued* to do through the Holy Spirit.

The presence, power and authority of Jesus is evident on every page of the book of Acts. He is building his church through the working of the Spirit in his people.

BAPTISM AND... THE NAME (continued)

- ◆ So, everything in Acts happens “in the name of Jesus - preaching, healing, salvation, deliverance and, of course, baptism; see, for example, 3:6, 4:10, 4:18, 16:18, 2:38. They are *under* the authority of Jesus and performed *with* the authority of Jesus. Jesus is Lord, and reveals his Lordship in and through them.
- ◆ In Matthew, Jesus states that baptism is *into* the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism is about the totality of relationship with God; as Father - we are his children; as Son - Jesus is our Saviour, Lord friend and brother; as Holy Spirit - the one who fills us and leads us. For this reason the words of Matthew 28:19 are usually used when some one is baptised. But used or not, it is the reality behind them that is important.

Regardless of what words are actually used at the time, believer's baptism is *always* “in the name of Jesus”. It has his authority stamped on it and brings that authority, his Lordship, into focus. Equally, baptism is *always* in the name of the Trinity. The wholeness of our relationship with God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit comes to us afresh as we are baptised.

DIFFICULT... VERSES

John 3:5: Jesus answered (Nicodemus), "I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit."

- ◆ Does this verse teach that baptism ("water") is necessary in order to enter the kingdom of God?

If "water" means baptism then the baptism that Nicodemus would have known was the one practised by John the Baptist - a baptism of repentance. This would then tie in with Acts 2:38. "Water" may refer to procreation (an idea strange to us but not in the time of Jesus), in which case Jesus may mean that your natural birth must be followed by a spiritual one.

1 Peter 3:21: ... baptism ... now saves you also - not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience towards God.

- ◆ Does this verse teach that *baptism* "saves you"?

See the end of the verse. Baptism is administered as a pledge (or, response) of a *good conscience towards God*; in other words, on the basis of repentance and faith in God. Peter says (v20) that Noah was saved through water - but only because he believed.

IMPORTANT... QUESTIONS

◆ *Do I have to be baptised?*

The short answer is “No”. As Acts 16:31 says: *believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.*

It is not a question that the New Testament answers, in that Paul and the other writers *assume that every Christian has been baptised.* To neglect baptism is to deny oneself the many blessings that God has for those who are baptised. It also goes against the first command of Jesus to the believer.

◆ *I was baptised as a baby, isn't that enough?*

NB: What is popularly known as “Christening” is, in fact, infant baptism. “Christening” refers to the giving of a “Christian name” to the child as part of the ceremony. Words such as “I baptise you (name) in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” are used.

Having got this far it will be understood that biblical baptism is the *baptism of believers.* In love we must say that, in spite of its long history, infant baptism is a mistake. Yet we recognise that many hold to it in sincere faith. Our fellowship is with those who acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, *not* on the basis of baptism.

Everyone must act according to his or her conviction before God.

IMPORTANT... QUESTIONS (continued)

◆ *When should I be baptised?*

In the book of Acts people were baptised almost immediately after they had first repented and believed in Jesus. However, many of the earliest converts were either Jew or “God-fearers”, already having some background (Old Testament) knowledge. Later, when Gentiles (non-Jews) became Christians, Paul (and others) stayed with them for some time making sure that they grew in their newfound faith.

Believer’s baptism is part of the beginning of our new life in Jesus, so ought not to be delayed for too long. However, some understanding of what baptism means enables us to both give and receive more as we are baptised. If you have been a Christian for a long time and have not been baptised as a believer, then the answer is *as soon as possible!*

◆ *Who should baptise?*

In the New Testament it would seem that any Christian could baptise a new believer. Today, for the sake of good order in the church, this task usually falls to the leaders of the local church or to those who baptise on their behalf. (Compare Paul’s comments in 1 Corinthians 1:14-17.)

IMPORTANT... QUESTIONS (continued)

- ◆ *Do I **have** to give my “testimony” when I am baptised.*

A testimony (in the context of baptism) is a statement of how you became a Christian and / or how you have come to the point of being baptised. You are telling people, in your own words, what God has done for you and how he has worked in your life. According to Romans 10:9,10 a public, verbal declaration of your faith in Jesus is an integral part of becoming a Christian and is therefore very appropriate at the time of your baptism.

Of course, some take this in their stride while others find it scary! If you belong to the second (larger) group, don't worry; we will help you to give your testimony in the best way for you. The safest way is to write it out and read it on the day. Others have made up poems, sang songs, or had a question and answer approach. A few can speak “off the cuff” with ease.

No matter what way you choose, know this: God will bless you as you are faithful to his word and as you witness to what he has done for you.

GETTING PRACTICAL

- ◆ *Where do baptisms in Community Church take place?*

Some fellowships use swimming pools or even the sea or rivers. We use a baptismal pool and the baptisms are held during our Sunday service.

- ◆ *What should I wear?*

Something that you don't mind getting wet! Again, some churches insist that those being baptised wear white or even - yes - black. All we ask is that the clothes are suitable for the occasion. Bear in mind how they will look on you when they are wet. Hems of skirts and dresses need to be weighted so they do not "balloon" in the water. And don't forget a change of clothes and a towel...

- ◆ *Will I slip or fall over in the pool?*

We make sure that people are on hand to help you in and out of the pool; it is perfectly safe.