

## 13 What Is Baptism?

The Lord Jesus commanded His church to observe two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, right up to the time of His return: the first is baptism.

### Why Do We Baptise People?

We baptise people first of all because Jesus told us to; that alone is a good enough reason.

"Make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Matthew 28:18 – 19

Second, we baptise people because, in being baptised Himself, Jesus set us an example.

"Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Mark 1:9 – 11

Third, baptism is a sign: a visual aid or object lesson that helps the person who is baptised to understand what happened when he or she was saved.

There are examples in the New Testament of people being baptised in private and that would not have happened if, as some believe, baptism is intended to be a testimony to the world and a sign to the church of a believer's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism is not primarily for other people — either to meet requirements of church membership or even as a public confession or testimony — it is a matter between God and the person who is baptised. Nevertheless baptism, when properly explained, can also be a powerful witness to those who look on.

### What is Going On When Someone Is Baptised?

Three things in particular are pictured in baptism.

First, it is a sign that the baptised person has given himself up to God in order to live a new life. As the person who is baptised goes under the water it symbolises the fact that he has died so far as this world is concerned. As he emerges again it shows that he has risen to a new life. So, baptism is a symbolic burial of the new believer's old life. It is a renunciation of sin and it marks the beginning of a new life of obedient, committed service to God. It is a sign of his repentance.

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."

Acts 2:38

Second, it is a sign of the washing away or remission of sins.

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."

Acts 2:38

Third, it is a sign of union with Christ and fellowship with Him in His death and resurrection. The person who is baptised is identifying with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is saying, "I am now in Christ: the old me who was in Adam has been crucified with Him and now that and all the other benefits of His death and resurrection are mine."

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Galatians 3:27

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.”

Romans 6:3 – 5

## **How Does It Happen?**

The believer is baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Since baptism is a symbolic identification or union with the one whose name is used, it symbolises union with God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

No importance is attached to the identity or position in the church of the baptiser but immersion in water is the usual way to administer baptism. The Bible does not tell us why this is so but the fact that water is recognised as a cleansing agent seems to be significant.

“Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.”

Acts 8:38

## **Who Should Be Baptised?**

The only people who can rightly be baptised are those who profess repentance towards God, profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and are willing to yield obedience to Him.

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved.”

Mark 16:16

“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized.”

Acts 2:41

“Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.”

Acts 8:36 – 37

Baptism is a badge of discipleship. Ideally it should follow immediately after confession of faith in Christ as the first act of obedient discipleship. So the person who is considering baptism has no difficult decision to be made like, “Am I ready?” or “Do I understand enough?” Often those who have been baptised say that their baptism has become more meaningful to them in subsequent years as their experience in Christ and their knowledge of the truth has increased.

## **Key Words**

**Sacrament** A sacrament is a symbolic act that Jesus has commanded his followers to observe. It has no ability to change the person who observes it and it does not gain him any favour with God. It is only as the truths it depicts are received in faith that he is blessed. Protestant churches recognise only two sacraments, or ordinances as some prefer to call them: baptism and the Lord's supper.

## **Memory Verses**

☺ Mark 16:16