

What to do?

Today if we're keen to restore the faith and practice of the earliest Christians, then we should give the strong emphasis on baptism as the New Testament does. That means encouraging believers to be baptised if they have not done so. It also means teaching about baptism as part of the process of spiritual conversion.

After all, if a person loves Jesus and wants to obey him, what's stopping their obedience to Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19-20?



CONTACT INFORMATION:

*Please contact us if you wish to know more
or if you have any questions.*

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Why be baptised?



by Benny Tabalujan

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Baptism today

Today, some churches baptise and others don't. Some baptise by immersion in water, others sprinkle or pour water. Some baptise babies while others practise adult baptism. Given such different practices, what can we learn about baptism from the Bible, especially in the New Testament?

Baptism in the New Testament

A quick look into the New Testament shows that there is much said about baptism.

- In one of the clearest statements in the Gospels, Jesus instructs his apostles to “make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). This passage tells us that the process of making disciples involves baptising and teaching.
- Elsewhere, Jesus says that no one can see God's kingdom unless one is born again - that is, “born of water and Spirit” (John 3:3-5). Today, some question whether the “water” in this passage refers to baptism. But the references to water baptism later in that passage (3:22-4:2) are significant. They suggest that the Holy Spirit's work in the process of spiritual rebirth includes water baptism.

- In the New Testament epistles, we read of Paul's understanding of baptism as the moment when a person puts on Christ (Galatians 3:26-29). He equates immersion into water with the death and burial of Christ so that thereafter the baptised person is able to walk in “newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4). Paul also refers to baptism as a key unifying point of Christian faith (Ephesians 4:5). He points out that baptism is a work of God, not our work (Colossians 2:11-13).
- In Acts, Luke records the preaching of Peter who called on the Jews at Pentecost to be baptised for remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Throughout Acts, various individuals are described as hearing the gospel and being baptised (eg. 8:38; 16:15, 33; etc).



Baptism and Spiritual Rebirth

In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus uttered some fascinating words in John 3:8 – “The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” This hints at the mystery of spiritual rebirth.

In that sense, being born again is both simple and mysterious. On the one hand, conversion is God's gift of grace and no human work can earn it (Ephesians 2:8-10). On the other hand, individuals must respond to God in faith to enjoy that grace. And

being willing to submit to baptism – as Jesus himself submitted to baptism by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-17) – appears to be part of that response of faith.

Hence, it's not surprising that in the first few centuries after Christ the early Christians placed huge importance on baptism.¹ It was seen as a rite of initiation into the church, the community of disciples. Immersion of adult believers after a period of instruction about the Christian faith was the norm. For them, baptism was a serious matter.

1. See generally: Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).