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## Water Baptism



### What is water baptism?

Water baptism is a fundamental practice of Christianity. The Lord Jesus Christ commanded it when he said:

“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.” Matthew 28:19 (see also Mark 16:15–16)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

The word “baptise” comes from the Greek word *baptizo*, which means “to immerse or submerge.” That is precisely what baptism is: being submerged in water, symbolising death to the old life, and coming up out of the water, symbolising the start of a new life in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus established water baptism as a commitment opportunity for believers. It is far more than a ritual or religious exercise; it is a public, outward declaration that reflects a personal, inward faith.

Water baptism is a significant milestone in the life of every Christian. At Picton Baptist Church we believe that water baptism is a biblical teaching and sacred practice for true followers of Christ.

## What's the big deal about water baptism?

Even though water baptism is not essential for salvation, it is extremely important for the following reasons.

### *1. The Lord Jesus Himself was water baptised.*

We read in Matthew 3:13–17:

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River 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 alighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.’”

This one account alone provides more than enough incentive for believers to be water baptised. Every believer should pattern their life on the life of Jesus. We are called to be His disciples. Jesus was sinless and yet He saw it necessary to be water baptised to set for us an example (among other things). Note that God the Father was pleased when Jesus was baptised.

Here are a couple of verses exhorting us to follow Christ's example.

“Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Ephesians 5:1–2a

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.” 1 Peter 2:21

### *2. We are commanded to be water baptised.*

We read in Matthew 28:19–20 the very words of our Lord:

“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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

If Jesus commands us to “go and make disciples ... baptising them,” it goes without saying that we should be baptised first, before we baptise others. Jesus commands us to be water baptised and His commands are not optional. Water baptism was a definite part of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Although He did not water baptise, His disciples did.

“Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that He was gaining and baptising more disciples than John – although in fact it was not Jesus who baptised, but His disciples. So He left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.” John 4:1–3

The early Christians were commanded to be water baptised.

“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.” Acts 10:48

“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.’” Acts 2:38

### *3. Water baptism has great spiritual significance.*

Water baptism is more than a ritual or religious exercise. When a person goes into baptism they are communicating that they believe the good news of the gospel and they are forsaking the things of the world for the eternal satisfaction of following Christ. Just as my wedding ring is a symbol of the promise I made to my wife, baptism is a symbol of the faith that was sown into my heart by the work of the Holy Spirit. See Colossians 2:11–12.

### *4. Baptism brings us into covenant community.*

All throughout the New Testament we see Christians living together in communities bound by the New Covenant of Christ’s body and blood. The new life we possess in Christ is not lived in isolation but as part of the faith community. Some people say that I don’t have to be a “church member” to be a Christian. However, there is never a mention of a Christian in isolation from other Christians or apart from a fellowship of believers. New Testament believers were devoted to the Apostles’ teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42). Baptism is the means by which we are brought into communion with other believers, a local expression of the universal body of Christ.

## **Water Baptism FAQ**

### *1. Why is water baptism important?*

Water baptism is a significant milestone in the life of every Christian. At Picton Baptist Church we believe that water baptism is a biblical teaching and a sacred practice for true followers of Christ. While baptism itself has no power to cleanse or save from sin, it is an important step of obedience in a believer’s life as an outward acknowledgment of the salvation experience that has already taken place. The act of immersion and emerging from the water represents the death of our old self, and mirrors the death, burial and

resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, Jesus Himself emphasised the importance of water baptism when He gave the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, “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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

## *2. Where does it say in the Bible that we should be baptised in water?*

Jesus Himself was baptised by John the Baptist in the River Jordan just before the beginning of His public ministry, leaving behind an example for His followers (Matthew 3:13–17)

Jesus told His disciples after His resurrection and just before He was taken up to heaven that they should go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all that He had commanded them. (Matthew 28:18–20)

The disciples obeyed Him and preached baptism along with the gospel (Acts 2:38). When people repented from their sins and believed in Jesus, they were baptised in water. (See Acts 2:41; 8:12, 38; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 19:5; 22:16.)

## *3. Who are the ones who should be baptised?*

When Jesus told the apostles to baptise people, He meant those who had been made disciples (Matthew 28:19). When Peter preached the gospel on the day of Pentecost, he told people to repent and be baptised (Acts 2:38). When the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip whether he could be baptised, Philip replied that he could if he believed in Jesus with all his heart (Acts 8:37).

Therefore, it is people who have repented from their sins, believed in Jesus as their Saviour and decided to follow Him as His disciples, who should be baptised in water. In other words, only those who have been born again should be baptised, because only those who repent from their sins and believe in Jesus are born of God (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4).

## *4. Why should we be baptised in water after we are born again?*

In a nutshell, we are baptised to obey what Jesus commanded, and to testify of what Jesus has done in our life and how we have decided to follow Him. It is also an outward action of the inward change in us.

## *5. What is the meaning of water baptism?*

During baptism, when you are immersed into water, you are identifying with the death and burial of Jesus Christ – testifying that your old, sinful way of life is dead and is fit to be buried. As you come out of the water, you identify with the resurrection of Christ into the newness of life, signifying that you are now a new person with the life of Christ in you (Romans 6:3–4). By going through this act, you demonstrate your sincerity in wanting to live with a clear conscience before God (1 Peter 3:21).

## *6. What is the right mode of baptism?*

Since the days of Jesus and the early days of the church, it has been generally accepted that baptism means immersion or dipping, because that was the meaning of the Greek word that has been adapted into English.

*7. Does it really matter how one is baptised?*

Total immersion in water is the way Jesus received His baptism. It also gives the symbolic picture of “burial” and “resurrection.” However, special consideration will be given to those who suffer from physical difficulties or health impediments.

*8. Who has the right to baptise others?*

As we have seen, Jesus Christ gave His Great Commission to the disciples, so the authority to baptise rests with the spiritual leaders of the local church. While any believer can be authorised by a local church to baptise people, this is usually done by a pastor or an elder of the church.

*9. In what name should we be baptised?*

Jesus said very clearly to His apostles that we are to be baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).

*10. Does one have to be baptised in order to be saved?*

When a person repents from their sins and believes in Jesus, their sins are forgiven (Romans 10:9–10). They are saved from the guilt of their sins. Then they can testify through baptism what they have already experienced. Baptism follows salvation. It is not baptism that brings the forgiveness of sins, but repentance and faith in Jesus. Those whose sins are forgiven can go to God’s presence even if they have not been baptised in water, like the thief who repented and believed in Jesus while hanging on the cross (Luke 23:39-43).

*11. The Bible says what matters is faith working through love (Galatians 5:6). Why should we bother about baptism when what is really important is faith?*

True faith produces action (James 2:17), which includes following Christ’s example in water baptism. Baptism was important enough for Jesus to have insisted on being baptised Himself by John the Baptist because He considered it the right thing to do (Matthew 3:13–15). His actions provide us with an example to follow, and to effectively obey all that Jesus commanded, we need to be baptised.

*12. I was baptised when I was a baby. Now I have become a believer in Jesus. Do I need to get baptised again?*

Water baptism should follow after repentance and a decision to place one’s faith in Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord. True water baptism is always a “believer’s baptism” as demonstrated in the New Testament. At Picton Baptist Church we do not baptise infants; we *dedicate* them to the Lord. The baptism of an infant, practiced in some other

churches, is the decision of the parent. Since infants cannot make the decision to repent or place their faith in Christ, infant baptism would be considered more a ritual. If you were baptised as an infant, you should choose to be baptised again now as a born-again believer in declaration of your faith, since, as an infant, you could not make a conscious choice of your own to be a disciple of Christ.

*13. I was baptised as an adult. But now I see that I was not really born again at that time. I was only following what I saw others did. Should I get baptised now?*

Baptism is a testimony which only believers in Jesus can experience. It is an event that should take place after you have made the decision to be born again. If you feel strongly that you need to go through baptism again because of a newfound awareness of what it means to be born again, you should make the effort to do so.

*14. I was baptised as a believer long ago. But I backslid and went back to a sinful life. Now that I have repented and come back to Jesus, should I get baptised again?*

It is important to acknowledge your repentance from backsliding, but there is no need to be baptised once more. You should only consider being baptised again if you have doubts about your earlier salvation experience and wish to reaffirm your born-again commitment to Christ.

*15. My family strongly objects to my baptism. Should I get baptised secretly?*

Baptism is a public testimony of your personal faith in Christ and an important demonstration of your commitment to Him. However, there are times when one has to act wisely rather than recklessly. Do seek counsel from mature Christians regarding your situation.

*16. I have just been baptised in water, but I don't feel any different. What's wrong?*

What follows after baptism is the regular Christian life with its battles and temptations. In fact, just after Jesus was baptised, He faced strong temptations from the devil. The important thing is to set your heart to follow Jesus for the rest of your life.

*17. I have been baptised in water. What should I do now?*

Baptism is one of the first steps in following Jesus. Make a point to follow Him in every part of your life. To grow in your faith and relationship with God, you should also take time out to pray and talk to God daily. Start reading the Bible and join a home group in the church so that you can get to know other Christians and learn more about the Christian lifestyle.

*18. What if there are limitations that prevent baptism by immersion (such as physical sickness, lack of facilities)?*

God accepts us with our limitations if we have a willing heart (2 Corinthians 8:12). For Him, the condition of our heart is infinitely more important. Even if a born-again believer dies before he can get baptised, they are not going to miss out on heaven because it is

faith, not baptism, that saves us (Mark 16:16). If there are real limitations that prevent baptism by immersion, I am sure God will accept a symbolic form in place of the ideal one.

*19. How many times should a person be baptised?*

Just once. If you have been baptised before, but drifted away from the Lord because of sin, you can confess your sins, recommit your life to God and be forgiven (1 John 1:5-10); it is not necessary to be baptised again. Water baptism is a once-and-for-all public testimony of our identification with Christ's death, burial and resurrection. It is not a religious ceremony that washes away our sins.

*20. What do I need to bring in preparation for my water baptism?*

- Dark t-shirt and dark modest shorts (perhaps a swimsuit underneath)
- Change of clothes/undergarments
- Large towel (for drying off)
- Flip-flops, sandals or water shoes
- Pony tail holder (if you have long hair)
- Toiletries or other personal items (for after the baptism)
- A small plastic bag for your wet clothes

If you want to be water baptised, do speak to your Pastor or to any of the Elders.