



Believers'
Baptism

Going On For Jesus – Have You Been Baptised?

Congratulations! You have come to new life in Christ. The very next step you have to take is to be baptised. In the New Testament baptism is part of the conversion process: repentance, faith, the gift of the Spirit, baptism and church membership all belong together.

From a New Testament viewpoint true commitment to Jesus will show itself in baptism. As Baptists we are convinced that the Bible has to be our ultimate authority both for what we believe and for how we live. So let's look at what the New Testament says about baptism.

Why Be Baptised?

Jesus commands us

The first reason for baptism is to be found in the Great Commission. Jesus, as he was about to ascend to his Father, said,

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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.”

(Matthew 28:18-20)

It is the Lord Jesus who commands his followers to be baptised. What right have you or I to disobey?

So baptism is not dependent upon feelings but rather is, in the first place, an act of obedience. Are you truly a disciple of Jesus? If so, you will want to keep his commandments. Jesus said,

“You are my friends if you do what I command” (John 15:14)

Jesus set an example

The command of Jesus is reinforced by his own example in being baptised himself (Matt 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21, 22). True, John the Baptist did not want to baptise him. But Jesus said “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15)

The same will be true of your baptism. In being baptised you will be doing what 'God requires'.

There is, of course, a difference between your baptism and the baptism of Jesus. Jesus did not submit to baptism with a view to washing his sins away. Rather in baptism he took his first step to the cross by identifying himself with us in our sinfulness.

In contrast, when you are baptised you will be identifying yourself with Jesus in his sinlessness. However, like Jesus you will be submitting yourself to the will of God as you 'do what God requires'. Just as Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of his ministry, so too your baptism will mark the beginning of your service for God.

The early church practised it

The first Christians took seriously this command of Jesus to baptise. We see this on the Day of Pentecost. Luke tells us that,

“When the people heard Peter's sermon they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles. ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ Peter replied, ‘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 2:37, 38)

Part of the process of becoming a Christian is being baptised.

Look carefully through Acts and you will find a whole host of references to baptism.

- The Ethiopian official was led to Christ and baptised by Philip (Acts 8:26-40);
- Paul was baptised by Ananias after meeting Jesus on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-19);
- Lydia, the business woman (Acts 16:11-15) and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-34) were baptised by Paul.

It is quite clear that baptism was an integral part of church life. Indeed, in those days it looks as if there was no such thing as an un-baptised Christian.

What Does Baptism Signify?

A declaration of union with Christ

Baptism is a dramatic way of declaring your solidarity with Jesus! The only prop needed is a large quantity of water - a baptistry will do, although in New Testament times (and still today for some) rivers, lakes and ponds were used.

The spectators (in church terms, the congregation) are asked to imagine that this water is a watery grave. So, when you go under water, you will identify yourself with Jesus who died and was buried, as for one split second you will disappear, like Jesus, off the face of the earth. Then, like Christ, you will symbolically rise from death. In baptism then you will in effect be saying, 'Yes, Lord, you died for me', 'Yes, Lord, you rose for me'.

Paul puts it this way:

“Don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised 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”

(Romans 6:3, 4; also Colossians 2:12)

An act of revolution

To be united with Christ in baptism is more than a dramatic statement of belief. From Paul's description of the newly baptised as rising to “live a new life” (Romans 6:4), it is clear that there are ethical implications too.

As you go under the water, you will be declaring your resolve to die to your old way of living and, as you rise from the water, you will be declaring your resolve to follow Christ's pattern of living. Baptism marks the moment of your public surrender to Christ, when you turn from sin and renounce evil, and when you publicly make Jesus Lord of your life and of your lifestyle.

The implications for your attitude to work and to money, to sex and to relationships, are enormous. It is no exaggeration to describe baptism as a revolutionary act.

A sign of cleansing

Another consequence of giving yourself to Jesus and committing yourself to him 'for keeps' is that you are forgiven. The baptistry does not just symbolise a great watery grave; it is also a 'bath', in which you wash away your sin. 'Get up and be baptised', said Ananias to Paul, 'and wash your sins away, calling on his name' (Acts 22:16).

Paul himself later describes baptism as 'the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,' (Titus 3:5, Also Ephesians 5:25, 26; Hebrews 10:22).

Of course, it is not the actual water that washes away sins, but rather our faith in Christ expressed in baptism.

- As Peter put it, it is “baptism that now saves you also - not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience towards God,” (1 Peter 3:21).
- Only the “blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Baptism is the sign of this inner cleansing.

A sign of the Spirit's presence

Another thing that happens when you give yourself to Jesus is that God through his Spirit comes to live in you and so becomes the source of your new life, a life marked by a new power, a new peace and a new joy (Acts 1:8; Rom 14:17). Baptism is the sign of this presence. It is because of this that Paul can speak of baptism as baptism in the Holy Spirit:

“for we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body”

(1 Corinthians 12:13)

Down through the centuries Baptists have found that God has indeed blessed the act of obedience by a fresh infilling with his Spirit. So as you are being baptised look to God and expect him to bless you anew with his Spirit - you will not be disappointed.

A confession of faith

Paul may well have had the act of baptism in mind when he wrote to the church at Rome

“if you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord’, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”

(Romans 10:9)

For baptism is the great moment of nailing your colours to the mast and declaring that you belong to Christ and to his people.

Don't be ashamed of making “your good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:12). Make sure you invite all your friends, neighbours and relatives. Experience has shown time and again that the very act of baptism forms a tremendous sounding board for the gospel.

A rite of initiation

Baptism is the normal way of entry into the church. Look at 1 Corinthians 12:13: “We were all baptised by one Spirit into one body.”

When we are baptised we identify ourselves not only with Jesus who died and rose that we might have life, but also with the people of God.

Similar thinking underlies Galatians 3:26, 27 where Paul's mention of faith leads him on to baptism which, in turn, leads him on to speak of the church in which we are “all one in Christ Jesus”. Baptism is God's way for you to join the church.

This is one reason why in most Baptist churches baptism and church membership are closely linked. Through baptism we become a member of Christ's church. We give concrete expression to this fact by becoming a member of our local Baptist church. Baptism is not for spiritual gypsies.

Questions People Ask Coming From Another Church Tradition

What if I were 'baptised' as a child?

Many people who turn to Christ have already been 'baptised' as a small child. Perhaps you are one of them. Should you now be baptised as a believer? Yes - Baptists believe that a baptism without faith is not the baptism of the Bible.

What if I have been confirmed?

If at your confirmation service you meaningfully confirmed the promise made on your behalf by your godparents, we rejoice. But the same argument still applies. The New Testament knows only one baptism - the 'one baptism' in which by 'faith' Jesus is confessed as 'Lord' (Ephesians 4:5).

Is infant baptism found in the book of Acts?

Baptists maintain that infant baptism is not found in the New Testament - not even when Luke tells us that somebody and their family were baptised (Acts 16:15, 33; 1 Corinthians 1:16).

For us today a family normally means father, mother and two children; but in the first century it was considerably extended and included not just the immediate family, but relatives and servants. Careful reading of Acts 16:30-34 shows that if "all the family" included young children, then the young children not only listened to Paul and Silas preaching at midnight but also believed in God!

It is a dangerous practice to read a doctrine into the silences of Scripture - especially when elsewhere Scripture is quite clear. Personal faith is the one indispensable aspect of baptism.

If you lived in the Gobi desert, your pastor might be compelled to lose the symbolism of baptism by immersion and instead pour water on you in the name of the triune God. But while we can manage on less water, we can't do without genuine faith.

Some Practical Questions

How old do I have to be to be baptised?

If personal faith is the necessary condition the age is not important. Baptists do not practise 'adult' baptism; they practise 'believers' baptism. For that reason Baptists have avoided trying to set a minimum age.

The time to be baptised is the time when you “turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.” (Acts 20:21).

However we, and our society, recognise that some of the important decisions in life require some maturity (for example: 14 yrs to baby-sit, 16 yrs to leave school, 18 yrs to vote, 20 yrs to marry without parental permission)

Likewise, some discernment is required with regard to the decision and commitment to follow Christ. When is the faith being expressed the faith of the young person and when is it the expression of their parent's faith? That distinction is not always easy to make.

As a young person makes the transition from childhood to adult life, their own values and priorities will begin to become apparent. When they have established their own identity, it may well be the time when baptism is right for them.

As it is the Church that baptises an individual on behalf of Christ, it is important for the Church to do its best to make sure that there is some evidence of genuine Christian faith – irrespective of age.

Where there is doubt, delay is the best option. For it's better to delay the baptism of a true believer (until that genuine Christian faith becomes clear), than it is to baptise someone who is not actually a believer and give them a false assurance of their salvation.

While there is no guarantee that the Church will get that assessment right every time, it is nevertheless an important responsibility that cannot be ignored.

Do I have to give a testimony?

In many Baptist churches it is customary for those being baptised to give personal testimonies to God's work in their own lives.

For, although baptism itself is a declaration of commitment to Christ, it's often helpful for non-Christians if those being baptised elaborate on this confession and tell of what Christ means to them. Sometimes those being baptised find it easier to speak about their relationship with Christ if they are interviewed in the service by the pastor.

No church would want to make the public giving of such a testimony a necessary condition for baptism - in New Testament terms the actual baptism is the act of witness.

On the other hand, there is much to be said for those being baptised making the most of this special opportunity.

What to do now?

Ask yourself this question: ***What is there to keep me from being baptised?***

If you've not been baptised and you would like to – or you have more questions – then please contact the pastor or one of the leadership team and we'll arrange for someone to meet with you and talk through baptism with you.

Don't put the issue off for another day – follow through now and enter into all that the Lord has for you!