

## Stepping out in faith

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Spiritual growth results from a private and public commitment to Jesus Christ through obedience to His revealed Word. This next step in your spiritual growth journey is focused on the need for you to “go public” with your faith. Jesus publicly identified with us (sinners) and now, through baptism, He calls you to publicly identify with Him and His church.

Although baptism is only a symbol of your salvation, it is a very important step for you to take in your obedience to Him.

How important is obedience in your relationship with God?

1 John 2:3 \_\_\_\_\_

## Six aspects of baptism

- Commanded
- Symbolic
- Form
- Responsibility
- Biblical examples; and
- Your example

## Commanded

Through obedience to His Father, Jesus began His public ministry by travelling to the Jordan River where He publicly submitted to baptism by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13).

What instruction does Jesus give to His disciples concerning baptism?

Matthew 28:19b \_\_\_\_\_

Baptism is an obligation for those who are born again – that is, those who have repented of their sins, welcomed Christ into their lives, believed in His name and have decided to follow Him with their lives.

What did Peter instruct those who responded to his preaching to do?

Acts 2:38b \_\_\_\_\_

What was the result of Phillip’s message about the Kingdom of God and Jesus?

Acts 8:12b \_\_\_\_\_

What did the eunuch say immediately after he believed that Jesus is the Son of God?

Acts 8:36-37

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## **Symbolic**

Baptism is characterised in the New Testament by three different pictures:

Firstly, baptism symbolised imitating Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.

Read Romans 6:3-6.

Baptism is symbolic of a watery grave. In the act of baptism we bury our dead/sinful nature and, as Jesus was, we are resurrected to a new and eternal life – a life lived completely for God’s Kingdom and in obedience to Him.

Secondly, baptism is a picture of being submerged into God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, just as a fish is submerged and lives completely surrounded by and filled with water. We are baptised into the Trinity and then live our lives completely surrounded by and filled with God. This is often referred to as putting on Christ, like wearing a new and permanent piece of clothing.

Read Matthew 28:19; Acts 8:16, 19:5; 2 Corinthians 1:13; 10:2 and Galatians 3:27.

Thirdly, another picture of baptism is one of a new baby being welcomed into the Family of God. Just as a baby is born in a burst of water, so the believer’s spirit is reborn and he/she becomes a new child of God. In the Jewish faith into which Jesus was born, the new member of the family was initiated with a rite of circumcision, which was for boys only. But Jesus replaced this initiation rite with baptism which is inclusive of women and men, girls and boys.

Read John 3:3-8, Galatians 3:27-29 and 1 Peter 1:23.

## **Form**

There are two basic forms baptism takes in Christian churches: immersion and pouring or sprinkling.

### ***Immersion***

In churches that focus on the symbolism of dying and rising with Christ, similar to going down into the grave and rising again, baptism is usually performed by immersing the believer under the water. This is also an apt and beautiful picture of being immersed in the Trinity.

### ***Pouring or sprinkling***

In churches that focus more on the symbolism of initiating the new believer into the Family of God, baptism is usually performed by pouring or sprinkling water on the new believer.

And what should you do?

Since neither form is clearly commanded in the New Testament, you are free to make that choice for yourself. It is suggested that you follow the traditional form that is practiced by your church. Whichever you choose, your baptism experience will declare all three symbols:

- 1) Death and resurrection,
- 2) Immersion in the Trinity, and
- 3) Initiation into the New Covenant Family of God.

### **Responsibility**

- a. Baptism symbolises your union with Christ. This union carries a responsibility.

What is this responsibility?

John 15:16b \_\_\_\_\_

What does the following reference say?

Galatians 3:27 \_\_\_\_\_

- b. Baptism also symbolises your union with the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). This too carries a responsibility for every believer.

What is this responsibility?

Ephesians 4:16 \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Biblical examples**

The following biblical references show that immediately *after* a person declared belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, baptism **followed**. There was no waiting time to analyse feelings or gauge public opinion. God commanded – they obeyed.

Acts 2:41; 8:12-13; 8:36-39; 9:17-18  
Acts 10:47-48; 16:14-15; 16:31-33; and 18:8.

However, as the church grew, it became apparent that some people were not living the Christian life, even though they'd been baptised. They were causing much confusion and many unnecessary problems in the churches. They hadn't really understood what they were committing to – that becoming a student of Jesus usually meant a radical change in lifestyle. The church then instituted a time of teaching about what this really meant for their lives before baptising them. In some very pagan cultures, this could be as much as a year or more of instruction.

Read Matthew 19:29-30; 22:37-39; Mark 8:34-37 and Luke 14:25-33.

## **Your example**

Jesus went public with His life and love for you and me. He went as far as the cross and beyond.

Have you gone public with your life and love for Jesus through baptism?

To know Him is to love Him. And as we grow in our love for Him we will gladly obey Him (1 John 5:3).

## **Note on confirmation**

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Many people who were baptised by their parents as babies, but who, until now, have not been true followers of Jesus, wonder if their baptisms “worked”, or if they should be baptised again now that they have made their own decision to follow Him. This is a matter for each person to decide for themselves.

If they decide their baptism was valid, they may then choose not to be re-baptised, but instead to stand up in front of the congregation and give public testimony of their choice to be true followers of Jesus, confirming their parents' faithful commitment made years ago, and dedicating their lives from this point on to being His disciples. This is confirmation. Some churches regularly practice this for children who have been baptised as babies and who then want to make their own commitment as teenagers.

## Summary

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Baptism is the first step of obedience commanded by the Lord to those who profess belief in Him. Baptism is publicly identifying in faith and practice with Jesus Christ and His church. When should a believer be baptised? Scripture implies: NOW is always the best time to obey the Lord – NOW is the best time to *go public with Jesus* through baptism.



