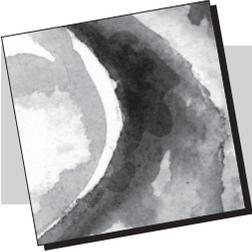


# baptism*basics*



## 1 Where it all begins

Every family has its own way of doing things. Some of those ways may seem strange to people outside that family; but to the family itself, they are an important part of who they are and how they operate.

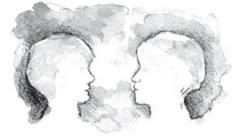
The Christian family is no different. One of its 'strange' ways is **baptism**. From the very beginning of the church, this was the way that a person marked their **new birth** into the Christian family. In this booklet we are going to look at why this was, and why it is still so important. Thinking this through will help you...

- **If you have recently become a Christian.** You know Jesus has forgiven all the things you have done wrong and that you have started a new life with him. Baptism is now about completing that process and **nauling your colours to the mast** in the way the Bible tells us to.

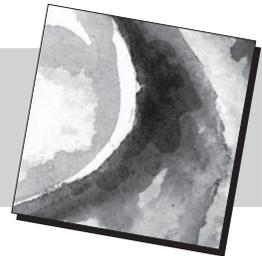
- **If you have been a Christian for some time** – perhaps even for many years – but, for some reason or other, have never got round to being baptised. Perhaps you were never told about it or were in a church that does not practise baptism in the way that the Bible talks about it.

*So, before we go any further, let's start by reviewing your journey of faith. How did you come to this point? If you are studying this in a group or with another person, then why not share – briefly! – where it all began for you and the journey that brought you to be reading this today.*

Whatever your background and history, we want to help you look at what the Bible says about baptism to help you determine your next step.



## 2 Where 'baptism' comes from



The word **baptism** is exclusively a religious word in our society today – although that is not how it started life! It comes from a Greek word (the New Testament part of the Bible was written in Greek) that meant **to dip or submerge**. From Greek writings we find that you could –

- **baptise** a cup into a bowl of water to fill it
- **baptise** a piece of cloth into a dye to penetrate its every fibre and change its colour
- **baptise** onions to pickle them

- you could even talk about a ship being **baptised** when it was sitting on the bottom of the sea, completely waterlogged!

*What do these different pictures start to bring home to us about Christian **baptism**?*




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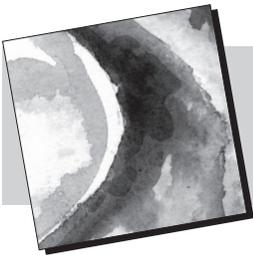


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We have lots of equivalent words today in the English language for baptise: words like **dip, dunk, plunge, immerse**. None of these sounds **religious** in the way **baptise** does. But remember: the word **baptism** wouldn't have sounded religious to the people of those days. In the Bible, baptism is about dipping, plunging, immersing a Christian in water – but for reasons far more special than those of our cup, cloth or ship! This ordinary word sums up some rather extra-ordinary things that God has planned for you through Jesus!



## 3 Who is baptism for?

The Bible is very clear that baptism is *only* for people who have repented of their sins, put their faith in Jesus and are resolved to live a completely new life with him. If these things are in place, then it does not matter how old we are, how bad we have been, what struggles we might still have.

What we do need to note is that there are **no** examples in the Bible of people getting baptised who had not been **born again**. It was never offered to –

- people who were still searching for faith in Jesus
- people who thought that a religious ritual would save them
- people who were not prepared to change and leave their old life behind
- people who were not old enough to understand what they were doing for themselves (i.e., babies or young children)

*Look at the following seven examples from the book of Acts (the story of the newly-founded Christian church) and note how belief in Jesus always came **before** baptism, and never **after** it, or **instead** of it. Write down the key phrases from each verse.*



Acts 2 v37-38

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Acts 2 v41

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Acts 8 v12

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Acts 10 v44-48

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Acts 16 v14-15

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Acts 16 v29-31

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Acts 18 v8

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*In the Bible, **belief** always comes before **baptism**.*

Baptism, then, is for those who have come to **believe in Jesus** and are resolved to live under his direction.

The interesting thing to note is that **baptism happened every single time** that someone put their faith in Jesus and was born again. It was not seen as –

- an optional extra
- a stage for **advanced** Christians
- something to think about for the future

*Baptism was the normal, next (and fairly immediate!) step for **everyone** who became a Christian. No one was exempted from it - and no one asked to be!*

In fact, baptism was so normal that people who had become Christians would even ask to be baptised as soon as they came to believe in Jesus:



**Read:**  
Acts 8 v34-36

If we are serious about being a follower of Jesus and have put our trust in him, then baptism is the inevitable next step. Jesus himself made clear that it is not an **optional extra**, but an **essential aspect** of being his disciple.

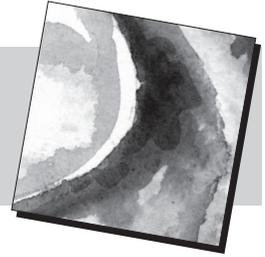


**Think:**

- *Have I repented of my sins and received Jesus' forgiveness for them for myself?*
- *Have I resolved to leave behind my old life and walk with Jesus from now on?*

If you have, then there is no reason why you should not go ahead and be baptised. Who is baptism for? It is for you!

## 4 What baptism is about



If you are going to be baptised, it is obviously very important that you understand what it is about and what is happening in it. Doing it because Jesus says so would be reason enough; but doing it with understanding will bring so much more to you!

When we are baptised, something very powerful happens. It is so powerful that the Bible uses a number of very powerful images to get across the full depth of it to us.

### **1. *Washing for dirty people***

All of us know how wonderful it is to get clean after doing a dirty job or getting home on a hot sticky day. A bath or shower at such a time is so cleansing and refreshing! But how much more refreshing it is when Jesus cleans us up from all that dirt that is **inside** us – dirt that has been there for years, that others may not even have known about, but that we know has crippled us inside and stopped us being the people God meant us to be!

Baptism is a powerful symbol, given by God himself, that Jesus has indeed **washed us clean**, by dying on the cross **in our place** and paying the price for **our** sins, so that we could be brought into God's presence and become his friends.

Let's look at some Bible verses that see baptism as the outward sign that the inward **washing** or cleaning-up has taken place. There is space for you to write down the key phrases or comments of your own:



**Read:**

Acts 22 v16

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1Corinthians 6 v9-11

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Ephesians 5 v25-26

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Titus 3 v3-7

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Hebrews 10 v19-22

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1Peter 3 v21-22

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*Baptism serves as God's sign and pledge that we really have been washed clean - on the inside, where it matters. No matter what we have done, or what we might yet do, the blood of Jesus has washed us clean - for ever!*

**Think:** Do I know that I have been washed clean from everything I have ever thought, said or done that was wrong in God's sight – not because of me, but because of what Jesus did on the cross for me?...



If so, then it is **washing time!**

- **Time** to declare – to myself, to family, to friends, to the devil and all his demons – that I am a washed person.
- **Time** to get baptised!

## 2. **Burial for dead people**

When someone dies, we do not keep the body around; we bury it. Burial is the final break. It ends, once and for all, our contact with this life. It is, as someone once said, **the ultimate farewell.**

The Bible describes baptism as a **burial**. It is our final break with our old life, our acknowledgement that we cannot go back to it any more.

But baptism is a **resurrection** as well as a burial. It symbolises the start of a new life, just as much as the end of the old one – and all because of the burial and resurrection of Jesus!

**Read:** *Romans 6 v1-14 (You can also read similar teaching in Colossians 2 v9-15)*

How does Paul describe baptism in this passage? (v4)

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What is he confident will happen to us in the future? (v5,v8)

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What does he expect the result to be for us right here and now? (v6-7,11-14)

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*Baptism is the declaration that I have died to my old life and have started a new life with Jesus – and no one can now rob me of that! It cannot **stop** me sinning (it isn't magic!) – but it is God's reminder to me that I now no longer need to sin.*



**Think:** *Do I want to show that my old life is over and done with? Do I want to stand with Jesus in his victory over sin, death and judgement? Do I want to see the hold of the devil broken in my life in practical ways?...*

If I do, then it is **burial time!**

- **Time** to make the final break.
- **Time** to confess and bury things that have dogged my footsteps.
- **Time** to say the ultimate farewell to how I used to live.
- **Time** to get baptised!

### **3. Oneness for separated people**

The Bible tells us that, before we came to faith in Jesus, we were cut off from God, shut out from his purposes and promises, without hope for this world or the next, as we see in the following passage:



**Read:**  
*Ephesians 2 v11-13*

Because of his death on the cross, however, and through our faith in him, Jesus has taken us – **separated people** – and not only brought us to

himself, but actually **made us one** with himself! Baptism declares that we have become **one** with Jesus; what can be said about him can now be said about me!

*What are the key phrases in the following verses that speak of our **oneness** with Christ through baptism?*

Romans 6 v3

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Romans 6 v5

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Galatians 3 v26-28

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In baptism we are identifying ourselves absolutely and completely with Jesus Christ, and he with us. We are saying, not only that Jesus was crucified, buried and raised **for me**; but that I believe I have been crucified, buried and raised *with him*! His death is my death; his burial is my burial; his resurrection is my resurrection. I have been baptised *into* him; I have been *clothed* with him; and because of that I am no longer separated from my Father.

*In baptism, we are identifying ourselves completely with Christ; in fact, we are taking on his very identity! Our identity is now secondary to his; whatever we were, whatever we have done, we are now something new and different. In him we really are "a new creation" (2Corinthians 5 v17).*



**Think:** *Is that what I want to declare has happened to me? Am I ready to embrace a completely new identity – that of Jesus himself (which is so much better than mine!)?*

If so, then it is **oneness time**:

- **Time** to stop thinking of myself as the old person that I was.
- **Time** to embrace Christ's identity for me and in me.
- **Time** to get baptised!

#### **4. Fullness for empty people**

In the New Testament baptism in water is very closely linked with **baptism in the Holy Spirit**. God does not want us to be simply immersed in the water (a very momentary event); he wants us to be immersed (just as completely!) in his Holy Spirit. He wants us not just **clean**, but **full** – full of the very life of Jesus, full of his love and joy, full of his peace and power; in fact, so full that it is as if **streams of living water** were flowing from within us continuously (see John 7 v37-38). Only when we are full of the Spirit of Jesus we can live the life of Jesus in the way he intended it to be.



*In the following verses, note how the coming of the Holy Spirit is closely linked to the act of baptism – although not always in the same order!*

Matthew 3 v16

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Acts 2 v38-41

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Acts 10 v44-48

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Acts 19 v1-7

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Titus 3 v4—6

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When people were not baptised with the Holy Spirit at the time of their baptism, the church took steps to pray for this to happen at the earliest opportunity:

**Read:**

Acts 8 v14-17

**Think:** *Can I see that baptism in water and baptism in the Holy Spirit belong together? That both are necessary and both should be sought? That to be cleaned up, but left empty, is a sad situation indeed?*



If so, then it is **fullness time:**

- **Time** to see I cannot live the Christian life in my own strength, but only as I am immersed by the Spirit in the life of Jesus.
- **Time** to ask to be baptised with the Holy Spirit, if this has not already happened.
- **Time** to be baptised with water!

## **5. Family for lonely people**

From the very beginning of his dealings with people, God has been looking to build **a family**. When he created the first man, he said, **It is not good for the man to be alone.** (Genesis 2 v18) When he started his **plan of restoration** through Abraham, he promised that a huge family would be right at the heart of it. (Genesis 12 v2 & 15 v5-6). **Family** has always been at the very centre of God's heart.

Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God's plan for Family really swung into play! How? Because all those obstacles and barriers to people being a family, whether with God or one another – things like selfishness, self-interest, hatred, disinterest – had now been removed.

When we come to Jesus, we discover that we have not just come to him, but to a huge family of others who have come to him! Baptism was always seen in the New Testament as the doorway in to God's great big family!



*Read the following passages and note down the key phrases in each concerning the family we are brought into:*

1Corinthians 12 v12-13

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Acts 2 v41

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Ephesians 2 v14-18

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Ephesians 4 v4-6

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While baptism is **personal**, it is not **private**. Even the smallest baptism will have at least one other person there – you cannot baptise yourself! This in itself is a powerful symbol that God has not left you alone in your Christian faith; he has brought you into a big family with many others to walk with you. You will never be able to live this Christian life alone and you were never meant to!

*Baptism does not just unite us with Christ; it unites us with Christ's **people** everywhere. We now become part of a huge family that crosses nations and generations!*

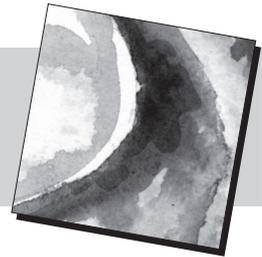
**Think:** *Do I recognise that I cannot live this Christian life alone? That God has never intended me to, that there is no such thing as a solitary Christian? That I need to be united to his church as much as to him?*



If so, then it is **family time**:

- **Time** to recognise I need my Christian brothers and sisters.
- **Time** to become part of the Body of Christ.
- **Time** to identify completely with his church.
- **Baptism time!**

## 5 Why baptism matters



By now we hope that you have seen what an immensely important thing baptism is! But to reinforce its importance, here are two key reasons why it matters and why all Christians should seriously consider this step.

### 1. ***Jesus himself was baptised***

If anyone needed **not** to be baptised, it was surely Jesus. And yet, although Jesus was the sinless Son of God, he still went ahead with it! In doing so, he was identifying himself absolutely and completely with sinful human beings and with **God's** way of dealing with sin.

**Read:***Matthew 3 v13-15*

Why do you think John hesitated to baptise Jesus? (v14)

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What do you think Jesus meant by the words, 'It is proper for us to do this **to fulfil all righteousness?**' (v15) And why did John then agree to go ahead?

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How did God show that this was a step he was pleased with? (v16-17)

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*If Jesus took this step, is there any reason why I, as his follower, should not also do so?*

*It is a bold man or woman who feels they do not need to take this step that Jesus himself took!*

## **2. Jesus commanded his disciples to baptise those who believed**

From the very beginning, baptism was seen, not as an optional extra, but as **an integral and essential part of what it meant to be a Christian**. There was no such thing as an unbaptised Christian in the New Testament Church!

**Read:**

Matthew 28 v16-20

Jesus tells his followers to go out and **make disciples**. What two key features of discipleship are mentioned here?

(i)

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(ii)

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**Read:**

Mark 16 v15-16

What two key things were they told to preach as the keys to salvation? (v16)

(i)

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(ii)

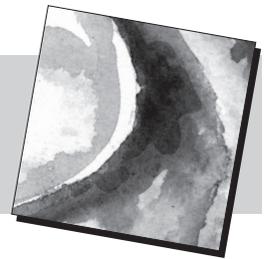
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*Jesus was baptised; he commanded his followers to be baptised. If we are serious about being a follower of Jesus ourselves, to debate its necessity is a nonsense.*

# 6

## But what about...?



By now, we trust you are more clear in your thinking about baptism. But some of you may still have some questions in your mind. Of course, the person taking you through this book will be glad to help you with any specific questions you may still have; but here are some of the more common ones.



## 1. **What about ... the things I still do wrong?**

“**I’m not good enough yet**” you might be thinking. “**Join the club**” will be our reply! None of us are ever good enough – that’s the point of baptism. It is a powerful demonstration of the truth that we cannot do anything to save ourselves; only a brand new start with Jesus will do. Even then, we will still get things wrong at times; we will still stumble into sin. But the cross of Jesus is powerful enough to deal with **all** our sin – even that which we haven’t committed yet.

*Baptism doesn't prove we have arrived; it proves we have started!*



## 2. **What about ... what people will think?**

Sure, some people may think you are strange or weird, that you have **caught religion** or **become a fanatic**. (Although many will respect – even envy – you enormously!) But so what? And anyway, if you cannot get this very basic step of obedience to Jesus right, how will you get any future ones right?



## 3. **What about ... what my parents or partner may say?**

Jesus foresaw that following him would sometimes lead to tensions, even among one’s friends or within one’s own family. But he also said that if we are serious about following him, then love

for him and obedience to him must always come first. (See, for example, Matthew 10 v37-39; Luke 14 v25-33.) If we do not settle this issue at the beginning of our Christian life, then it will be only harder later.

If you are still a minor, however, honouring and being obedient to your parents is also very important. For many parents, their greatest fear at times like this is that they are about to **lose** their offspring. If the church leaders haven't already done so, they will happily talk with your parents and try to explain what baptism is all about and to reassure them.

If you are married, then that is the most important relationship on earth to you. Jesus wants to see your partner won for him too, and it may be that as he or she sees that your commitment to Jesus has only deepened your commitment to *them* and made you a better husband or wife, that their attitude will change. Again, the leaders will be happy to talk with them, or to talk with you about the way forward.

#### **4. *What about ... my infant baptism or christening?***

Sadly christenings are, more often than not, a purely cultural or traditional thing, without any real faith basis to them. If this is how it was for you, then your christening has no value in God's eyes whatsoever (though that does not mean those who had you christened were bad-hearted!) You should go ahead and get baptised – as **God** intended it to be and with the results that **God** promised come with it.



If your christening was done with genuine, committed Christian parents, this is something that we would not despise. But such a christening is **not** what the Bible intends baptism to be – even if it is followed later by confirmation.

Baptising people without their knowledge or consent is a practice completely unknown in the Bible; there is neither example of it, nor command about it, nor permission for it.

It is a practice that arose in Church History, essentially from two sources: first, from a fear that unbaptised babies would go to hell; and second, from the conversion of the Emperor Constantine who decided that, overnight, his entire Empire would be Christian too – whether it wanted to be or not! – and so began **Christendom**, with its confusion of church and state membership.

Whatever reason lay behind your christening, you now need to decide whether you are going to build your relationship with God on the Bible and the words of Jesus, or on human traditions.



## **5. *What about ... my faith? Isn't it just enough to believe in Jesus? Do I really have to get baptised?***

The Bible teaches clearly that we are saved through **faith** in what Jesus did for us on the cross; and it contains at least one example of someone who was saved without being baptised. One of the thieves who was crucified next to Jesus repented at the last moment and was assured that he would be saved (Luke 23 v39-43). Where

circumstances prevent baptism, God will certainly not hold it against us; but there are no valid grounds for us preventing ourselves from being baptised!

Asking if I can believe without being baptised is rather like asking if I can love without being married. Well, of course you can. And yet, so much is missing! Where is the commitment, where is the covenant, where is the agreement to walk in life together, come what may?

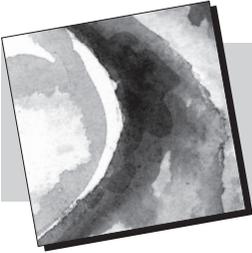
Being a Christian is not just about **us** agreeing to walk with God; it is about *God* agreeing to walk with us! In faith, we are acting; in baptism, **God himself** is also acting. Which is why the New Testament cannot conceive of any real believer wanting to miss out on this such important thing!

We believe that, at the end of the day, whatever questions you may have, the Bible's teaching is clear and that it stands above every question or objection:

**Repent and be baptised, every one 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 v38)**

***Think:** Am I now going to respond to that teaching?*





# 7 What happens next?

## 1. *Ask God!*

Having been through this course, we would now encourage you to think and pray carefully, asking God if this is the next step for you. If you are ready to go ahead, then talk to one of the church leaders, or your group leader, and we will arrange for your baptism to take place as soon as practically possible.

## 2. *What will happen at the baptism?*

Baptism services vary in their content, but yours will almost certainly include -

- worshipping the Lord together
- time for you to share your story (testimony) briefly with the church (you can read it out if you wish)
- praying for you and seeking God for any prophetic words from him for your life
- baptising you into Jesus, **in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit**
- laying our hands on you and praying for the Holy Spirit to come in a special way, either to see you baptised in the Holy Spirit for the first time, or filled up again with him and anointed for your walk with him in the days to come

You should come with a towel and a change of clothing. You do not need to wear any special clothes to be baptised, but please make sure they are appropriate! Consider inviting friends and family along who are not yet Christians, as baptisms can be powerful times of showing that the Christian faith really changes people and makes a difference.

### **3. *Then what?***

Then, a new exciting life lies ahead of you! We will do everything we can to help you in your walk with Jesus, whether at an individual level, or in the group you will become a part of, or in our bigger meetings together. You are part of us, and we are part of you! Together, we want to grow in our faith, worship and service. Baptism is your Step Number One towards that end.

So, as the Bible says: **what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name.** (Acts 22 v16)