

Baptism: Common Questions

Baptism is an outward expression of an inward change. It doesn't change our eternal destiny or our standing with God. Rather, it is a public expression of what has already transpired in our lives. It is a declaration of our faith in Christ and our decision to become one of His followers. A good illustration of the significance of baptism is that of a wedding ring. The ring is a symbol of the love and promises shared by husband and wife. It is worn proudly as an expression of belonging to another and as an expression of love for another. Like the wedding ring, baptism is a symbol. And, like the ring, it is a significant one – for it is the one our Lord himself gives us.

WHY SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

There is a short answer to this question – Jesus commanded it. He instructed his disciples to baptize those who chose to become his followers. (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” While it is certainly enough to say that Jesus commanded it, I think we can identify several reasons why he did so.

✦ Baptism is an opportunity for an individual to honor God as the object of their delight. When we are baptized, we say that we have found a treasure in Christ that is so complete that we surrender our very lives to Christ's direction. In baptism, we publicly point to Christ as our source of hope and joy. In the same way that a bride and groom honor one another publicly in a wedding – saying in essence, it is my privilege to spend my life with this person – we, in baptism, say that it is our privilege to be a follower of Christ.

✦ Baptism is an opportunity to demonstrate the central truths of the gospel to those who are watching. The image of being lowered into the water symbolizes our being identified with Christ in his death. We have died with him so the penalty of our sin is paid in his death. Being raised out of the water symbolizes the new life we enjoy as his followers. The whole process reminds us that in the same way that our physical bodies are cleansed by washing in water, so we are cleansed from the corrupting impact of sin as we enjoy complete forgiveness in Christ.

✦ Baptism is an opportunity to encourage those who have contributed to our coming to faith. As they see us boldly and publicly identify ourselves with Christ, they are reminded that their efforts in ministry are resulting in changed lives and changed eternities. They are encouraged to continue to serve faithfully and sacrificially because they know God is at work through them.

✦ Baptism is a point to which we can return in our own hearts. It gives us opportunity to establish a marker point in our lives that can serve as a reminder of our awakening to the greatness of the good news and our turning to Christ.

✦ Baptism is an opportunity for us to identify with the community of Christ followers. It is our chance through a common and shared expression of our faith to publicly identify ourselves not only with Christ but also with his people.

IS IT NECESSARY FOR ME TO BE BAPTIZED TO GO TO HEAVEN?

The Bible is clear that heaven is reserved for those who come to recognize their own spiritual bankruptcy and who rely on the gracious forgiveness that is offered through Christ and his death. That absolute dependence is faith. The Bible is also clear that those who truly depend on Christ express that dependence in tangible ways – particularly in transformed lives. These changes in attitude and behavior don't in any way earn a relationship with Christ. Rather, they reveal the presence of Christ in the lives of the individual. Baptism is one such

expression of faith in Christ. It does not replace faith as the one thing asked of me to receive salvation. But it does express faith.

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

Since baptism is an expression of trust in Christ's offer of eternal life, we believe that baptism should be entered into only by those who have come to trust in Christ. That trust includes a confidence in who he is and a confidence in what he offers. It includes as well a response to his offer of forgiveness and a response to his invitation to follow him.

DO WE BAPTIZE INFANTS?

Because of our understanding of who should be baptized (above #3), we do not baptize infants. They are unable to comprehend or respond to the claims of Christ or the truths of the gospel. It should be noted that those evangelical Christians who do practice infant baptism do not interpret baptism as a public expression of personal faith but rather a forward looking confidence that the children of Christ followers will themselves eventually follow their believing parents. With that in mind, we would consider it perfectly appropriate for those who have been baptized as infants in a forward looking hope of future conversion to be baptized as adults to confirm that the hope to which their infant baptism pointed has now become a reality.

HOW OLD DO YOU HAVE TO BE BEFORE YOU CAN BE BAPTIZED?

This is a parenting question and we yield to the wishes of the parent. However, as fellow parents, it is our observation that most – if not almost all of the children of Christ followers, share the beliefs of their parents when they are very young. As they grow older, some hold fast to those beliefs while others abandon them – some of those permanently and some for a season. In light of that reality, we encourage parents to consider carefully whether to baptize their very young children. They might certainly be able to repeat the right answers but that might not indicate that they have truly entered into a personal faith. Rather, they may just be mimicking the faith of their parents. We encourage waiting until the

child is at least reading and able to understand and discuss ideas. Again, this is an opinion – not clear teaching of scripture – and we certainly consider the wishes of parents who strongly desire to baptize younger children.

WHAT IF I WAS BAPTIZED AT SOME POINT IN THE PAST BUT CAME TO KNOW CHRIST PERSONALLY LATER?

This is one personal story:

"I was baptized at age eleven. I believed the things I had learned about Christ as a child – and to the best of my knowledge had responded to what I knew. But my Christianity at that point was primarily a culture I had adopted rather than a personal relationship with Christ. As a college student, I came to understand my need for Christ's forgiveness and I responded to him personally. Over the next couple of years, I came to believe that in my own situation, it was at that later time that I genuinely came into a relationship with Christ. I wanted to honor him publicly as my Savior and Lord so I was baptized again as an expression of my devotion to Christ."

Your experience might not be the same, but we know that many have similar experiences. If you believe you have come into a genuine relationship with Christ subsequent to a baptism in your past, why not be baptized now to declare publicly what Christ has done in bringing you to an authentic faith?