

initiated into Israel. Similarly, through baptism in the name of Jesus, one is initiated into or identifies with that community of Christ's followers called the "church." We see this in Acts 2:41 when, after baptism, three thousand people were said to be "added" to the young church.

According to 1 Corinthians 12, water baptism represents the incredible reality that we have been spiritually initiated into the body of Christ, the church, that we have become united with one another through Jesus Christ.

Questions about Baptism

Oftentimes, followers of Jesus Christ may have questions about baptism that keep them from responding to Jesus' call. Let's consider several of these:

Question #1: "I'm a Christian, but shouldn't I wait until I become more mature in my faith or until it feels right before being baptized?"

Jesus' instructions, as well as the Apostles' example in the book of Acts, confirm that baptism is a foundational aspect of following Christ. In Acts, those who were baptized were baptized immediately after trusting in the gospel or "good news" about Jesus (cf. Acts 8:36; 10:47; 16:33). The only reason to delay baptism is if one is unsure about his or her faith in Jesus Christ. If you have put off baptism, there is no better time than the present to obey the call of Christ as a disciple. It will be a joy to you and to everyone who witnesses your testimony of faith in Jesus Christ.

Question #2: "If I was baptized as an infant, do I need to be baptized again?"

The New Testament very clearly describes baptism as a second step. The first step is always faith in the gospel. This saving faith in Jesus Christ involves turning from our old way of sin and self (repentance) and trusting in Jesus as Lord. Since an infant cannot exercise this kind of saving faith, the faith that "comes from hearing... the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17), such "baptisms" cannot take the place of the baptism we've been exploring. If you have become a child of God by trusting in Jesus Christ, then regardless of what took place in your past or what decisions were made for you, God is calling you to personally express your faith through baptism.

Question #3: "Is baptism necessary for salvation through Jesus Christ?"

Whenever Paul talks about salvation, about being forgiven by and reconciled to God through Jesus, he always points his readers to the importance of faith: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through 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) By definition, faith is a matter of the heart, not an outward action. But genuine faith always expresses itself outwardly. Baptism is one of those expressions. When the Apostle Peter shared the "good news" about Jesus with Cornelius and his family in Acts 10, we read that while "Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message." (10:44) This pouring out of the Holy Spirit on those who believed drove Peter to ask, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." (10:47) The reality of baptism did not lead to new life. The reality of new life led to baptism.

Expressing Your Faith

If you have turned in repentance from your sins, and have personally accepted the grace of God made possible by Jesus' death and resurrection; if it is your desire to follow him as Lord in all things, then God is calling you to publicly testify to these truths in the waters of baptism. We invite you to talk to someone in leadership to find out more.

We pray that God will give you the same joyful enthusiasm he gave to the Ethiopian eunuch who heard the gospel through Philip and declared, "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, 38)



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Baptism

an expression of faith

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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

—Matthew 28:19

After his resurrection, but before he returned to his Father, Jesus instructed his followers to "make disciples of all nations." This "Great Commission," as it is often called, is nothing less than God's plan for reconciling men and women to himself through Jesus Christ. According to Jesus, one of the ways in which this commission was to be carried out was by "baptizing" those who responded to his invitation.

When we look at the record of the early church in the book of Acts we find instance after instance in which Jesus' call to baptize was faithfully carried out by his followers (Acts 2:41; 8:2, 38, 9:18; 10:48; 16:33; 18:8; 19:5). In fact, it is difficult to find in the New Testament any follower of Jesus who was not baptized in water.

But what is baptism? What does it mean to be baptized? Since Jesus himself includes baptism as such a foundational part of what it means to follow him in new life, it's critical we understand this idea.



When many people today hear the word "baptism," they might immediately think of some sort of baby dedication. Others may picture a long line of people in white robes walking into a river. For still others, baptism is a mystical act that guarantees a fresh start in life. But to understand baptism, we must go beyond these cultural ideas and listen to what God himself has revealed through the writings of Scripture.

The word we translate "baptism" is actually just an English version of the Greek word *baptizo*. The word literally means "to dip, to submerge, to immerse." According to the New Testament, there are two basic reasons for baptism:

Reason #1: Baptism is a demonstration of saving faith.

After Jesus returned to the Father, the Apostle Peter announced to the people of Jerusalem that God had "made this Jesus, whom

you crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:36) When the people heard this message, "they were out of the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" (2:37) Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." (2:38) Verse 41 describes those who came forward to be baptized: "Those who accepted his message were baptized."

Jesus himself would later appear to Paul and declare that those forgiven by God "are sanctified by faith in me." (Acts 26:18) This is precisely what is meant in Acts 2:41 by the phrase they "accepted his message," that is, they believed that Jesus truly was "both Lord and Christ," and so this saving faith was almost immediately expressed through baptism.

But why does God call for such a demonstration? Jesus himself declared, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:32) When the New Testament describes the formal expression of such an "acknowledgment" or "confession," it does not mention altar calls or prayers. It calls the believer to baptism.

So baptism is a way in which we can express our faith publicly by identifying ourselves with Jesus Christ.

Reason #2: Baptism is a representation of saving grace.

Someone may ask, "But why demonstrate our faith in this way, with water?" Well, to understand why God uses this kind of act, it's important to recognize that, in regard to the follower of Christ, Scripture describes two distinct, but interrelated baptisms.

The first is the water baptism we've been describing. The second is an inward spiritual baptism that takes place when one is reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Water baptism simply paints a vivid picture that points back to the spiritual baptism that occurred when we first believed the "good news" about Christ.

How does baptism outwardly illustrate what has taken place inwardly through faith? Consider what Scripture reveals:

Baptism is a picture of being buried and raised with Christ in his death and resurrection.

Listen to what the Apostle Paul tells us about the spiritual baptism that one experiences when they trust in Jesus Christ as Lord:

"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." (Romans 6:3, 4)



When a believer in Jesus Christ is submerged (as the word *baptizo* indicates) under the water, they illustrate their burial with Jesus, that is, that they have died to their old life lived apart from God. In the same way, when they are brought out of the water, this is a picture of a person's resurrection with Christ to "new life."

Baptism is a picture of being washed clean of sin by God's Spirit.

Listen to how Paul described this reality:

"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior..." (Titus 3:4-6)

Notice the water words Paul uses here, like "wash" and "pour." Our bodies are "washed" in baptism because our hearts are first washed by God's Spirit. When we trust in Jesus Christ, we are cleansed of all our sins because of his cross; we are renewed. Baptism is a powerful picture of this "washing of regeneration."

Baptism is a picture of being joined to the body of Christ by God's Spirit.

Paul described this truth for us when he wrote:

"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." (1 Corinthians 12:13)

When a Gentile (a non-Jew) wanted to convert to Judaism, he or she had to go through a ceremonial washing in order to be

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