



**“Repent and let each of you be baptized in the
name of the Lord Jesus Christ ...”
(Acts 2:38)**

**“Go therefore and make disciples ... baptizing
them in the name of the Father and
the Son and the Holy Spirit.”
(Matt. 28:19)**

**by
Pastor Mick Catron
Calvary Chapel of Blythe, Ca**

INTRODUCTION

Christian baptism is a normal and essential part of becoming a follower, or “disciple,” of Christ. Baptism is a moment of intense celebration that beautifully illustrates the redeeming work of Jesus in us – how we, who were spiritually dead in sin, have been made alive in Christ. It also is a “crossing-the-line” experience that declares openly that I’m ready to follow Jesus as a devoted disciple – dying to my old way of life and letting Him live through me.

Baptism is a step ordained and mandated by Christ himself for His true followers. In this article, we’ll take a look at some common questions and Biblical perspectives about baptism.

BAPTISM & PICKLES (A mini-Greek lesson)

The base meaning of the Greek work translated “baptism” in the New Testament is “to immerse, submerge, dip into” (Strong’s Concordance). The normal idea behind the word is that something is immersed into a particular substance, or “medium.” Equally important to the word’s understanding is the result of baptism – namely, that the thing “baptized” takes on the characteristics of the substance or medium into which it was baptized.

We can see this in a couple common 1st century examples of the word’s usage:

Example #1 – Cucumbers were placed in vinegar in order for them to become pickles. The “baptizer” is the food prep guy, the “one baptized” is the cucumber, and the “medium (or substance) baptized into” is vinegar. As cucumbers were immersed or

submerged in vinegar, they would, over time, take on the characteristics of the vinegar – they would become *pickled*. The cucumber was said to be “baptized” into vinegar. The next time you crunch into a nice juicy dill, you’re actually biting into a “baptized cucumber.”

Example #2 – Cloth that is dyed to color it. The “baptizer” is the person dipping the cloth, the “thing baptized” is the cloth, and the “medium” is the dye. As a light cloth is submerged into a dye, the cloth takes on the color of the dye. To make white cloth red, they had to “baptize” it into red dye.

As we consider a couple distinct Biblical “baptisms,” it’s important to note: (1) The one who is doing the baptizing (the “baptizer”); (2) The one being baptized (the “recipient”); (3) the substance the person or thing is baptized into (the “medium”).

If we keep these distinctions in mind, it will help us to see and appreciate the distinction and the beauty of two baptisms referred to in the New Testament. One is internal and spiritual. The other is external and physical. But more on that on p. 4-5, under the section *A Happy Funeral*.

In both of these above examples, the thing (cucumber, cloth) is immersed into a medium (vinegar, dye) with a specific purpose – so that the thing immersed takes on the characteristic of the medium immersed into.

With Christian Baptism, that basic concept carries over in a deep and rich symbolic way. When we’re immersed in the “medium” of water, it obviously isn’t so we take on water’s characteristic of wetness. Rather, it is to declare and demonstrate that we are

embracing the *spiritual* characteristic of Christ's death and resurrection as described by the Apostle Paul in Rom. 6.

Now, if that last statement left you a little confused, keep reading. It will make sense shortly. The next section will help explain what it means, as in Rom. 6:3, to be "baptized into His (Christ's) death."

BAPTISM – A CELEBRATION OF MY RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST (*WHAT GOD HAS DONE*)

A HAPPY FUNERAL

Baptism has been referred to by some preachers as a "happy funeral." In a deep yet simple way, that does capture a large part of the meaning of being baptized – at least the going-under-the-water part.

Eph. 2:1 says that before we came to Christ, we were spiritually dead. We weren't weak, or under informed ... we were dead. In John 3:18, Jesus said, before putting our faith and belief in Him, we were already condemned. The Biblical picture is that, because we are sinners, both by nature and by actions, we were "condemned" to a life now and in eternity apart from God.

God is holy and perfect. Heaven is holy and perfect. And because we weren't and aren't holy and perfect, we are separated from the perfect God and His perfect heaven. The only way that this separation can be fixed is by God Himself.

Through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, God takes away our sin and guilt and, the moment we trust in Christ, replaces it with the perfection, or "righteousness" of Jesus. We then are said to be

“covered,” or “hidden” in Christ (Col. 3:3). His perfection is credited to us and in a flash that painful separation has been removed. We are said to be “in Christ”. For a more detailed discussion of this, see our booklet, “*Only Perfect People Go To Heaven.*”

But back to the funeral picture ... Spiritually, before someone comes to Christ, he is dead. What do we do with one who is dead? We bury him. When Jesus died on the cross, He took my sin and guilt on him. My old spiritually dead self was nailed to the cross with Him. It was buried with Jesus. That’s what water baptism awesomely symbolizes. It’s a celebration of what God has *ALREADY* done to bury the old me the moment I put my faith in Christ as my Savior and Lord. It celebrates what God did FOR me, and IN me, in the death and burial of Jesus! But it doesn’t stop there ...

At this point, let me just mention that according to 1 Cor. 12:13, there was another “baptism” that took place the moment we put our faith in Jesus. Unlike *Water Baptism*, it was invisible and spiritual. Remember the “baptizer” and “medium” thing? Well, in Water Baptism, the “baptizer” is usually a pastor, and the “medium” is water. The Purpose is to declare testimony.

But, the “baptizer” of that inner spiritual baptism was none other than the Holy Spirit. The “medium” into which He immersed us was “the Body of Christ.” The purpose of that baptism was to place or bind us in relationship with Christ as part of His forever family. In a sense, my water baptism becomes an awesome *outward* demonstration of the *internal* spiritual baptism the Holy Spirit did to me the instant I trusted Christ.

A HAPPIER RESURRECTION

Then, as I emerge from under the water, it declares and pictures my unity with Christ's resurrection and what happened to me when He rose from the dead. Eph. 2:4-5 says, though we were dead spiritually, "*God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love ... even when we were dead in our transgressions [sin], **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), and **raised us up with Him**, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus ...*"

So, first and foremost, baptism is a celebration of the work God has accomplished in me through the redeeming work of Jesus. I've been made alive, raised to new life, and positioned with Him in the heavens. Wow.

2 Cor. 5:17 declares, "*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*" Illustrated in the going under and then coming up out of the water, we identify with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. By baptism, we dramatize His work of burying the old me ("*old things have passed*") and proclaim our acceptance of His Salvation for ME ... PERSONALLY FOR ME!

By going under the water, it's as if my baptism is proclaiming:

"He saved me by His Grace. I acknowledge and receive His gift of salvation, and I honor Him as the Gracious Giver who has given me new and eternal life."

I have to chuckle a little as I write that. Because, though I've just penned a wonderful theological proclamation of what baptism pictures, I know full well that when most of us hit the water, we've got a much simpler thing going on in our mind.

We're more likely at that stage to be saying:

"I don't know nothing about theology, but I know I was messed up and going nowhere until Jesus changed my life. I love Him and want to grow as His follower."

I think that's beautiful and simple. And that's what baptism declares – *my thrill in what God has done, and is doing in me.*

BAPTISM – A CELEBRATION OF MY DEDICATION TO FOLLOW JESUS

A second aspect of baptism is a testimony of my decision and determination to follow Jesus and His Word. As I go under the water, I am willingly burying who I was. As I come up from the water, I'm proclaiming I willingly choose to follow Him in this newness of life.

It's an affirmation of my acknowledging His awesome work in me. And it's an affirmation of my determination to be a true disciple, making outward choices compatible with the inner work He has already done, and continues to do, in me.

When the Apostle Paul introduced one of his baptism-discussion passages (Rom. 6:3-14), he asked, "How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" By my baptism, I'm saying I'm DONE living in sin. And, he continues, "As Christ was raised from the dead ... so we too might walk in newness of life." Die to sin. Live a new life to God. That's the idea.

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

The simple answer is every true follower of Jesus. Baptism is for all who make a sincere profession of repentance of sin and of faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

An honest disciple is one that not only understands what Jesus has done FOR him, but also knows and submits to what Jesus requires OF him. In the Bible, the words “repent”, “learn”, “obey”, “trust”, and “follow” are foundational to describing true discipleship.

If one is not really willing to be this kind of a follower, then he’s not really a true follower of Christ at all. James speaks about one claiming to have genuine faith, but then is not willing to obey and follow the Word (James 2:17-20). That supposed “faith” James calls “dead” and useless and equates it with the “faith” of demons – i.e., those who understand the truth, but do not submit to it.

The simple fact is this: One cannot be a true follower of Jesus if he has no true determination to follow Him or His Word. For that person, being baptized as a picture that he has buried the old self-centered ways, and come alive to the new Christ-filled life is nothing less than an insult and a mockery to God.

I’m not saying that he needs to have everything in perfect order before he can be baptized – if so, then no one would ever make it to the water! But I am saying that the central issue needs to be in order – namely, I recognize Jesus as my Savior and my Lord, and I am resolved to die to my way and follow His. The decision and direction needs to be set. Then baptism makes perfect sense.

But someone perfectly content to live in a life of sin and disobedience to what God has already revealed to him has no business being baptized. It's a sham that only devalues what God deems holy. Honestly, one like that needs to repent and renounce the sin ... then come to the water.

Every true believer who has come to Jesus for salvation, who has decided to follow Jesus as Lord of his life, ought to be baptized. In the same way that I have concern about the one who wants to be baptized but refuses to repent of sin, I also have concern about the one who claims to follow Jesus, but refuses to be baptized. It's like telling Jesus, "You're my Lord and I will follow you anywhere ... as long as you lead me where I want to go." That doesn't make sense. Jesus said to be baptized. A follower will joyfully do it.

WHEN SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

Essentially, when you have come to recognize Jesus as your Savior and Lord, you're qualified. You see, it's a work of the Holy Spirit in your heart to bring you to the point of recognizing and surrendering your heart to Jesus.

Most often in the New Testament examples, baptism happened really fast. The process was: Hear the Gospel → Believe and Confess Jesus as Lord → Repent of and renounce known sin → Get Baptized. As seen in the book of Acts, the whole process often happened on the same day.

Part of the problem in the modern church is that, in an effort to grow the church and make the Gospel more attractive and less invasive to unbelievers, the message gets watered down. The

message of “Believe in Jesus” is pronounced pretty clearly ... but often skewed. You know, the “believe in Him and He’ll do all this cool stuff for you” type message. But the “repent from sin” part is often absent.

Sometimes even using the word “sin” is discouraged because it makes people uncomfortable. The message becomes what God can do for me, rather than the honest truth – than I’m in trouble before God because I’ve fallen short of His perfection and need His grace and mercy. As a result, there are lots of ‘non-converted’ converts in the church at large. Even baptized ones. The New Testament knows nothing of this.

Do you know Jesus’ first recorded sermon? It is summarized in Mark 1:15. Essentially He said that the time had come. So ... “Repent and believe the gospel.” Repent and believe. Similarly, on the day of Pentecost when Peter gave his first sermon about Jesus being Messiah and Lord, crucified, buried, and resurrected for them, the hearer’s hearts were pierced. Acting on the belief that was being born in their hearts, they asked, “What must we do?” Like Jesus, Peter answered simply and directly, “Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ ...” Again “repent.” It’s unavoidable – the message of *repentance* is at the heart of the gospel.

DO I NEED TO BE BAPTIZED TO BE SAVED?

This question has created great controversy in the church at large. As I read scripture, I firmly believe that one does *not* need to be baptized in water to be saved.

Though the infamous, non-baptized thief on the cross at Jesus' side is usually brought up at this point in the discussion, I feel there is a much clearer example that speaks to the question. Acts 10 speaks of a group of non-believing Gentiles who gathered to hear Peter. It says that as Peter declared the gospel, the Holy Spirit came upon those who were intently listening.

Peter then declares, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" You see, while they heard the gospel preached, they believed. The Holy Spirit began His work. The Holy Spirit has clearly already *internally* baptized them into the body of Christ and filled them so that they even began displaying spiritual gifts.

If that's not being saved, I don't know what is. They're saved, as validated by the Spirit, then they go to the water and get baptized. Baptism was the normal next step. But don't miss the point. These guys were saved BEFORE they got wet.

Now having said all that, let me also say this: Being baptized is the absolute normal next step. So much so that if one claims to be a Christian but, for whatever reasons, refuses to be baptized, I would have to wonder about the authenticity of his faith. For how can someone claim to follow Jesus, then overtly disregard what He tells them to do?!

So here's how I'd summarize the answer to this question: I believe that you do not need to be baptized to be saved. Period. But if you're truly saved, you will be baptized. Period.

WHAT ABOUT RE-BAPTISM?

This question sometimes comes up regarding one who was baptized as an infant or child, and/or when they were baptized prior to really understanding the gospel or to putting their personal faith in Christ.

When I look to scripture I see only one example of re-baptism – Acts 19. When Paul arrived in Corinth, he found a group of baptized “disciples.” He quickly discovers that their understanding of the gospel was incomplete. They had believed in John the Baptist’s message – that the Messiah was coming – and they had repented to ready themselves. They had been baptized “into John’s baptism.”

They had believed and embraced as much of the message as they’d heard, but they were still missing the rest of the story. Paul filled in the blanks with Jesus – that He’d come, was crucified, buried, and resurrected. Paul gave them the rest of the gospel message, and they believed.

Immediately these “disciples” went to get baptized “in the Name of the Lord Jesus.” They were re-baptized because they now had, and embraced, the full gospel of Jesus.

I gather from this account in Acts 19 that sometimes people are baptized before really understanding the gospel, or before really understanding what it means to repent and follow Jesus. As a result it’s not uncommon for someone who was baptized as an infant, or youngster, or teen, etc., to want to be re-baptized as a testimony that they now understand the gospel, and are “all in” so

to speak. For that reason, we allow, and even encourage, re-baptism in some cases.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT AFTER I'M BAPTIZED?

A couple of things for sure. Firstly, you can expect increased joy and likely even Jesus working in a stronger way in and through you. He seems to like to do that when people rise up as true followers who love and obey Him.

Secondly, you can expect some opposition. You need to understand that when you get baptized it's like giving notice to Satan and to your own fleshly appetites that you are no longer under their bondage or control. You've got a new Master and His Name is Jesus Christ. He's saved you, He's delivered you, and you are a new person in Him!

If we take seriously the fact that we are in a spiritual battle, we need to know, that by declaring Jesus as Lord, we've just stirred the pot, and as the old gunslingers used to say, "them are fightin' words."

Understand that Satan has lost you. Forever. And he's not happy about it. Don't be surprised if he throws some opposition your way. And remember, he's not a fair fighter. He may stir friends, family, co-workers, etc. to throw little (or big) darts your way.

But don't let that dissuade you. You already stand in victory with the Victor – Jesus! You are "in Christ," and "covered with" and "hidden in Christ." For the enemy to get to you, he has to get through Jesus. And he can't. Baptism pictures that. You're in

Christ and spiritually untouchable for eternity. Learning to walk in that victory is another matter. That's what we call "discipleship."

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

So, what about you? If you believe in Christ and confess Him as your Savior and Lord ... If you're heart has taken the posture of submitting to and following Him ... If you are repenting of and stopping any known sin ... then you should experience the awesomely holy and blessed step of Water Baptism.

If you're reading this and you *haven't* been baptized ... and if you are at the place that this paragraph describes, you should be baptized. If you choose to follow Jesus, then follow all the way. All in. Get baptized. It's time.