

Why Should I Be Baptized?

— by Pastor Peter Bongers

That is a very good question, and one that every Believer should ask themselves early-on in their walk of faith. There is no arguing that Christ underwent baptism, He preached baptism, and He commanded new believers to undergo baptism. Baptism must be at the core of every disciple's faith-journey, for it shows that we appreciate the serious and important task we have begun.

This booklet asks and answers the question, “**Why should I be baptized?**” Believer's baptism is 1) An act of obedience; 2) A symbol of our union with Christ; 3) A time of initiation, and 4) A time of commissioning.

I. BELIEVER'S BAPTISM IS AN ACT OF OBEDIENCE

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 am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Mat 28:19-20

It is true that we believe that baptism isn't necessary for salvation. But it is also true that believers are to be baptized because baptism is an act of obedience to God's revealed will. The charge which Christ gave to the apostles to make disciples also included the command to baptize people into the church. In reality, baptism is not an option for those who wish to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

A. Baptism is a Sacrament

It is important to understand that baptism is an essential *sacrament*, which along with the Lord's Table, is the only other

sacrament which the evangelical church recognizes. The word “sacrament” comes from the Latin term *sacramentum*, which referred to the Roman soldier's oath of *absolute obedience* to his general. Baptism is first and foremost about obedience.

Consider Jesus' attitude towards baptism. Although He was sinless and not in need of the baptism which John offered, He did so out of obedience to his Father in heaven. When the Baptist protested that it was he who should come to Jesus, Christ simply said: “*Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness*” (Mat 3:15).

And don't forget Paul, who immediately after his dramatic conversion, received a visitor named Ananias, who restored the Apostle's sight, and then baptized him into the church. Over and

Baptism is for us the public declaration of our love, surrender and commitment to Jesus Christ as our Leader and Forgiver.

over again in the book of Acts, from Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, when 3,000 were saved and baptized, to the Ethiopian eunuch who jumped down off of his chariot immediately after receiving Christ, baptism followed belief.

B. Baptism is For Believers Only

This raises another critical point. Baptism is an act of obedience, and so by definition must be reserved for believers. It is not a rite for the uncommitted, but for those who have consciously made a decision to follow Jesus Christ as their Leader and Forgiver. While older children are sometimes baptized, they must be able to demonstrate an age-appropriate understanding of their faith, and what it is that baptism entails. Baptism must be the believer's *willing response* to a life of obedience to Christ.

C. The Mode of Baptism is Important

The method — full immersion — is important theologically and spiritually. The word itself is derived from two closely-linked Greek verbs, the one meaning “*to dip in*” or “*to dip under*,” was often used of dying fabric. The second related verb from the earliest of times was used to mean *total immersion*. To be fully submerged symbolizes **the totality of our commitment**, and our acceptance of Christ’s claim on our life. I am aware that many have been baptized by different modes, and yet if by that act a total commitment and surrender is meant, then we have no quibble, but we teach as the preferable and indeed biblical model.

There is another powerful reason for insisting on total submersion. Standing in water with your clothes on and telling about your faith-journey before you are plunged beneath the surface is hardly an everyday occurrence. For most of us, it involves submission and perhaps more than a little humiliation. But Christ was not afraid to submit to a humiliating death for us, and so through baptism, we are declaring our obedience, and willingness to be completely identified with our Saviour.

Baptism is first and foremost **an act of obedience** for believers.

II. BELIEVER’S BAPTISM IS A CONFIRMATION AND A PLEDGE OF OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

... don’t you know that all of us who were baptized 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. *Romans 6:3-5*

Baptism is an important step in the life of the believer, because through baptism we are confirming what we have professed.

A. Baptism Is A Powerful and Public Proclamation

By undergoing baptism, we are in fact declaring that:

- we believe that Christ is the sinless Son of God who has purchased our forgiveness and eternal life through His death on the cross, and
- we are willing to be identified with our Lord and Saviour in every way.

When we pass through the waters of baptism, we are graphically portraying our union with Him in His death and resurrection. Our immersion is how we symbolize our total identification with Christ and his atoning death. It is a powerful representation of our being buried with Him in death, and raised with Him in victory and newness of life!

B. Baptism Portrays Our Love And Commitment

Believer’s baptism is in one way, the NT equivalent of an OT practice, where a servant could choose to bond themselves to their master for life, even though he was a freedman and able to go where he would.

⁵ “... if the servant declares, ‘I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,’ ⁶ then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life. *Exodus 21:5-6* (NIV)

The pierced ear symbolized whole-hearted commitment. Our public immersion symbolizes ours. Baptism is the logical progression of our journey of faith, which begins when we accept Christ as Lord and Saviour. Even before we enter the waters of the baptismal tank, we have already been “placed into” Christ by virtue of our faith in Him. Paul writes in Galatians 3:26-28:

You are all [children] of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for *all of you who were baptized into Christ* have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Our baptism by water is the outward picture of the inner spiritual reality of our identification with Christ. It affirms that it is no longer we who control our destiny, but Christ who lives within us, giving to us new spiritual life.

C. Baptism Affirms That We Have Been Joined to Christ In His Death

Through baptism we have – in a real, spiritual sense – been “crucified with him” and are therefore no longer held captive by our sinful past:

⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶ 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— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. *Romans 6:5-7*

It seems ironic to think this way, but when we are dead, we don't have to worry about sinning any more; in fact, we don't have to worry about doing *anything* any more, because we are in fact dead! That is why Paul could say:

¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. *Galatians 2:19-20*

D. Baptism Affirms Our Hope of Resurrection

But just as baptism identifies us with Christ in His death, it also identifies that we also have the hope of eternal life, because of Christ's resurrection from the dead. As Paul says in Romans: “We were... 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” (Rom 6:4).

Christ was not simply resuscitated to live again the life of a Galilean carpenter; He was *resurrected* to a new and glorious life to rule as Lord of all. He rose to a new life, and so we have the sure hope that one day we will share in His resurrection. Baptism is **evidence of our hope of eternal life** in and through Christ. For the believer, baptism is the confirmation and pledge of our union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

III. BELIEVER'S BAPTISM IS OUR INITIATION INTO THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE CHURCH

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. *For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free* - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. *1 Cor 12:12-13*

In baptism, the believer is set apart by Christ to be a member of His church. Baptism is the means by which we are initiated into Christ's Body. It is more than a ritual washing, or some arcane ritual that needs to be endured in order to become a member. I have known many who have been baptized so that they could be married at a certain church, or become members at a certain church. But baptism is the means by which we identify-with and become a part-of God's people.

A. Baptism Is A Pledge Of Our Participation In Church Life

It's not about getting our name on a membership role somewhere, it's about identifying ourselves completely with Christ, and **pledging our full participation-in and experience-of His body, the Church**. That means at our baptism, we are willingly joining ourselves to everyone else who has like-wise surrendered to Christ; *baptism is not only being joined to Christ, but other believers as well*. Our baptism is a pledge of our active involvement, contribution, and mutual submission to the church.

B. Baptism Is A Symbol Of Belonging

In Christ's day and long before, when a man converted to Judaism, he was first circumcised, and then took a ritual bath. Circumcision was the sign that one belonged to the covenant community, that one believed in God. The uncircumcised Israelite was *not* covered by the covenant promise given to Abraham by God. But when Christ came, he superseded the Old Covenant, and instituted the New Covenant, by shedding His own blood. With this New Covenant comes a new sign of belonging, for now baptism is the sign and seal of God's blessing. Writes Paul:

.... you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. 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, who raised him from the dead. *Col 2:10-12*

In baptism there is no physical or external mark to show that we belong to God. Instead, as believers in Christ we are all plunged fully into His death and resurrection. The verb translated "putting off" is significant. In the old rite of circumcision there was a partial cutting away of physical flesh, but in the new ordinance of baptism there is the full "stripping away" of our old sinful nature — the flesh, as Paul puts it. Baptism is a public indication that we intend to give our all to Christ, that we have renounced who and what we were and intend to give our all for him. To not be baptized is to hold back, to show our reluctance to be joined to Christ and His church. Believer's baptism is our initiation into the Body of Christ, the Church. Finally,

IV. BELIEVER'S BAPTISM IS OUR TIME OF COMMISSIONING

Baptism is our means of entering God's family but membership in the Church means that we now have *responsibilities*. In 1

Corinthians 12, Paul teaches about spiritual gifts and the interconnectedness of the Body within the context of baptism:

¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:13, 27 NIV)

Baptists believe in the priesthood of all believers and that *each member* of Christ's Church has been given *spiritual gifts* which they are to use to serve God. Therefore, baptism is not only an act of initiation into Christ's Body, it is also a time of commissioning when the believer is set apart for service in Christ's Kingdom. If you take the time to read 1 Co 12 from start to finish, you will see that Paul is exhorting the church to become *fully involved* and *fully committed* to using the gifts that God has given, to fulfil the Great Commission to spread the Gospel.

When you are baptized, you are being *set apart for service*, declaring your intent and willingness to use the spiritual gifts which God has given you. As long as we draw breath, God *expects* us to use our gifts to serve and glorify Him! In Christ we all have gifts given by the indwelling Holy Spirit, and it is incumbent upon us to discover what they are and use them!

Why should we be baptized? Because baptism is a time of commissioning, when we are set apart for service in Christ's Kingdom.

CONCLUSION

Why should you be baptized? Because believer's baptism is a significant and transforming event in the life of every Christian, and it is not to be despised. Indeed, baptism is:

- An act of obedience;
- A Confirmation And A Pledge Of Our Union With Christ;
- Our initiation into the Body of Christ, the Church;
- Our time of commissioning.

20/08/2008 10:10