



# Baptism & Church Membership

Once you have given your life to Jesus, the next step of faith is to be baptised. In the New Testament, baptism was part of the conversion experience. In fact the evidence of the early church makes it clear that there was no such thing as an unbaptised believer. When you professed faith,

you were baptised on that profession of faith. All believers in the New Testament church were baptised. Although baptism existed before Christ – He is the one who has given baptism to the church and it has been carried out in the church of Jesus Christ for 2000 years. It is important for us to understand that baptism is not an optional extra of faith, but it is an act of obedience to Christ Himself, who calls His followers to be baptised. This act of obedience is not about how you feel, but about are you going to be obedient or not.

**Discuss -** (In group / or small groups)

**Q1)** Why should Christians be baptised?

**Q2)** Why do you think some Christians don't get baptised / or are put off?

**Q3)** What do you think can happen when someone is baptised ?

## **Point 1 – There is only one baptism found in The New Testament – “Believer’s Baptism!”.**

The whole witness of the New Testament is one of an individual, being personally responsible to come into a relationship with God, through Christ. As a result of this, the New Testament is full of examples of adults being baptised, but none of babies. Infant Baptism is NOT found in the New Testament. There are a number of occasions where families are mentioned in regard to being baptised, but there is no evidence that there were babies or young infants present.

Believers Baptism is the concept that someone has to have come to the age where they can both repent of their sin and claim Jesus for their own, through personal faith and profession. Jesus made it clear that we were to, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News. **THOSE WHO BELIEVE**, baptise them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As someone once said, “God has no grandchildren.” You cannot inherit salvation through the faith of your parents. Giving your life to Jesus has to be a personal act of the individual. Therefore Baptism has to be done on profession of an individual’s personal faith. The practice of the early church was baptism by full / total immersion and this was the standard practice of the church right up to the middle ages. Mark 16 v 15- 16

## **Point 2 - Both in example and teaching, Jesus calls us to be baptised.**

One of the truths we read about Jesus is that He lived a perfect human life and therefore in every sense did not need to be baptised. John’s baptism was a baptism for repentance of sin – however Jesus lived a completely sinless life. Yet we see Jesus submits Himself to be baptised. The reason why Jesus did this was to set His people an example to follow, for just as He was baptised, He calls us to be baptised to. Secondly, many people believe that Jesus was baptised to identify Himself with humanity and its sin. For Jesus came to save humanity and destroy the root and curse of sin. Alongside of this physical example Jesus gave the command to His disciples that as they bare witness to Him and people came to faith they were to baptise them. John 14 v 21 makes it clear that if we truly love Jesus we will obey what He commands us to do. Baptism is not a suggestion, or a request – It is a command given by Jesus Himself. There is a real sense that Jesus wants His people to publicly acknowledge Him and declare that they are not ashamed of the Gospel. In fact the promise is, that if we acknowledge Jesus before man – He will acknowledge us before His Father in Matthew 10 v 32 – 42,

**Point 3 – What baptism means and CAN do.** Baptism is a dramatic way that we declare our oneness with Jesus. It is a public commitment to repent of our sins, leave our old life behind and follow Jesus and His example for eternity. The act of baptism has the power to more fully unite us with Christ both in His death and resurrection. Through the processes of faith exerted, the blessing of God for obedience to Christ’s command and the work of the Holy Spirit, baptism can be a place of powerful cleansing, affirming and empowering. Read Romans 6 v 1 – 11. As we go under the water there is a real sense of being united in Christ’s death. This means for us, a dying to our old life, a washing away of failures, sin, weaknesses and hurts. As we come up out of the water, there is a sense of being united in the resurrection of Jesus and an empowering of the individual’s life. If real faith is present, many believe that there can also be a more powerful filling of the Holy Spirit.

## **Point 4 – Through baptism we are initiated into His Church**

Time and time again we are told that through baptism we are united and become part of the body of Christ. This body is defined for us in 1 Corinthians 12 as being the church of Jesus Christ. When we talk about the church, we are talking about all those who are born again, spirit filled and have their names written in the Lambs book of life. Although there are many different Christian denominations out there, Baptism unites you with all the true Christians in those denominations for there is only ONE church of Christ. In the New Testament believers were BOTH united to the universal church of Christ through conversion and baptism and yet belonged to local expressions of that body of Christ. We see that even the Apostles recognise the authority and oversight of these local expressions of Christ’s body, as in their letters they commend people to these fellowships, seek financial help, and look to introduce their own ministries to these local fellowships. There is a real sense that we are called to make a covenant commitment to a local body of believers, coming under the authority of the local church and discharging both our callings and gifts to move forward the witness and ministry of that fellowship, for the Kingdom of God. For some churches this local covenant is expressed through formal agreement / membership of the local church. Acts 2 v 38 – 41

