Getting Ready

Once a person admits that he or she is a sinner and turns to Christ for salvation, the Bible says that a person should proclaim the life change that has occurred: the watching world needs to know. Baptism has always stood as a kind of public testimony for people who have moved from being a seeker to being a believer.

Believers are those who have realized that their sin has separated them from God. They have given up all efforts to reach God through good works or religious activity. They have concluded that Jesus Christ's death on the cross for their sins is the only thing that can bridge the gap between them and God. A believer is someone who has decided to trust Christ alone for his or her salvation.

If you have come to this point in your spiritual journey, then you are ready to be baptized. Just as a bride and groom tell of their love for one another through the symbol of rings, you should also want to show the world, through baptism, of your union with Christ. Let the miracle that has happened in you show through the sacrament He ordained for you.

> The Ethiopian 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 traveled along the road, they came to some water and the Ethiopian said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?"... Then they went into the water and Philip baptized him. — Acts 8:34–38

Biblical Passages

1. In **Matthew 28:19–20**, Jesus commands his followers, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit…" Baptism is the means by which followers of Christ are identified.
2. In passages such as **Acts 2:41, 8:12 and 10:47-48**, it is evident that Baptism follows an individual's decision to trust Christ alone for salvation. The New Testament records the baptisms of adult believers only. Baptism was never intended to provide salvation for an individual but rather to publicly identify a person with Christ.
3. In **Romans 6:1–11**, the apostle Paul explains how the immersion mode of baptism identifies the believer with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Going under the water represents Christ's death and coming out of the water illustrates His resurrection.

You do not have to be baptized to have Christ in your heart any more than you must exchange rings to be pronounced man and wife. But if the inner commitment to trust Christ alone for salvation has been made, then the outward symbol of baptism should be as valued and as visible as the gold ring on a newlywed's finger.

Scriptural teaching on Baptism may be summarized as follows:

1. Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Christ, fulfilled by individuals who have submitted themselves to His sovereignty.
2. Baptism symbolizes the spiritual cleansing through divine forgiveness and the newness of life experienced by believers by virtue of their identification with Christ in His death and resurrection.
3. Baptism provides an opportunity for believers to make a formal profession of their faith before the church.

A Word Concerning Infant Baptism

If the purpose of baptism is to publicly identify a believer in Jesus Christ, you may well be asking yourself, "What was the significance of my baptism as a baby?" In the Bible, we find parents bringing their children to Jesus. He held them and prayed for them and told us to welcome them. But He did not baptize them, and He did not tell anyone else to baptize them. Baptism is for those who have made a personal decision to trust Christ alone for their salvation. Because of this, we recommend that children not be baptized until they reach the age of nine.

If you were baptized as a child, it was the intent of your parents that you would one day be a follower of Christ. Your Baptism as an adult can be viewed as the fulfillment of your parents' wishes. It in no way repudiates the Baptism you received as a child.

Although the old covenant practice of infant circumcision is sometimes given as a rationale for infant baptism, the biblical definition of the functions of circumcision and baptism shows that those two institutions fulfilled different purposes in their respective covenants. The equation is never made in the Bible between the circumcision of male infants, in the old covenant, and the Baptism of born-again believers, much less of infants, in the new covenant. However, we encourage Christian parents to present their children for the ceremony of dedication, whereby God's blessing is formally invoked upon the children, and the parents publicly commit themselves to raise the children in accordance with the teachings of Scripture.

Because the symbolism of baptism requires a more adult level of cognitive and developmental readiness, we require that children be at least 9 years old to be baptized. Proverbs 20:25 issues a significant caution against the danger of making a vow before adequate knowledge, forethought and reflection have been given. In an effort to prevent young people from making a premature commitment that they may not fully understand, this minimum age has been established.