

Why Water Baptism?

Baptism has already been mentioned in this series of studies but we now need to know the specific reasons for baptism and what it means to us personally.

Why do we need baptism?

Some people ask, *Is baptism really necessary?*

Does it make any difference whether I am baptised or not?

Isn't believing and trusting in Jesus all that really matters?

The Christian Bible gives us some clear reasons why we should be baptised once we have committed our lives to Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ was baptised.

Matthew 3:13-17 [NIV] *“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?” Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.” Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”*

Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptised in the river Jordan.

Notice baptism of Jesus was complete immersion for it states that Jesus *“went up out of the water.”*

John 3:23 [NIV] *“Now John also was baptising at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptised.”*

Baptism needed *“plenty of water”*. This fact will be shown to be important later in this study.

Jesus did **not** need to be baptised.

John was baptising people as a sign that they were repenting and turning away from their sins.

Hebrews 4:15 [NIV] *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, **yet was without sin.**”*

Jesus Christ had no sin to repent of.

Yet Jesus still came to John for baptism.

Why?

Jesus knew that this was what God the Father wanted, and it was confirmed by the voice from heaven.

Jesus through His baptism was showing a willingness to stand by the side of sinners and be counted as one of them for our sake.

Jesus through His example calls on us to follow His example, believe in Him and follow in His steps.

Jesus commanded baptism.

John 3:5 [NIV] *“Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.”*

The term “*born of water*” could indicate baptism by immersion, as we will see later.

Matthew 28:19 [NIV] *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, **baptising them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”*

Jesus commanded His disciples to baptise new converts to Christianity.

John 14:15 [NIV] *“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”*

Obedience to Jesus Christ’s command to be baptised is showing our love for Him.

If we don’t want to obey Jesus in this first step of discipleship, how will we obey Him in all the other steps He will later call us to take?

The early Christians practised baptism.

Acts 2:37-38 [NIV] *“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “**Repent and be baptised**, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

In the teaching of the early church it is clear that baptism was part of the process of becoming a Christian.

Acts 8:12 [NIV] *“But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, **they were baptised**, both men and women.”*

The Samaritans were baptised directly after belief in Jesus Christ.

Acts 8:34-38 [NIV] *“The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptised?” And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and **the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him.**”*

The Ethiopian eunuch was baptised without any delay after believing the message Philip gave him.

Acts 10:44-48 [NIV] *“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, “Can anyone keep these people from **being baptised with water?** They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” So he ordered that they be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.”*

The Gentile Cornelius and his friends and relatives baptised after, to the surprise of Jewish onlookers, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 16:29-33 [NIV] *“The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately **he and all his family were baptised.**”*

The jailer and all his family after hearing the message of Peter and Silas.

Whenever anyone became a Christian they were baptised almost straight away.

Baptism was part of conversion.

Baptism was only for believers.

Baptism always came after a person believed and trusted in Jesus Christ.

In New Testament times there was no such thing as an unbaptised Christian.

The deep meaning of baptism

What are we doing when we step into the waters of baptism in obedience to Jesus' call?

Baptism makes our commitment to Jesus Christ clear.

Matthew 10:32-33 [NIV] *“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”*

Baptism was how the first Christians showed others clearly that Jesus was their Saviour and Lord.

Romans 10:9 [NIV] *“That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

Early Christians confessed with their lips and showed with their baptism that Jesus Christ was their Lord and Master.

Some may find this open show of commitment through public baptism hard to do.

But Jesus calls us to be baptised and will help us to overcome any problems we have in doing it.

All who are baptised will be blessed as we take this first and important step in our Christian life.

Baptism is an outward sign of an inner cleansing.

Through baptism we are showing that our sins have been washed away and we are now forgiven and made clean in God's sight.

Hebrews 10:22 [NIV] *“let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and **having our bodies washed with pure water.**”*

The blood of Christ and the washing of baptism are linked and applied through faith in Jesus Christ.

The water of baptism cannot wash away our sins.

1 John 1:7 [NIV] *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.**”*

Only the blood of Jesus Christ purifies us from the penalty of sin.

Baptism does **not** make us a Christian.

Baptism is the outward sign of what God has done inwardly.

Baptism is a sign of new ownership.

Romans 6:1-7 [NIV] *“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were **baptised 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 so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should **no longer be slaves to sin**, because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”*

Symbolically we died when we go down into the waters of baptism and as we rise out of the water our old self, our old life, is left dead in the watery grave.

The sins we committed are cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ and we are “*born again*” to a new life.

This does **not** mean that baptism makes us perfect and we will no longer sin.

Romans 6:8-14 [NIV] *“Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but **rather offer yourselves to God**, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him **as instruments of righteousness**. **For sin shall not be your master**, because you are not under law, but under grace.”*

Coming through the waters of baptism means we now want the resurrected Jesus to live His life again on earth through us.

We will sin at times and have to confess them and be cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

But now sin is **not** our master, we have a new Master, Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:15-18 [NIV] *“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, **you are slaves to the one whom you obey**, whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. **You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.**”*

We offer our whole life to Jesus Christ to use in fulfilling God’s will here on earth.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, **to offer your bodies as living sacrifices**, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

We sacrifice our whole life body, brain and spirit to Jesus Christ as a thanks offering for all He has done for us.

Baptism makes a new beginning.

Baptism is a beginning **not** an end in itself, baptism is only part of the conversion process.

Romans 12:2 [NIV] *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Having offered our whole life to Jesus Christ we now begin a process of change.

Our mind is re-focussed and transformed from the selfish pattern that pervades society, to an attitude of a servant, who loves his master and his fellow human beings.

John 15:13 [NIV] *“Greater love has no-one than this, that he **lay down his life** for his friends.”*

We lay down our lives by serving Jesus and other human beings.

Luke 10:25 [NIV] *“On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

All of us, if we are honest, want to exist after death.

How did Jesus answer this question?

Luke 10:26-29 [NIV] *“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered: “**Love the Lord your God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘**Love your neighbour as yourself.**” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And **who is my neighbour?**”*

Love God and our neighbour.

Luke 10:30-37 [NIV] *“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ “**Which of these three do you think was a neighbour** to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “**The one who had mercy on him.**” Jesus told him, “**Go and do likewise.**”*

This story of Jesus tells us that the neighbour we are to love is anyone who is in need of help.

This command opens up our helping all who are in need of physical food and clothing but also all who are in need of spiritual food [God’s Word] and spiritual clothing [God’s righteousness].

The provision of the physical often leads to our being able to offer the spiritual.

A physical act of love leads to a spiritual act of love being made available to those who need the love of the true God.

Perhaps we feel we are not ready or good enough to be baptised just yet.

It is important to realise that baptism is **not** a step of spiritual “*graduation*” that we take when we feel good enough.

Rather, it is the “*commencement*” of our Christian living course.

Baptism is the first step we take in our discipleship course.

We will never be good enough, all we have to do is trust Jesus Christ who is good enough.

Baptism is the first step to take in following Jesus Christ.

We have to ask ourselves, *are we willing to take that first step with Jesus?*

Memory verse:

Romans 6:4 [NIV] *“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.”*

In the next study we will meditate on the effect of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.