

The background of the entire page is a photograph of ocean waves. The water is a deep blue color, and the waves are breaking, creating white foam and spray. The perspective is from a low angle, looking out at the sea.

BAPTISM BOOKLET

UNIVERSITY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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Common Questions About Baptism

Since the time of Christ, baptism has occupied a significant place in the life of the church. Nearly every church today offers the rite of Christian baptism, though churches differ in their administration. Some baptize infants, while others will only baptize adult believers. Some accept sprinkling, while others require a full immersion. Some churches present baptism as a requirement, while still others make it optional.

Baptism was never meant to be an issue to cause division but rather a point of uniting Christians. The Bible reminds us that among the factors that unite believers are one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. Of the 89 references in the New Testament regarding baptism, nearly every one alludes to water baptism. This baptism is associated with many key events. Jesus was baptized to signify the beginning of His ministry. The first converts to Christianity were baptized on the day of Pentecost. The apostles refer often to baptism as a time when a believer enters the new walk as a Christian.

Much of the confusion over baptism is not the lack of clear biblical teaching. Instead, centuries of traditions have clouded the meaning of this act. Rather than look at what the Bible says, we have perpetuated practices simply because "That's the way we've always done it." We also carry the fear of what a change in practice might say to previous generations.

The aim of this booklet is to answer some of the more common questions about the practice of water baptism in light of the teachings of the New Testament. More than anything, we want our practice to be consistent with the instructions Jesus gave to and through his apostles. Our hope is that you will allow God's Word to speak to you and His Spirit to guide you in knowing how to respond to His invitation to baptism.

Who Should Be Baptized?

In the Great Commission, Jesus said to His followers, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). Before the gathering of the first church, the orders to build the church included the mandate to baptize disciples. In fact, it appears that the life of a disciple begins with a commitment to follow Christ, as expressed in baptism, followed by a life of obedience to the commands of Christ. The person that should be baptized is the one who desires to be a disciple of Christ. Mark 16:16 says, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." Here we are told that personal faith must come before baptism. Baptism apart from faith has no spiritual significance, since the water in itself possesses no magical powers. Faith that leads one to submission to Christ, as shown in baptism, is the kind of faith that saves.

In virtually every New Testament example where the gospel is presented, the initial response of the hearers involved baptism. Take the day of Pentecost. When the Jews heard Peter's message, they were instructed to "repent and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ." Those who took the word to heart were baptized, over three thousand of them (Acts 2:38,41).

Entrance into the family of God comes through a personal response to the good news. An individual chooses for himself whether or not to become a disciple. This faith is displayed in a desire to turn away from sin and to let Jesus reign as Lord. Then, in the act of baptism, the believer puts down a stake, making the departure from an old way of life and the entrance into the new. The person who is baptized is like the Old Testament Israelites who passed through the Red Sea, leaving behind a life of bondage and entering into a pilgrimage of faith.

Why did God choose the act of baptism as the starting point for the Christian life? For one, it is the embodiment of faith and repentance. Faith, in that the immersion acknowledges that Christ truly died and rose from the dead. Repentance, because the act of submitting oneself to the hands of another in baptism is symbolic of the submission involved in surrendering oneself to God. We present to God our entire being as we identify with the words of Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

Baptism can be a humbling event for an adult, and for good reason! God wants us to be assured that our only hope for salvation is by casting ourselves upon His grace and mercy.

How Should One Be Baptized?

Three forms of baptism are practiced by churches. Some observe a form of baptism called "sprinkling," when water is either dribbled or dabbed upon the candidate's head. Another common method is "pouring" water on the head of the candidate. A third method of baptism is "immersion," as the individual is submersed in water.

Of the three methods of baptism, only immersion is accepted by all churches. This is largely due to the fact that the Greek word baptisma consists of "the processes of immersion, submersion, and emergence." Baptism by immersion is supported by the fact that John the Baptist baptized in the Jordan River and again at Aenon because "there was plenty of water" (John 3:23). Furthermore, immersion best pictures a believer's complete submission to Jesus Christ as Lord, as dramatized in this spiritual burial. Romans 6:4 states "We therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

Archaeology has unveiled baptistries of the early church, and historians verify that immersion was the practice of the church for the first thirteen centuries. Even denominational leaders agree that this is the original mode of baptism:

Methodist: John Wesley said, "We are buried with Him, alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion."

Catholic: F. Brenner, a catholic theologian, wrote, "Thirteen hundred years was baptism generally and ordinarily performed by the immersion of a man under water; and only in extraordinary cases was sprinkling or effusion permitted. These latter methods of baptism were called in question, and even prohibited."

Lutheran: Martin Luther wrote, "On this account I could wish that such as are baptized should be completely immersed into water according to the meaning of the word and the significance of the ordinance."

Presbyterian: John Calvin said, "The very word baptize signifies to immerse, and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the primitive church."

When Should Someone Be Baptized?

In the New Testament times, people were baptized as soon as they believed the gospel message. In the biblical examples there is a sense of urgency to be baptized, which is so unlike many churches and pastors who either don't encourage their people to be baptized or postpone it for months and even years. Three thousand who responded on the day of Pentecost were baptized "that day" (Acts 2:41). This was also the response of the Samaritans. "But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12).

The Ethiopian eunuch asked to be baptized as soon as he came near water (Acts 8:36-38). After Saul's encounter with Jesus on the way to Damascus, he was told by Ananias, "What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized" (Acts 22:16). Likewise, Cornelius and his household were commanded to be baptized after the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 10:47-48). After Paul and Silas shared the gospel, the Philippine jailer and his family were immersed "at that hour of the night" (Acts 16:33).

"In the book of Acts, when a person expressed faith in Christ he was immediately baptized. Overall, we can encapsulate the New Testament view this way: A Christian is someone who has committed his life to Christ through baptism. Baptism is not an "extra" thrown in on the Christian life; it is a fundamental point of identity."

In every case in the book of Acts, baptisms were performed as soon as possible. None of the believers were instructed to wait any significant length of time. They didn't even wait until Sunday services! Instead, they were baptized at the earliest opportunity, as a demonstration of their acceptance of the gospel and change in life direction.

A beautiful analogy of baptism is found in the modern wedding ceremony. (This is fitting since the church is called the "bride of Christ"). A man who loves a woman confesses his love and commitment to her in the marriage ceremony. A spiritual work takes place as the two become one. Similarly, in baptism the believer publicly identifies with Christ as a spiritual partner and the two become one. In place of wedding vows, the believer pledges "a good conscience toward God" (1 Peter 3:21). Neither the wedding nor the baptism is the climax of either relationship, yet both offer the opportunity for greater intimacy. That's why we must be careful to place the greater emphasis on the relationship with Christ, and not on the act of baptism.

Does Baptism Have Anything To Do With My Salvation?

If baptism is indeed a response to the preaching of the good news and an initiation into a relationship with Christ, then it must have a connection with salvation. Although many modern teachers dismiss any connection between one's baptism and salvation, the biblical imagery speaks otherwise. In baptism there is...

...a spiritual burial. "We were buried with him in baptism" (Romans 6:4).

...the washing away of sin. "Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away" (Acts 22:16).

...a covering with Christ's righteousness. "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

...a circumcision of the heart. "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature...having been buried with I'm in baptism" (Colossians 2:11-12).

...a promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Repent and be baptized...and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Baptism is always associated with concepts like faith, forgiveness and righteousness. It has no meaning apart from one's salvation. It fits in the category of faith responses - along with repentance and confession. Although it's an act of obedience, baptism differs from things like tithing, the Lord's Supper, and witnessing - which are not connected to the initial reception of the gospel. The Great Commission separates baptism from obedience to everything else (Matthew 28:19-20). In a very real sense, immersion is for the believer who is ready to take the plunge into a new life of obedience to Christ!

Is Baptism a Work We Do To Be Saved?

We never want to take attention away from the grace of God. "For it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:8). Whenever our faith is placed in our human works, whether our church attendance, ministry performance, or even our baptism, it is wrongly directed. Faith is no stronger than the object upon which it is placed. You can either trust in your own works, which will never get you very far, or trust in the sinless, death-conquering Savior - Jesus Christ. Although personal works cannot save, we must do something to receive the benefits of the gospel. The Pentecost believers cried out, "What must we do to be saved?" They were instructed to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:37-38). The Philippine jailer begged, "What must I do to be saved?" He was told to believe, and he and his household were baptized that night (Acts 16:30-33).

When a doctor gives a prescription, the patient follows his directions because of his confidence in the doctor. The patient doesn't take credit for his own healing, even though some steps of obedience were required. In the same way, when a believer follows the prescription for his spiritual ills, he is demonstrating faith in the Great Physician and gives Him the praise for the healing!

Of the parties involved in baptism, the person being baptized does the least amount of work! He does not baptize himself - he submits himself to the hands of another. Yet there is someone greater at work. God is the One who raises the believer from the dead, who circumcises his heart, who washes away his sin, who adorns him with righteousness and who gives him the precious Holy Spirit. In baptism, faith is placed in God and His promises. So yes, baptism is a work - a wonderful work of God!

"In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God" (Colossians 2:11-12).

As you can see, baptism is not portrayed in the Bible as an obligation (something you do for God) but as an opportunity (to have something done to you by God!) This was the attitude of the Ethiopian. His question was not, "Why do I have to be baptized?" But rather, "Look! Here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" (Acts 8:36).

Do I Have To Be Baptized To Be Saved?

A related question that is often asked is this: "If I'm not baptized, are you saying I'm not saved?" The answer to these questions can evoke a lot of emotion. After all, we are dealing with some pretty important issues. Since we ought to speak where the Bible speaks, we have to agree that the Bible says that if you do not believe you will perish (John 3:17). It also says if you don't repent you will perish (Luke 13:3). There is also good evidence that if you fail to confess Christ, you will not be saved (Matthew 10:32-33). However, in no passage does it state that if you are not immersed, you will not be saved.

God is the judge of who is saved and who is not. However, His command is clear that disciples are to be baptized. It would be strange to call someone a believer who refused to be baptized, since it is viewed as part of the conversion process.

"It must be remembered that in New Testament times repentance and faith, regeneration and conversion, baptism in water, reception of the Holy Spirit...admission to church fellowship...were all part of a complex of events which took place within a short time... logically they were distinguishable, but in practice they were all bound up with the transition from the old life to the new.

We would have to seriously question the faith of someone who claimed to believe in Jesus but refused to be baptized. How can you call Jesus "Lord" yet reject being baptized in His Name?

What If I've Accepted Christ, But Have Never Been Immersed?

If this describes you, you are not alone. Most evangelism approaches today say little if anything about baptism, choosing instead to rely upon the "sinners prayer." If you were sprinkled as a baby and later confirmed as I was, you may have figured you had the baptism issue covered retroactively.

If you search the New Testament, you will find something that may surprise you. In the following list of conversions or references to conversion, notice when faith, repentance, prayer and baptism are either commanded or described:

Passage	Faith	Repentance	Prayer	Baptism
Mat. 28:19-20				X
Mark 16:15-16	X			X
Acts 2:36-41	X	X		X
Acts 5:12-14	X			
Acts 8:4-13	X			X
Acts 8:34-38	X			X
Acts 10:39-48	X			X
Acts 11:19-21	X	X		
Acts 16:30-34	X			X
Acts 18:7-8	X			X
Gal. 3:26-27	X			X
Eph. 2:8-9	X			
Col. 2:11-12	X			X

We wouldn't say that since repentance is only occasionally mentioned it is unnecessary. And while baptism is not referenced in every case, it is spoken of almost as frequently as faith. What's absent is any talk of a "sinner's prayer." Prayer is called for in another passage, in the conversion of Saul. Ananias said to him, "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).

In the letters of the Apostles to young churches, assurance of salvation is not based on when one "said the prayer," but when he believed and was baptized. (See Romans 6:1-5, Galatians 3:26-27, Colossians 2:9-12). Therefore, if we truly want to follow the biblical example, we ought to have people call on the Lord in prayer in connection with their baptism, rather than say a prayer and wait weeks, months, or even years before being immersed.

Since we want to follow the New Testament example as closely as possible, we place an emphasis on a believer demonstrating his or her commitment to Christ in baptism. If you have never been immersed as an act of faith, we echo the words of Ananias to Paul: "What are you waiting for?"

What About Baptizing Infants?

A passage often cited for support in baptizing infants are Jesus' words: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14). If you notice, this verse says nothing about infants nor baptism. The force of the passage is about giving children accessibility to Jesus: Let them come, and don't keep them from coming. The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who freely choose to come to Christ - whether children or adults.

The practice of baptizing infants is neither commanded nor described anywhere in the Bible. Sometimes household baptisms are cited as evidence of infant baptism. Yet in each of the cases, there is no mention of children.

Furthermore, in each situation the responses indicate that young children were not among those baptized. Cornelius and his household praised God (Acts 10:44-46). The Philippine jailer and his family came to believe in God (Acts 16:34). Stephanas and his household devoted themselves to serving other believers (1 Corinthians 1:16; 16:15). Praising God, believing in God and devoting oneself to service are not the responses of infants but of mature adults.

Children should be baptized just like adults on the basis of their personal faith in Jesus Christ and a repentant heart. For some children, they will come to this point in early elementary school. Others will not be ready until they are teenagers or older. There is no "right age" when a child should be baptized. Fortunately, the gospel is simple enough that a child can understand it. If you think your child is ready to talk seriously about being baptized, please talk with one of our Children's Ministers.

I know that some teachers try to equate the Old Testament rite of circumcision of infants with baptism. However, one of the errors of Jewish thought was that a relationship with God could be passed on from parents to children through an external rite. Paul emphatically denounces that idea in Romans 2 and 4, saying that a ritual void of personal faith has no value whatsoever.

Faith makes all the difference. That's why the impact is so much greater when an adult is immersed than when an infant is sprinkled. A pastor from a mainline church gave this testimony at a conference:

"We found many people out here in California who knew very little of the Lord. When they found Christ as their personal Savior, we baptized them as adults. You know what? Those are exciting baptisms! In fact, I'm beginning to think we ought to dedicate our infants and baptize our adults!"

Many Christian parents have their children sprinkled as infants. While intent is noble, the practice can give a false impression of what it means to be a Christian. If you have an infant and have come from a tradition where children were baptized, we encourage you to participate in our Baby Dedication service. This is a time when Christian parents dedicate themselves to raising their child in a godly manner, in the hope that one day they will choose to follow Him as well. If you are interested in our Baby Dedication Service, contact the church office.

If your parents baptized you as a baby, thank God for their desire to raise you in a Christian home. Then invite them to your adult baptism and let them know that what they started so long ago has led you to this point in your faith journey.

Should A Person Ever Be Re-Baptized?

The Bible presents one story of some individuals who were baptized a second time. In Acts 19, we find some disciples who knew nothing of the Holy Spirit and only knew the baptism of John. They had never been baptized as an expression of their faith in Jesus Christ, nor had they received the Holy Spirit. Paul told them about the baptism of Jesus. They then were immersed a second time and received the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes young people, and even adults, are baptized for the wrong motives. Maybe the fear of being left out or the desire to make someone else happy has moved them to baptism. Maybe they craved attention given to those who are baptized. If someone was baptized for any reason other than faith in Christ, then that person should consider being immersed, this time as an expression of his or her personal faith and devotion to Christ.

Once someone is immersed for the right reasons, no other baptisms are needed. I've known people who have strayed from the Lord and felt a need to be baptized again. What they really need is just a time of confession and repentance.

Sometimes adults think they should be baptized again because they know more now than they did when they were first immersed. Yet a person does not have to have complete knowledge to be baptized. If that were the case, no one could ever be baptized! What is critical is a basic knowledge of who Jesus is, what He accomplished for us, and what happens when you commit your life to Him. I know much more about my wife and marriage now that I've been married for over a decade, but it doesn't mean that our wedding was ineffective and that we must do it over again.

A Few Other Questions

Because of the examples of baptisms in the New Testament and due to the meaning of the word, immersion is a requirement for membership at University Christian Church. If you have never been immersed as a believer, we encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity to express your acceptance of the good news and to unashamedly declare your faith in Jesus Christ.

When Can I Be Baptized? We can schedule your baptism for any time. It could be on a Sunday morning after service, throughout the week, or on a Baptism Sunday. This is a great opportunity to invite your family and friends to join.

Where Can I Be Baptized? Most of our baptisms take place at the church, but you can be baptized anywhere there is sufficient water - event in a lake or swimming pool!

Who Will Baptize Me? Since we believe the Great Commission is to be carried out by all Christians, any immersed believer may baptize another individual. One of the most exciting events is seeing parents baptizing their children, husbands baptizing their wives, and friends baptizing friends. Our staff is happy to be a part of this decision and baptize you, but we recommend you select someone who has been instrumental in encouraging your faith.

What Do I Wear? You can wear anything from your 'church clothes' to shorts and a t-shirt. We will have extra shirts and towels for you.

What Do I Say? We believe it is important for the person being baptized to publicly express their faith. You will be asked to repeat a statement of faith:

"I believe that Jesus is the truth. I admit that I have sinned and need His forgiveness. I repent of my sin, and my hope is in Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave. I give control of my life to Jesus as my Lord."

If, after reading this, you have additional questions or would like to be baptized, please email connections@university.church or call 785-776-5440.