

A Look at Believer's Baptism



at Faith Bible Fellowship Church

What the Bible Fellowship Church Teaches regarding Baptism

Water baptism (Acts 8:36) the immersion of the believer, is a visible testimony to the work of regeneration (Acts 2:41) and a mark of identification and union with Christ. It has no saving or cleansing power, but it is the answer of a good conscience before God (Matt 28:19, 20; Romans 6:3, 4; Colossians 2:11, 12); hence, it should be administered only to those who have, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, realized the forgiveness of sins and possess the assurance of acceptance with God.

*Article 20-1 Articles of Faith
Bible Fellowship Church*

Why Baptize At All?

We baptize because Christ commanded it. Consider these words of Jesus:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Jesus began His public ministry by being baptized, and He concluded His public ministry by commanding His disciples to baptize others. Matthew records these words as the final explicit instructions of Jesus before He ascended to heaven. This passage is called the Great Commission because it is the foundation for our missionary outreach. We are commanded to "make disciples", and this involves "going", "teaching", and "baptizing". Following Jesus' command, Christians throughout the centuries have baptized new Christians, those who have become "disciples of Jesus."

Put simply - baptism is a clear command of Jesus Christ for His church.

What Does Baptism Signify?

WHAT IS IT? Briefly stated, baptism is a public ceremony in which a new disciple of Jesus Christ is immersed in water as a statement that his or her old self has died and been buried, and that his or her new self has come to life through the power God. It is a public statement of that person's identification with, and commitment to, Jesus Christ.

I'M SAVED! The New Testament tells us that when a person turns from ruling his own life, places his personal trust in God for the forgiveness of sins and commits his life to Christ, God will forgive his sins and save him from the coming judgment. Christians say that person has been "saved."

A NEW ME! Not only has a new Christian been saved, he has been made a new person. At the moment of salvation, the believer's old self died and was buried, and a new spiritual self was born. This was the person's second birth. Jesus called this being "born again." The Apostle Paul said that this death, burial and new birth at the moment of salvation was like the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Thus, when a person trusts in Christ, God baptizes (immerses) that person into a permanent identification with Christ.

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized [immersed] into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were 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. If we have been united with him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with Him (Romans 6:3-5)

AN OUTWARD SYMBOL OF MY INWARD CHANGE! The ceremony of baptism is an outward display of what has taken place spiritually in the believer's life. In the ceremony of baptism, we can easily see that going under the water symbolizes the death and burial of the old self. Then, coming up out of the water symbolizes the resurrection of the new self.

IT DOESN'T SAVE ME. Baptism cannot give us salvation. There is nothing spiritual that happens at the time of baptism. Rather, it is a public declaration that the new believer has been transformed and is identifying him or herself with Jesus Christ. What happens if you baptize an unbeliever? He becomes a wet unbeliever.

Who Is To Be Baptized?

First, faith is always the prerequisite for baptism. Note again, the order of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go...make disciples...baptize them." Acts 2:38 says, "Repent and let each one of you be baptized." Acts 2:41 says, "And as many as gladly received the word were baptized."

Acts 8:12 is particularly clear on this point:

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."

Belief in Christ clearly precedes baptism. That belief entails one's personal confession of sin and repentance. *It is the personal emphasis of the one being baptized that gives baptism its meaning.*

That is why we say it is a *"visible testimony to the work of regeneration."* It is the disciple of Christ who is baptized, that is why *"it should be administered only to those who have, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, realized the forgiveness of sins and possess the assurance of acceptance with God"*. (BFC Faith & Order; Article 20-1)

We call this believer's baptism. Those who believe should be baptized. It is the believer's first step of obedience.

Why Is The Person Immersed during Baptism?

The New Testament was originally written in Greek. The Greek word translated "baptize" is the verb *'baptizo'*. According to most contemporary lexicons, the primary meaning is "to dip, plunge, immerse." The secondary meaning is to "bring under the influence." Dr. Merrill Tenney notes that "after making allowances for certain occasional exceptions, such as passages where washing is implied, the etymological meaning indicates that baptism was originally by immersion. (*Basic Christian Doctrine*, p. 257)

A brief survey of baptism in the New Testament reveals the following interesting facts:

1. Baptism requires *plenty of water*. (John 3:23)
2. Baptism requires *going down into the water*. (Acts 8:38)
3. Baptism requires *coming up out of the water*. (Matthew 3:16, Acts 8:39)

Furthermore, the figures of speech used by the Apostle Paul accord well with immersion. Baptism, as we have previously noted, is called a "burial" in Romans 6:4. Colossians 2:12 agrees, saying:

having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Baptism is "into His death" and involves being "raised to walk in newness of life." It is difficult to see how sprinkling or pouring could convey these meanings. Baptism is a beautiful illustration of the death, burial, and resurrection of the person who believes on Jesus Christ. Immersion is the way God arranged for us to symbolize it. Sprinkling doesn't depict the full meaning of baptism. Immersion does. The method and the meaning are bound up together.

Finally, the testimony of church history is that immersion was indeed the mode of baptism practiced in the early church.

It is also worthy of note that the Greek language has verbs that explicitly means "sprinkle" or "pour" but these verbs are never used with reference to baptism.

Therefore, based upon the evidence mentioned above, total immersion in water is the mode of baptism practiced in the Bible Fellowship Church.

Brief Answers To Other Questions About Baptism

1. How old should children be before they are baptized? They should be old enough to make an intelligent profession of faith in Christ. Some young children will truly understand the gospel and the meaning of baptism; others will need to wait a few years. In any case, the Elders in prayerful discussion with the child's parents should be the ones making the final decision.

2. When should baptism be performed? As soon as possible after conversion. Remember, baptism is not a mark of spiritual maturity, but rather a statement of personal identification with Jesus Christ.

3. What actually happens at a baptismal service? The service is usually informal but includes these elements: singing, testimonies, and teaching the explanation of baptism. The person to be baptized is asked to affirm his/her faith in Jesus Christ and his desire to be baptized. After asking the candidate if they have received Christ and their desire to be baptized, the candidate is immersed.

6. Should I invite my friends and family to my baptism? Absolutely. Remember, baptism is a public testimony to your faith in Christ. It is also a visual re-enactment of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. So, yes, by all means invite everyone you know to attend your baptism. Make it a festive, joyous occasion and pray that God will use your witness to influence your friends for Christ.

I Want to be Baptized. What Should I Do?

Contact one of the Pastors, one of the elders or the church office for a "Baptism Application" and "Testimony Sheet". Once this is completed, two or three of the elders will meet with you to hear you share your testimony and make sure you have an understanding of the meaning of baptism. Then, we'll make plans for a baptism celebration.