

Water Baptism:

A Christ-Follower's Journey

There is no greater life journey than to respond to the call to follow Christ throughout the whole of one's life. It is an invitation to declare to the on looking world that I not only believe in Christ but that I belong to him and his family and by his empowering Spirit I will commit to the process of becoming like Him. This is demonstrated, initially, when I am baptized in water.

So just exactly what is water baptism? Water baptism is the public act of being immersed in water (by another) as a declaration of your faith in Christ's death, burial and resurrection on your behalf. It is also a declaration that you have been joined to the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (**1 Cor. 12:13**) and now share in the community of faith with all fellow Christ followers.

Jesus commanded us to be baptized (**Matt.28: 18-20 & Mark 16:15**). The early church practiced water baptism (Acts **2:38-41; 8:12-16; 9:18; 10:47; 19:1-5**). And throughout the history of the church, water baptism continues to be practiced right up to our present day.

Water baptisms have taken on such meaning and significance here at EPC. As a faith community we join in worship to God with thanksgiving and celebration alongside of those individuals who are being baptized. It is a powerful expression and experience of community right here in our midst.

If you have not been baptized as of yet, please prayerfully consider this significant call from Jesus to follow Him and declare your allegiance to Him publically.

Water Baptism: A Christ Follower's Journey

1. UNDERSTANDING WATER BAPTISM

A. Baptism Is:

- a. It is a public act that is performed in the presence of the gathered Christian community, whereby a person is fully immersed in water as a confession or declaration of that person's *faith* in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin and gift of eternal life.
- b. By being baptized a person declares that they are *identifying* with fellow Christ followers who likewise have been baptized signifying their faith in Christ for salvation.

2. THE PRIORITY OF WATER BAPTISM AS DEFINED BY THE NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES.

A. Why Is Water Baptism Important?

- a. Jesus *commands* us to be baptized as the initial evidence of our *allegiance* to him and *intention* to follow him. This makes water baptism an issue of *obedience* to the will of Christ
 - *Matt.28: 18-20*
 - *Mark 16:15ff*

B. Water Baptism Was A Significant Trait of the Early Church As Depicted in the Book of Acts.

- a. The disciples openly and consistently emphasized and practiced baptism. They encouraged everyone who had repented of their sins and received Christ as Lord and savior to be baptized as a testimony of what Christ had done for them.
- b. The following Scripture references describe several aspects of baptism as depicted in the New Testament:
 - *Acts 2:38-41*
 - *Acts 8:12-16*
 - *Acts 8:36-39*

- *Acts 9:18*
- *Acts 10:47*
- *Acts 16:30-34*
- *Acts 18:8*
- *Acts 19:1-5*

Describe The Significance of Baptism from the following verses

- *1 Corinthians 1:13-17*
- *Ephesians 4:5*
- *Hebrews 6:1-3*

3. THE PURPOSE AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM

A. Baptism Signifies My Allegiance To & Association With Christ.

- a. I am publically proclaiming to the on looking world that I am a follower of Jesus Christ. I am declaring my allegiance to him and His Lordship over me by obeying his command to be baptized.

- *Mark 16:16; Matt.28:18-20*

B. Baptism Signifies That I Have Been Identified With Christ's Substitutionary Death On my Behalf!

- a. I am identifying with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection (**1 Corin.15:3-4**)

- *Romans 6:1-10*
- *Colossians 2:12*

- b. What does it mean to be identified with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection? It means that at the very moment that I place my faith in Christ for salvation I become a **co-participant** in His already accomplished work of salvation (**Hebrews 7:27; 9:26; 28**), which was accomplished through His death, burial and resurrection. I also become a recipient of what his death, burial and resurrection have accomplished on my behalf.

- c. In public baptism I am proclaiming the inner reality of having experienced Christ's death, burial and resurrection on my behalf. Therefore baptism becomes an external expression of an internal reality.
 - d. When we understand how we are all joined to Adam (by virtue of his humanity) and therefore the recipients of the consequences of his sin; we are better able to appreciate the value of being identified with Christ in baptism (**Romans 5:12-21**) and being now able to receive all the blessings and benefits of His obedience to God..
- C. Identification With The Christian Community: **Acts 2:41ff; Acts 10: -11.**
- a. Baptism not only speaks of my having been spiritually joined to Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection by the work of the Holy Spirit; it is also a way of proclaiming my identification with the very faith community that has been formed by having both believed this message and experienced its reality.

4. QUESTIONS NORMALLY RAISED REGARDING WATER BAPTISM

A. *When Should I Be Baptized?*

- As soon as possible
- 'feeling ready' has nothing to do with responding to Christ's call
- This is a matter of obedience which means that you choose to obey or choose not to!

B. *How Old Must I Be Before I Can Be Baptized?*

- Age is rarely an issue
- If you have understood what baptism means in its most basic form (i.e. obeying the command of Christ); then understanding the full implications of what baptism means and symbolizes will come in due time and with further teaching.

C. *Do I Have To Be A Mature Christian Before I Can Be Baptized?*

- No you don't
- The people who were baptized on the day of Pentecost were new in their faith relationship to Christ (Acts 2:36-41).
- The Ethiopian eunuch was a 'new' believer (Acts 8:26-40)
- If anything, being baptized is a step towards spiritual maturity (Hebrews 6:1-3)

D. *Why Must I Be Baptized In Front Of People? Why Can't I Do This In Private?*

- Although baptism is based upon a person's own **personal** encounter, experience, and embracing of faith in and with Christ it is never **private**!

- The Holy Spirit 'baptizes' you into the spiritual body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). This is an 'invisible' work of the Spirit. Water Baptism becomes an external declaration of this inward reality.
- The public nature of baptism provides you with an opportunity to declare your faith in Christ to the church (your faith community) and allows the church to affirm your decision and hold you accountable to the confession of faith you have made before them.

E. Does The Bible Teach Infant Baptism As Practiced by Roman Catholics and Anglicans?

- In truth both Catholics and Anglicans have made a relatively strong biblical case for the baptism of infants, which is regarded more as an initiation into the faith community, rather than a personal confession of faith by the one being baptized. In many ways their rite of baptism seems to relate best to our rite of baby dedication. In both infant baptism and baby dedication a biblical appeal is made to both the Old and New Testament for support.
- In wanting to stress a person's response to the call of Jesus to be baptized and an understanding of what baptism symbolizes, many Protestants of which Evangelicals are a part of, have opted to wait until the one being baptized has an understanding of what baptism is and why they are being baptized.

F. *If I Was Baptized As A Child, Should I Be Baptized All Over Again?*

- The Scriptures are silent on the matter.
- Experience has shown that individuals who have been baptized as fully responsive followers of Christ have been able to pledge their allegiance to Jesus and to His church in such a way as to 'strengthen' their own sense of 'assurance' of being a Christ follower.

G. *Does Water Baptism Wash Away My Sins?*

- No it does not!
- The association of water and the washing away of sins is a familiar metaphor in the Old Testament (Ps.51:2,7; Ezek.16:4,9; 36:25;) and the New (Matt. Luke ; John 13:5-10; James 4:8; Hebr.10:22; Eph.5:26; Titus 3:5 , espec.1 Peter 3:21-22).
- But in these cases water is used as a metaphor for cleansing and forgiveness and not the reality or agent of cleansing. Through the institution of the sacrificial system God

ordained that forgiveness was to be made possible only through a blood sacrifice (Hebr.10:1-4; 9:22).

- Scripture is clear that Jesus is the blood sacrifice that made atonement (i.e. the satisfying of God's righteous demand for the punishment of sin) for our sin (Hebr.7:27; 9:14; 26, 28; 10:10, 12, 14; 1 Corin.5:7; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).
- Therefore it is more correct to say that it is the blood of Christ that washes away by sins.

H. Why Must I Be Submerged Under The Water? Why Cant I Just Be Sprinkled Or Have Water Poured Over My Head?

- "**sprinkling**" : is a practice that is done that is reminiscent of Jewish initiation rites. Roman Catholics and Anglicans practice it.
- "**pouring**" : is done because of special circumstances – the person being baptized may be a paraplegics, or bound by a wheelchair .
- "**immersion**" : Is the practice that appears to best symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

I. What Do I Need To Be Sure Of Before I Get Baptized?

- A person must **receive** the biblical testimony that they are a sinner and are incapable of saving themselves. They must declare their need of Christ as their Savior and that salvation is a gift that they cannot merit but must receive by faith (**Ephes. 2:8-9**).
- A person must be willing to **repent** of their sins (**Acts 2:38-41**).
- A person must **believe** in Christ by placing their faith / trust in his redemptive work upon the cross on their behalf (**Mark 16:16; Acts 2:41; 8:12-13; 18:8; Gal.3:26ff; Acts 16:31; 34**).

J. Does Anything Supernatural Happen To Me When I Am Baptized?

- The truth of the matter is that there is no telling what can happen!
- Some people testify of 'feeling' no different after having been baptized!
- Others have testified of greater joy; deeper assurance of having been forgiven of their sins; a closer sense of the presence of God... (cf. Acts 8:39)
- Some individuals have cried; others have felt humble and awed!
- Biblically, Acts 19:1ff is the only place where something supernatural followed water baptism (i.e. Paul prays for the Ephesian believers, lays hands on them and they are baptized in the Holy Spirit).

- A case can be made for the fact that baptism can be a means or a way God imparts empowering grace in response to a person's obedience to do what He has commanded. In this case water baptism has been regarded as a sacrament.

K. Why Was Jesus Baptized?

- a. see Matt. 3:14-15
 - he was being **set apart** for his mission
 - he was **identifying** himself with humanity
 - he was setting an **example** for us

L. What Is Your Particular Questions Regarding Water Baptism?

5. WATER BAPTISM AT EVANGEL PENTECOSTAL CHURCH

A. The Process:

- a. Fill out an application for baptism
- b. Meet with the Pastor who is teaching the class on water baptism & confirm your decision to be baptized.
- c. Attend the class on water baptism where you will be given further instructions as to the time, place, and other aspects of the water baptism itself.

B. The Procedures:

- a. The baptism is usually performed at Evangel Pentecostal Church.
- b. You should be able to explain why you want to be baptized.
- c. You can choose to be baptized by the person who has had the most spiritual influence in your life.
- d. You are encouraged to invite all of your family and friends, whether they are Christians or not, to witness your baptism. This has proven to be a very significant way of sharing your faith with others.

C. Your Personal Preparation Towards Your Baptism

- a. You may want to write out the story of your personal journey towards Christ; including moments when God was reaching out to you and drawing you close to Him.
- b. You may consider spending some time in prayer on behalf of any friends or family who don't know Christ who will be attending your Baptism. Pray that God would use your baptism as a way of reaching them.
- c. Don't be alarmed if you experience an increase in spiritual opposition whether it comes through circumstances, difficulties or people.

- d. Our spiritual enemy Satan will attempt to use anything to discourage you from this significant event in your life. Remember that in Christ you have grace and power to be strong in your faith; as well as being able to resist the enemy (1 Peter 5:6-11; James 4:7-8).