

# Does Anything Happen At Baptism?

## Why All This Talk About Baptism?

Have you ever wondered why baptism is mentioned so often in religious circles? You're not alone. It is not uncommon for newcomers and others with different religious backgrounds to wonder what the *big deal* is. But since some form of the word is used well over a hundred times in the New Testament by Jesus and His disciples, we believe it must have some significance. Can we determine what it is?

**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 (Mt. 28:19)**

## What Is Baptism?

What does the word itself mean? We believe that in New Testament times believers were immersed. Greek dictionaries define the word which was used (baptismos) as *immersion*, *dipping* or *submersion*. We believe Jesus was immersed. The Bible says that Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan (Mark 1:9, 10). The Greek word, *eis*, meant *in* or *into*. When Jesus came out of the water, the word *ek* was used, which means *out of*. So Jesus went *into* the water and came *up out of* the water. That's why the apostle Paul wrote that baptism is a *burial* (Romans 6:4), and that's why both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and came up out of the water (Acts 8:36-39). For more than

**We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death... (Rom. 6:4a).**

1200 years of Christian history, immersion was universally accepted as the way a person was baptized. Even the great Reformers such as Martin Luther, John Wesley and John Calvin acknowledged that immersion was practiced in New Testament times.

**As they traveled along the road they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him (Acts 8:36-37).**

### **Who Should Be Baptized?**

In the Bible, the need to be baptized is always addressed to mature, responsible people who are capable of believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, changing their minds about sin (repentance) and wanting to obey God. The decision to be baptized is an important one and should be made by one who is ready to make a full commitment to trusting Jesus Christ as his/her Lord and Savior.

### **What About Infant Baptism?**

Infant baptism did not originate until well after Bible times and grew out of two erroneous teachings:

1. that children are born guilty of original sin, and
2. that the only thing that can bring about their forgiveness is baptism.

Sin, however, is defined in the Bible as a transgression of God's law ([1 John 3:4](#)), and infants, and those not responsible for their actions, cannot sin. Further, they do not inherit the sin of their parents ([Ezekiel 18:20](#)).

Second, baptism is not a sacrament, that is, a rite which conveys virtue within itself, but is meaningful only when it is an expression of one's personal belief in Christ. Since infants meet neither of these criteria, we believe that infants are therefore not subjects of, nor candidates for, baptism. Though these reasons are why we believe infant baptism was begun, there are many who practice infant baptism today simply as a dedicatory rite. We believe this also is without Biblical precedent, and therefore, we do not practice it.

### **Does Anything Happen At Baptism?**

When one is baptized does anything happen, or should anything happen? The apostle Paul answers this in his writings. Paul speaks of the moment at which both Jews and Gentiles are clothed with Christ and describes it as the moment of baptism ([Galatians 3: 26-27](#)). For New Testament writers, the mere mention of baptism presupposes a belief in

Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Son of God. The possibility of a nonbeliever being baptized or of a believer refusing baptism does not even occur to Paul.

The Romans' baptism was much more than symbolic or figurative – some things *happened*, and those things made it totally inappropriate and inconsistent for them to continue to live in sin:

1. they were baptized into Christ Jesus,

**Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him 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. If we have been united with Him like this in his death, we will certainly be united with Him in His resurrection (Rom. 6:1-5).**

2. into His death,
3. united with Him,
4. their old selves were crucified with Him,
5. their *bodies of sin* were done away with,
6. they died to sin, and
7. they were justified from sin.

It seems that Paul is making clear that baptism puts us into union with Christ and we participate with Him in His suffering and death, making us recipients of all the blessing implied by that death. When one submits himself to be baptized, as an expression of his faith and out of love for God, God affects change in the status of that person. That is why Paul wrote, “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” ([Colossians 2:12](#)). The change in relationship does not come because we merit or deserve it. It is *God’s Power*, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, that works the salvation of man, but He requires that we submit in trusting obedience. “For it is by grace you have been saved, though faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast” ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)).

**When the people heard this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one 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 2:37-38)**

## Is Baptism A Work?

If it is, no one has suggested discarding it. Practically all religions claiming to be Christian practice something called baptism. If it is a work whose work is it? Who is the actor? The believer is commanded to submit, “to be baptized” ([Acts 2:38](#)). In other words, he is passive. The promise is “the forgiveness of your sins.” That’s God’s promise and God’s work. No one has done anything to deserve salvation except Jesus Christ, and obeying Him in baptism demonstrates our faith in Him alone as our Savior.

## What About The Church?

If the body of Christ is the church, as Paul writes ([Ephesians 1:22, 23](#)), and we are baptized into Christ then it follows that we are baptized into the church. Acts 2 states that the Lord added to their number daily those who were being baptized (see margin). So we believe that the way into the Lord’s church is through baptism. If you have been baptized as the Bible teaches, you are a member of the church of Christ and have access to the fellowship of the family of God everywhere.

## Again, Who Should Be Baptized?

If what we have seen is correct, and we believe it is, then

**Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation... (2 Co. 7:10).**

those who are ready to trust Jesus completely for their salvation and those who are ready to repent of their sins should be baptized. But

**Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out... (Acts 3:19a).**

when the Bible says *trust* and *repent*, it’s talking about real commitment. You see, knowledge of the gospel (good news

about Jesus) is what leads to belief and trust in Jesus ([Romans 10:17](#)). Do you believe in Jesus as the Son of God? Godly sorrow is what leads to repentance (see margin). Are you truly sorry for your sins and their offense to God? Are you ready to let Jesus be the Lord of your life? That's what repentance is, and that's the commitment you make when you are baptized into Christ. All spiritual blessings await you in Christ Jesus ([Ephesians 1:3](#)), including His Holy Spirit ([Acts 2:38](#)), to help and empower you ([Romans 8:26](#); [Ephesians 3:16, 17](#)). If you are interested in being baptized, or would like to discuss this matter further, we welcome an opportunity to visit with you.

*And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name (Acts 22:16).*

The information in this article was taken from the Richland Hills Church of Christ Website. <http://www.rhchurch.org/outreach/whybaptism01.pdf> and adapted for our use with permission.