

Considering Baptism

Introduction

Many of us have thought about being baptised. We perhaps have wondered whether we ought to take this step ourselves. This brief study will examine what the Bible says about baptism to help you consider the issue for yourself. It will look at what the Bible says about why and when and how a baptism ought to take place.

Why?

The biggest reason for considering being baptised is that Jesus commanded his followers to make disciples and this involved them being baptised.

Matthew 28:18-20.

Those who came to Jesus during his earthly ministry were baptised (read John 3:22, 4:1-3). Not only this but before leaving his disciples the Lord Jesus told them to make disciples of all the nations baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son of the Holy Spirit. Baptism seems to have been a normal part of being a disciple or a follower of Jesus.

We see this in the story of the early church. In the book of Acts the call to people who responded to the preaching of the gospel was for them to repent and be baptised. We see this after the first sermon preached in the book of Acts after the resurrection (Acts 2:38). We see this then repeated throughout the book (Acts 8:26-40; 9:18-19; 16:11-15; 16:25-34). It is quite clear that baptism was a normal thing for a person identifying themselves as a follower to do. In fact the NT knows nothing of disciples who were not baptised. Indeed in a number of places in the NT it seems to assume that all believers have been baptised. This is why all believers ought to consider being baptised. It is something that every disciple is called to do.

When?

Maybe I am considering being baptised but I'm not sure when it should happen. Ought I know more than I do if I am to be baptised? Is there anything I need to know or do in order to be baptised. When is it appropriate?

Please have a look at the follow passages to understand when it is appropriate to be baptised. Please make some notes as to when those in the account were baptised:

Acts 2:36-41

Acts 8:12

Acts 16:14-15

Acts 16:33-34

Acts 18:8

In the early church baptism was practised at the point of faith. What we see happening in Acts was that people were baptised when they heard the message, believed and repented. It wasn't a matter of passing a test or how long they had gone to church. People were baptised when they understood the gospel and wanted to put their faith in Jesus. If you have come to that point where you know you understand and now believe the gospel then considering baptism is the next step for you to take.

How?

How should it be done? For a variety of reasons there have been a number of ways of being baptised that have been adopted by different Christian groups. There are some people who sprinkled disciples with water and some who have poured water over their heads and others who have been completely immersed as believers. Which is correct?

While the NT doesn't have an appendix with an exact baptismal procedure laid out the most natural reading of the NT would seem to provide a very strong argument for baptism by immersion. A number of passages suggest that not only was a lot of water required in order to baptise people but people had to actually go down into the water to be baptised. Please refer to the following passages:

Mark 1:9-10

John 3:22-23

Acts 8:36-39

Although the details are fairly meagre what details there are would suggest that they needed a lot of water and that people actually went down into the water in order to be baptised. This description fits best with the practice of immersing someone in water. All that is needed is a large quantity of water like a river or a creek or an ocean. In many Baptist churches a small pool has been installed that is large enough to immerse someone although baptisms can also still take place in a river or at the beach.

What?

What is the significance of baptism? What is a person saying when they respond to the gospel with faith and decide to be baptised in the name of Jesus.

- We belong to Jesus.

By baptised into the name of Jesus we are saying that we belong to him. In 1 Corinthians the church in Corinth had become divided. Different groups were following different Christian leaders and the church was fragmenting. Paul asked them, 'whose name had they been baptised into?' Paul was conscience that it wasn't his name that they had been baptised into and it wasn't the name of Apollo's or that of Cephas. It was the name of Christ. He did this to remind them that they all belonged to Christ. To be baptised is to publicly testify that we are following Jesus.

Baptism is therefore an act of identification. We are identifying ourselves with our Lord and Saviour. We are saying that we belong to him. When Jesus was baptised he identified himself with those who he had come to save. When we are baptised we identify ourselves with our Saviour – the one who came to save us. Baptism is an outward action by which we testify to the fact that we now belong to him.

- We have been united to Jesus in his death and resurrection

Believers have been united to Jesus in a special way. We share in what he has done for us through his death and resurrection. On that cross he died the death that we deserved. We are united with him. Paul says that we have been baptised into his death (Romans 6:3). It isn't that baptism itself connects us to his death but that it is a symbol of this union with Christ.

Some imagine the water as a watery grave and suggest that in going under the water you identify with Christ in his death and burial. Like Christ you then symbolically rise from the dead. Our baptism reminds us that we have died to sin and now are alive to God.

- We have been cleansed

It lastly is a symbol that we have been made clean. The water does not just symbolise a great watery grave; it is also **like** a 'bath'. '*Get up and be baptised*', said Ananias to Paul, '*and wash your sins away, calling on his name*' (Acts 22:16)¹. Baptism is also a symbol of having been forgiven and cleansed on account of what Jesus has done for us. Of course the baptism itself doesn't cleanse us. We are cleansed through the work of the Spirit who unites us to Christ and applies the benefits of his death and resurrection to us. As Paul writes, "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:5,6). The apostle John also makes it clear that *only the 'blood of Jesus his Son purifies us from all sin'* (1 John 1:7). Baptism however is a sign of this inner cleansing.

By going into the water and being baptised (literally = dipped) in it you are declaring that you have been forgiven and cleansed on account of Jesus and what he has done for you. It is to declare by faith in Jesus you have been saved.

Conclusion

Baptism is that great moment of declaring to everyone that you have followed the Lord Jesus and are trusting in him for forgiveness and new life. Baptist doesn't make you a disciple of Jesus. Rather, it testifies to everyone that you are one. If you are a disciple of Jesus and as yet have not made this declaration then it is well worth considering baptism as soon as possible.

¹ "Baptist Basics", Paul Beasley-Murray.