

# Baptism: What the Bible Teaches



## Introduction

Few subjects generate more discussion than baptism. Some believe it is merely an outward sign of an inward salvation, while others teach that it is essential to becoming a Christian. Rather than relying on tradition or personal opinion, Christians should ask one simple question:

### What do the Scriptures teach?

The New Testament consistently presents baptism as God's appointed response of faith, through which believers receive the blessings He has promised. Baptism is not a human work that earns salvation, nor is it an optional ceremony performed after salvation. It is an act of obedient faith in which God works according to His grace.

## What Is Baptism?

The Greek word translated "**baptize**" (**baptizō**) means *to immerse, dip, or plunge*. The New Testament describes baptism as a burial in water followed by a resurrection from the water.

Paul wrote:

"We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4)

Likewise, Colossians 2:12 says:

"Having been buried with Him in baptism..."

These passages point to immersion as the biblical mode of baptism.

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## Why Did Jesus Command Baptism?

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus gave the Great Commission:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them..." (Matthew 28:19)

Mark records His words:

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16)

Jesus joined belief and baptism in His command. Baptism was never presented as an optional addition to discipleship.

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## Baptism in the First Gospel Sermon

On the Day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter preached that Jesus was the promised Messiah whom the people had crucified. Convicted by the message, the crowd asked:

"Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37)

Peter answered:

"Repent and be baptized 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 2:38)

About three thousand people gladly received the message and were baptized that very day (Acts 2:41).

If baptism were merely symbolic, it is difficult to explain why Peter included it in his inspired answer to those seeking salvation.

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## Baptism Is Connected With Forgiveness

Throughout the New Testament, baptism is consistently associated with the forgiveness of sins.

### **Acts 22:16**

Ananias told Saul:

"Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name."

### **1 Peter 3:21**

Peter wrote:

"Baptism... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Peter carefully explains that the power of baptism is not found in the water itself but in God's work through the resurrection of Christ.

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## **Baptism Unites Us With Christ**

Paul explained that baptism is the moment when believers are united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

Romans 6:3–5 teaches that Christians:

- are baptized into Christ,
- are baptized into His death,
- are buried with Him,
- are raised to walk in newness of life.

This is why baptism is much more than a symbolic ceremony. It is God's appointed means of identifying believers with the saving work of Christ.

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## **Baptism Places Us Into Christ**

Galatians 3:26–27 says:

"For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

Notice that faith and baptism are not presented as opposing one another. Baptism is the obedient expression of faith through which believers are united with Christ.

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## Baptism and the Church

When people obeyed the gospel in the first century, they were baptized and then added by the Lord to His church.

Acts 2:47 says:

"And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

No one voted them into membership.

No denomination received them.

The Lord Himself added the saved to His church.

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## Is Baptism a Work That Earns Salvation?

Some object that baptism cannot be necessary because salvation is "not by works."

The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is by God's grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8–9).

However, baptism is not a work of human merit. It is an act of obedient faith in which God is the One who works.

Colossians 2:12 explains that we are raised:

"...through faith in the powerful working of God."

The power belongs to God—not to the water or the person being baptized.

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## Who Should Be Baptized?

The New Testament pattern is consistent.

Those who were baptized had first:

- heard the gospel,
- believed in Christ,
- repented of their sins,
- confessed Jesus as Lord,
- and were then baptized.

Because infants cannot believe, repent, or confess Christ, every example in the New Testament involves accountable believers responding in faith.

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## How Should Baptism Be Performed?

Biblical baptism is immersion in water.

Several passages point to this conclusion:

- Jesus came up out of the water after His baptism (Matthew 3:16).
- The Ethiopian eunuch and Philip both went down into the water before the baptism and came up out of it afterward (Acts 8:38–39).
- Baptism is described as a burial (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12).

Immersion best reflects the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

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## What Baptism Does Not Mean

Baptism is not:

- a magical ritual,
- a work that earns salvation,
- a replacement for faith,
- a substitute for repentance,
- merely joining a local congregation,
- simply a public testimony after salvation.

Rather, it is the God-ordained response of faith by which believers receive the blessings He has promised in Christ.

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# Faith, Repentance, Confession, and Baptism

The New Testament presents conversion as a unified response to the gospel.

A sinner hears the gospel, believes in Christ, repents of sin, confesses Jesus as Lord, and is baptized into Christ.

These are not competing steps; together they describe obedient faith responding to God's gracious invitation.

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## Conclusion

The New Testament consistently presents baptism as an essential part of God's plan of salvation. Jesus commanded it, the apostles preached it, the first Christians obeyed it, and the Lord honored it by adding the saved to His church.

Our confidence is not in the water, the minister, or the act itself. Our confidence is in Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection make salvation possible.

Those who love Christ seek to obey Him.

As Jesus said:

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

Baptism is not about earning God's favor—it is about trusting Him enough to obey His word.