



Baptism is a special and important act of obedience that helps us focus on what Jesus has done for those who believe in Him. Because of its importance, it's worth taking the time to understand and appreciate. The enemy has tried to distort the meaning of baptism. Thankfully, the Word of God is authoritative, clear, and sufficient, so, with God's help, we can *rightly* understand and appreciate baptism and *avoid* pitfalls. This guide will help you to think rightly about baptism. While this guide is thorough, it is certainly not exhaustive; our prayer is that you will be blessed by the Lord as you work through it.

*"Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, **equip you with everything good that you may do his will**, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."*
Hebrews 13:20–21

The Meaning of "Baptism"

The word baptism literally means "immersion," the act of putting something completely under water, but the Bible uses the word "baptism" in different ways. For instance, Galatians 3:27 talks about being *baptized into Christ*. 1 Corinthians 12:12–13 talks about being *baptized in the Spirit*. In Acts 8:36–39, the Ethiopian Eunuch was *baptized into water*. We learn from these passages that baptism can entail being immersed into Christ, the Holy Spirit, and water. Woah!

When we think of baptism, we usually think of immersion into water. In the New Testament, though, references to baptism usually mean being baptized into Christ (*Galatians 3:27, Romans 6:3*) or the baptism of the Holy Spirit (*1 Corinthians 12:13, Matthew 3:11, John 1:33*). These events, being baptized into Christ and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, reference the moment of salvation. At salvation, the Holy Spirit causes the believer to be spiritually united to Christ. So, believers experience being baptized into Christ and the Holy Spirit the moment they first believe in God through faith.

Since we usually think of baptism as immersion into water, this can be quite confusing. This confusion has led some to believe that water baptism is necessary for salvation. God's Word shows us the thief on the cross next to Jesus was not baptized in water, but he was assured by Jesus that very day that he would be with Him in paradise (*Luke 23:39–43*). We must always remember we are saved by grace alone through faith alone, not through baptism into water (*Titus 3:5, Ephesians 2:8–9*).

When God saves us, He does an amazing and spiritual work: He makes the hard heart soft; He makes the dirty heart clean. This event is invisible and unique for each believer; we cannot see God do this the way we might watch a dirty plate being scrubbed clean. But because of faith, the believer can be assured this has taken place. Believers may go through seasons of doubt, but ultimately God desires for His children to be assured of their salvation (Note: 1 John is a great book to help believers *know* that they *know* they are saved.).

Because the baptism into Christ and being baptized into the Holy Spirit *is* invisible, water baptism, plays an important role in tangibly and externally expressing what has already taken place at the time of salvation by grace through faith. In water baptism, the believer says, "Lord, even though I

did not see You wash my heart clean with my own eyes, I believe in faith that You did. Now, as I am baptized into water, I am showing You, Lord, and everyone else present, that I believe You have saved me.” Passing through the waters is an external symbol of what God has done internally to save a person. In other words, when Christians are baptized into water, they declare they have already been baptized into Christ, they have been immersed in his death and resurrection so that sin and the grave no longer have a hold (*Romans 6:1-4, Colossians 2:11-14*)! Hallelujah!! Praise God!!

DISCUSSION

What are some reasons people might choose to get immersed in water before they have been saved by God? Perhaps this is your story, if so, please share it.

Why is it unhelpful to “get dunked” before true saving faith?

Have you been saved by God? If yes, do you desire to get baptized? Why or why not?

Following baptisms on a Sunday morning, if someone turned to you and asked, “What’s the gospel?” How would you respond? (Be sure to mention repentance and faith.)

The History of Baptism

Read Luke 3:1–21.

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by baptizing others. This practice appears as though it came out of nowhere, but the people were actually quite familiar with it. In this time, sacred baths and ritual washings were prevalent in the culture. These washings typically took place when someone was converting to a new religion and were usually self-administered, but John called people to be baptized by him which was a more humbling act.

The baptism of repentance (*Luke 3:3*) was especially humbling considering John was preaching to a primarily Jewish audience. They already had methods for repentance written down in the Law of God (*Genesis–Deuteronomy*) and would have viewed John’s baptism as unnecessary. The Jewish understanding was that their ancestors had been baptized, or immersed, into Moses (*1 Corinthians 10:1–5*), their spiritual leader. As their leader, Moses received great favor from God and this favor

extended to them also. Moses was the one who had led God's people out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land, so, in the Jews' eyes, being baptized into Moses meant being saved.

With this as the backdrop, John the Baptist proclaimed to the Jews they needed more: they needed repentant hearts! Though their forefathers passed through the waters of the Red Sea during the Exodus, they needed to "pass through the waters" of baptism in a posture of repentance. Repentance (and humility!) ran counter to the legalistic, "self-righteous" attitudes the Jews had developed over time. It was not the baptism in water that had the power to save them, but rather the grace of God!

John was calling people to repent and to put their repentance into action by being baptized. As the people turned away from their sin, the only place to turn was to their Savior. This is important to note: faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin. To turn away from the sinfulness of the world (repentance) means the individual is turning toward Christ (faith). Repentance and faith occur simultaneously as someone is saved by God. This is why John preached the importance of repentance. He urged people to turn away from the world and toward God, helping them to prepare in faith for the One Who would baptize with the Holy Spirit ([Luke 3:16](#)). Jesus is the *only* Savior Who can rescue the lost from despair and judgment. As shown by John the Baptist, faith in God is the only solution for the forgiveness of sins.

Baptism is still humbling. Because of this, people put off being baptized. When someone comes up out of the water with wet hair and clothes after having shared his/her testimony in front of the whole Church, he/she doesn't exactly look refined and in control. *That is the point.* This step of obedience, baptism in water, is a reminder that we have given up our semblance of control, repented from our old way of living, and instead are choosing to look undignified as we worship Jesus and all He has done for us.

DISCUSSION

Do you have any hesitations about getting baptized?

Jesus' Example of Baptism

Read Matthew 3.

Why did Jesus get baptized by John the Baptist? Obviously, Jesus did not need to repent. Jesus did, however, want to set an example for all His followers, and He used this baptism as an opportunity to demonstrate great humility. As Leon Morris puts it, "Jesus could have been up there in front standing with John and calling on sinners to repent. Instead, he was down there with the sinners making himself one with them in the process of the salvation that he would in due course accomplish." (PNTC)

Jesus sets a powerful and humble example here. He came to seek and to save the lost, a mission that required Him to take the place of all those He came to save ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). Just as Jesus "shouldn't have had to take on the sins of His followers," Jesus "shouldn't have had to undergo baptism." Jesus' baptism depicts His mission and demonstrates His humility, obedience, and submission to the Father. All of this took place as a part of God's perfect plan!

The picture of Jesus' baptism becomes even more powerful as we see the ways He reenacted Israel's journey toward the promised land:

Israel	Jesus
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Passed through the waters of the Red Sea• Tested by God for 40 years in the wilderness• Failed testing repeatedly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Passed through the waters of baptism• Tempted by Satan for 40 days in the wilderness• Overcame Satan's temptation by quoting from the Law in Deuteronomy<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ A book that emphasized Israel's learnings from their time in the wilderness

Israel failed; Jesus would not fail. Israel strayed from God's commands; Jesus would not stray. Passing through the Red Sea prepared Israel for a long journey toward the promised land; Jesus' baptism prepared Him for the journey toward the cross. Jesus knew the road to the cross would be hard and require Him to lay down His life in humility. He chose to submit to the Father's will. His baptism was the beginning of his ministry, a ministry of humility and hardship.

Jesus' baptism was an act of consecration. Consecration is the act of making or declaring something sacred. The only other time in the Bible someone was consecrated through a washing by water is in Exodus 29:4 when Aaron and his sons were being consecrated for priesthood. This sacred washing set them apart for their important new roles as priests. This was just a shadow, a symbol, of the greater consecration that would take place through Jesus' baptism, and *he* became our great high priest ([Hebrews 4:14–16](#)). Jesus was baptized to reveal his mission to be our perfect high priest, atoning for our sins, and creating a way for us to come before our heavenly Father in confidence.

Still, in His goodness, God goes a step further! After salvation, *all* followers of Jesus are consecrated into His service as priests, set apart for service to God ([1 Peter 2:9](#)). In other words, baptism follows Jesus' example of humility and marks the Christian for a life of faithful service in

the Church and in the world. Those who are baptized also invite their local church to hold them accountable. Once you have been baptized, it is wise to become a member of your local church to reinforce this loving accountability.

It is important for someone who has been genuinely saved to respond by immediately seeking to be baptized since, once saved, the believer has become a priest in the eyes of God. Baptism is a way of consecrating that position. The one who is baptized in water declares, "I have been set apart from this world. I am totally and completely operating in the service of the Lord." In a traditional Jewish wedding, both the bride and the groom are immersed in water separately in a ritual called the mikvah to symbolize spiritual cleansing. In a similar way, the Church's groom, Jesus Christ, immersed Himself in water and invites His bride, the Church, to follow suit. For these reasons, if you are saved and have not yet been baptized, we encourage you to take that next step of obedience.

Read Acts 8:26–40.

DISCUSSION

In your own words, why is baptism following salvation an urgent matter?

When you are "consecrated" through baptism you invite the church to walk with you and hold you accountable as you serve Jesus. Discuss why this is such a sweet blessing.

The Importance of Baptism

Read Matthew 3:13–17, 28:16–20.

Based on these passages, why is baptism important?

Read Ephesians 2:8–9; John 1:12, 3:16, 5:24; Romans 3:21–31, 10:9; Galatians 3:1–9.

DISCUSSION

What is the common thread between all these passages?

We are saved by: _____

Based on the above reading, why is it problematic to believe we are saved by anything apart from, or in addition to, the faith given us by God's grace?

It is extremely important to recognize as Christians that we have been saved by grace alone through faith alone! Genuine faith is a powerful and beautiful gift from God—it will produce good fruit (This is the meaning of James 2:14–26). But the fruit is not what saves—it is solely faith that saves. True and genuine faith, as James mentions, is accompanied by works. Therefore, a telltale sign of a true believer is this: over time he or she will grow at better imitating Christ in his/her works.

DISCUSSION

If you have been saved by God, where have you seen godly fruit in your life? Take a moment to boast about what the Lord has done.

Your Example of Baptism

This section is for those who have read each prior section, have a clear testimony of salvation by grace through faith, and desire to be baptized to publicly declare you are a follower of Jesus Christ. If this is you, Redeemer Bible Church is thrilled to celebrate what God has done.

Below you will find the questions you will be asked during your baptism. Please write out answers to these questions and discuss them with the person discipling you. Keep in mind that baptism is a beautiful picture of the fact you have been saved by grace through faith. You were once dead, but now you have been made alive! (*Ephesians 2:1-5*) This means that comments like, “I’ve always been a Christian,” or “I have always believed,” can’t be true. So, share the story of when and how God rescued you from your sin.

DISCUSSION

What led you to see your need for salvation through Jesus Christ?

Do you confess that you have turned from sin and placed your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord?

When do you believe this happened? (A date/time is not necessary)

How has your life been transformed since you began walking with Jesus?

Why do you want to be baptized?

In Matthew 28:16–20, disciples of Jesus Christ are called to go make disciples and to baptize them. Of the believers in your life, who has been most instrumental in discipling you (helping you to follow Jesus)? If possible, this is the person who should baptize you.

Given how significant a baptism is in the life of a believer, many times in the weeks immediately following baptism, believers see increased spiritual warfare. This is not always the case, but it is something to look out for. The enemy hates it when people publicly declare their allegiance to Christ, but this should not cause us to fear (*1 John 4:4*). While there is no need to fear (because you have the Spirit of God dwelling in you), it is wise to create a plan with the person discipling you of how you will remain rooted and grounded in God's Word following your baptism with the help of your mentor and your church.

DISCUSSION

What are some potential ways the enemy might try to discourage you following your baptism? How can you specifically prepare yourself?

Discuss how you can best put on the armor of God described in Ephesians 6.

To follow in the footsteps of Jesus is a great honor. In obedience to Christ, there is great joy. *Psalm 128:1* says, "Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways!" If the Lord is leading you to be baptized, you can trust He is leading you into what is good and right. You will be blessed in your obedience to Christ and encouraged by this tangible reminder of all that God has done for you. As you are immersed in the water and rise up, be reminded of how God, by His grace through faith, has washed your heart clean of all sin. And after your own baptism, any time you witness other baptisms, let them serve as reminders of God's faithfulness to cleanse us from our sin.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
Matthew 28:19–20

RBC Baptism Doctrinal Statement:

We believe Christian baptism is an ordinance instituted by Christ to display who is part of His Church, reserved for those who have been saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus. Baptism is an obedient and public declaration of the believer's salvation in Christ; it is not a means of salvation. Baptism is a picture of the believer's union to Christ, and expresses the believer has been buried with Him, raised with Him to new life, and has been cleansed from sin. Full immersion into water best depicts this all-consuming, transformative work of God. The Lord graciously bestows this ordinance to His children to tangibly illustrate the work he has accomplished by His grace. Finally, baptism marks the believer for a life of faithful service in the Church and in the world. (Ezekiel 36:24-27, Luke 3:21-22; Matthew 28:19; Acts 8:26-40; Acts 10:47-48; Romans 6:3-4; Ephesians 2:8-9; Colossians 2:11-12, 1 Peter 3:18-22)