

Believer's Baptism



May 2019

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What is believer's baptism?

Believer's baptism is an outward expression of an inward reality.

It is the public act of immersion in water, symbolizing a person's identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:1-4). It celebrates salvation. It celebrates the Father's extension of forgiveness to one who has been redeemed by the Son and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Believers who participate in baptism are doing so as an act of obedience and as a testimony of the fact that they have given themselves to Christ and are His.

It is one of two specific ordinances that Jesus told His followers to observe in His honor. Baptism is presented in Matthew 28:19-20 and communion is found in Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-29.

Believer's baptism has been practiced since the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was given to the disciples and the Church was birthed. It is an act for those who are confident of their salvation, who desire to step in obedience and give public acknowledgment of their commitment to Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

While baptism is a sacred, personal experience, it does not in any way contribute to or complete a person's spiritual salvation.

Who may be baptized?

Throughout Scripture, it is clear that believer's baptism is reserved exclusively for those who are confident of their personal salvation, fully accomplished by Jesus Christ and His finished work of atonement (Acts 2:38; 10:47), and credited to them when they placed their faith and trust in Him and became a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

When should a person be baptized?

While there is no specific instruction in Scripture, every example we have of believer's baptism occurs immediately after a person has placed their faith and trust in Christ. Baptism provides an opportunity to publicly verbalize the testimony of a person's relationship with Christ and certainty of salvation.

What is the salvation experience?

The salvation experience happens when a person is drawn by God to understand that they have rebelled against Almighty God, the Creator of all that is. A person first realizes that they have sinned and that their sin has earned the wrath of God, eternally separating them from His love. As God reveals this situation in their life, they then understand that Jesus came to pay the death penalty their sins deserve and that He

rose victoriously from the dead, defeating sin. That person then asks God for forgiveness and genuinely repents of their sin, acknowledging that it is God who is in control of their life. In so doing, they are saved and have experienced a conversion by God that is referred to as being born again. That person is then accepted by God into the family of God. Their life is forever changed and they live in obedient response to a new understanding of God's love. The Bible makes it clear that this is a conversion experience. It is a new life and a new relationship with God. He actually comes to live in those people who have been saved and they are forever changed (Romans 3:10, 3:23, 6:23, 5:8, 10:9-10; John 1:12-13; 2 Corinthians 5:15).

What does the salvation experience involve?

The salvation experience is a conversion experience that is made possible by the sinless life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The following brief overview of the salvation experience can help a person understand the gospel to determine whether they are truly saved and eligible for believer's baptism. Jesus commanded us to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19), in part, because each person of the Trinity plays a significant role in the salvation of an individual.

The role the Father in the salvation experience

Forgiveness: *Ephesians 4:32. See also Luke 5:21; 23:34; and Colossians 2:13*

God the Father forgives our sin in response to our repentance and trust in Christ alone (1 John 4:9-10). We can do nothing to earn His forgiveness. In His justice, we deserve the eternal separation from Him referred to as death in Romans 6:23. He cannot forgive sin without atonement (1 John 2:2).

Justification: *Romans 3:21-26*

God the Father declares us not guilty for our sin. He credits our sin to Jesus' account and credits the righteousness of Christ to our account. He sees us just as if we had never sinned. Amen.

Adoption: *John 1:12-13; see also Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:4-6; Ephesians 1:4-5*

God the Father accepts us into His family at the moment of our salvation. We are heirs of His promises and heavenly inheritance. We are considered co-heirs with Christ. We are granted direct access to God as our heavenly Father (Ephesians 2:18).

The role of the Son (Jesus Christ) in the salvation experience

Redemption: *Ephesians 1:7; see also Galatians 3:13; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 9:12; 1 Peter 1:18-19*

God the Son redeems (buys back) sinners from the bondage of sin. With the full price of our sin paid by Jesus, we are set free from our sin, guilt, and shame. We are free from our bondage to sin and its authority in our lives (Romans 6:15-18). Sin is no longer our master. Righteousness in the person of Jesus is our new master.

Reconciliation: 2 Corinthians 5:16-20; see also Romans 5:10-11

God the Son brings us back into a reconciled relationship with the Father. Our sin separates us from Him and makes us His enemies and objects of His wrath (Ephesians 2:3). But because of His love and in His mercy, He allows us to be reconciled to Himself through the sacrifice of Christ (Ephesians 2:4).

Atonement: 1 John 2:2; see also Romans 3:24-25; Hebrews 2:17

God the Son is our atoning sacrifice. He lived a perfect and sinless life. He was fully God and fully man and so was able to become a perfect atoning sacrifice for everyone who would receive His payment on the cross. His death satisfied the wrath of God and atoned for the sin of those who believe.

The role of the Holy Spirit in the salvation experience

Regeneration: Titus 3:3-7; see also John 3:1-7; Ephesians 2:1-9

God the Holy Spirit brings to life the spiritual nature that was dead to God. This is the work of regeneration in those who are chosen (Ephesians 1:11). This regenerated spiritual nature is just as real as our physical nature, yet it is without sin and allows for relationship with Holy God.

Sealing: Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30

God the Holy Spirit marks us as owned by God the Father and seals our salvation for all eternity. This is the seal that is found on our life in addition to being held by the Father and the Son (John 10:28-29). This sealing assures that it is an irreversible and finished work of God. This allows for certainty and security in our salvation.

Baptized into the Body of Christ: 1 Corinthians 12:13

God the Holy Spirit immerses us into the body of Christ. The body of Christ refers to the Church. The Church consists of all people who have placed their trust in Christ alone for their eternal security. This is a spiritual baptism.

Indwelling: 1 Corinthians 6:19

God the Holy Spirit moves into the life of a believer and empowers them to live a new life.

My role in my salvation experience

While Scripture is clear that our salvation experience relies solely on God (Ephesians 2:8-9), there is a role that each individual plays in the salvation experience.

Confession: Romans 10:9-10

Confession acknowledges the rebellious actions of a sinful person and agrees that those actions are worthy of the wrath of God. It further acknowledges that Jesus Christ is Lord over all.

Repentance: 2 Corinthians 7:10; see also Acts 20:21; 26:20

Repentance is turning away from sin and turning to God. True godly repentance is a change of heart and mind regarding sin, rejecting it instead of embracing or condoning it.

Belief: Acts 16:31

Belief in the true name of Jesus. This means a belief that He is the Christ, God incarnate. It is a belief in His essence, His message of truth, His sovereignty as King of kings, His sufficient atonement sacrifice, and His victorious resurrection. It is the unwavering belief that He is God in flesh. It is not a casual acknowledgement; rather, it is a core belief that reveals itself in adoration.

What are the various baptisms in the Bible?

John the Baptist's baptism: Matt. 3:1-12; see also Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-20

John the Baptist, as the forerunner of Jesus Christ the Messiah, passionately called people to acknowledge their sinfulness and repent. His baptism was their public act of repentance. This they did in anticipation and preparation for the Jewish Messiah's coming. It was their outward sign of an inward sense of guilt and their desire to be ready to receive their Messiah, the Holy One of Israel.

Jesus Christ's baptism: Matt. 3:13-17; see also Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22

Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River was not an acknowledgement of sin on His part, nor a sign of His readiness for the coming of Messiah, as He was the promised Messiah. Rather, it was His public identification as the Son of God and an acceptance of the ministry given to Him as the Messiah. It was also an act of obedience to the Father so that righteousness may be fulfilled.

Holy Spirit baptism: 1 Corinthians 12:13

The Holy Spirit immerses us into the body of Christ, the Church, at the moment we are regenerated. This baptism happens once, at the time of salvation.

Believer's baptism: Matt. 28:19; see also Acts 2:41; 8:12-13, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15, 33; Romans 6:1-5; Colossians 2:11-15

The public act of believer's baptism celebrates and publicly acknowledges the internal work of God in the life of one who has been reborn. Believer's baptism is, by its very nature, an opportunity for the person being baptized to give public testimony of their salvation experience as well as their allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord of their life.

What about infant baptism?

There is not a clear example of infant baptism in Scripture. Both Samuel and Jesus were presented—or dedicated—to God at the Tabernacle and Temple, respectively. Neither were baptized. In Acts 16:31-34, when the jailor's family was baptized, there is no mention of infants or children, but those to whom the message had been given.

Neither Jesus nor any apostle taught infant or child baptism and there is no Old Testament instruction for baptism of children.

Since believer's baptism is for those who are old enough to undergo the salvation experience as explained above, a person must be old enough to respond on their own.

An overview of believer's baptism history

- Acts 2:38-42: 3000 presumably Jewish people responded to Peter's sermon.
- Acts 8:12: Many in Samaria believe in Christ and are baptized. Presumably these are the mixed-race people of Samaria, thus expanding baptism beyond exclusively Jewish believers.
- Acts 8:26-39 The Ethiopian eunuch is baptized by Philip after receiving the good news.
- Acts 10:47-48 Many Gentiles in the house of Cornelius are baptized after hearing Peter's explanation of the gospel and receiving the Holy Spirit, as happened in Acts 2.
- Acts 11:15-19 Peter explains to the Jerusalem Jewish Christians what happened in Cornelius's home and agreement is reached that God has extended redemption even to Gentiles.
- Acts 16:31-33 The jailor in Philippi trusts Christ and is baptized, and his entire household.
- Acts 18:8 Many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized.

Some common questions about baptism

Is membership in the local church dependent upon baptism?

In some churches, yes, but not here at Calvary. While it is not required, we do strongly urge all members to be baptized in obedience to our Lord.

Is there a specific time frame after salvation in which one should be baptized?

Generally, it would seem appropriate to be baptized as soon as one is confident their salvation is genuine and authenticated by the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

If one is not baptized, will they still go to heaven at death?

Yes. Our eternal destiny is dependent upon God's finished work of salvation in our lives.

How young is too young to be baptized?

Since the Scriptures give no age limits, as long as a child is fully confident of their salvation and can articulate it clearly to the public, they may be baptized.

What if handicap or some other physical or emotional limitation restricts immersion?

We will be happy to accommodate such limitations by other means of water baptism and do so on an individual basis, if needed.

Summary:

Believer's baptism is a step of obedience to the command of Jesus.

Believer's baptism does not earn or add to our salvation, which is solely accomplished by God Himself.

Believer's baptism is only available to those who have confidence that God has accomplished His work of salvation in them.

Believer's baptism is an obedient response to Jesus Christ's command.

Believer's baptism is one of two ordinances commanded by Jesus Christ, the other being communion. Both ordinances celebrate the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as full atonement for the sinner.

Believer's baptism is celebrated all over the world in widely divergent settings. While Scripture does not specify a location or style, we believe full immersion in water is most expressive of association with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and the washing clean of the blood of Christ and regeneration to new life in Christ.

Believer's baptism may be practiced more than once. There appears to be no Scriptural limitation to number of times one can be baptized, although there is no example of anyone being baptized as a believer more than once in the Bible. Thus someone who may have been baptized into a different religion/faith, or baptized as an infant, or even baptized as an adult but wandered into a defiant lifestyle, could be eligible for believer's baptism.

