

Getting a Good Start

Introduction: Many believers receive baptism at the beginning of their spiritual journey with Christ, but often without much understanding of its meaning and importance. What does the Bible teach?

Question #1: What is meant by baptism?

Answer #1: It depends on the type of baptism.

Types of Baptism in the New Testament

Baptism by John (in water)	Matthew 3:5-6 Mark 1:4	⁵ Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him ⁶ and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁴ John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.
Baptism of Jesus (in water)	Matthew 3:13-17	¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ And John <i>tried to</i> prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?” ¹⁵ But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit <i>it to be</i> so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him. ¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice <i>came</i> from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”
Baptism by Jesus and His disciples (in water)	John 4:1-3	¹ Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John ² (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), ³ He left Judea and departed again to Galilee.
Ritual Washing (same word in Greek)	Mark 7:4-5 Luke 11:38	⁴ <i>When they come</i> from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they <u>wash</u> . And there are many other things which they have received and hold, <i>like</i> the <u>washing</u> of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches. ⁵ Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?” ³⁸ When the Pharisee saw <i>it</i> , he marveled that He had not first <u>washed</u> before dinner.
Baptism with the Holy Spirit	Mark 1:8	⁸ I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Baptism of suffering	Luke 12:50	⁵⁰ But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!
Believer's baptism (in water)	Acts 2:41	⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to <i>them</i> .
	Acts 8:36–38	³⁶ Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, <i>here is</i> water. What hinders me from being baptized?” ³⁷ Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” ³⁸ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.
	Acts 19:1–5	¹ And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples ² he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” ³ And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?” So they said, “Into John's baptism.” ⁴ Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.” ⁵ When they heard <i>this</i> , they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Question #2: Why do some Christians not practice believer's baptism by immersion?

Answer #2: Belief and practice are often influenced more by history and tradition than scripture.

Brief History of Water Baptism

Second Temple Period	Baptism by immersion first emerged during the Second Temple Period as a means of ritual cleansing and was repeatable as necessary to maintain purity.
Gospels	Baptism as a public declaration of one's repentance with intention to live accordingly was first practiced by John the Baptist, then by Jesus' disciples.
New Testament Era (starting with the Great Commission and Acts).	Baptism as a public declaration of one's faith in Jesus as Messiah and desire to follow Him was first commanded by Jesus, and following His ascension, taught and practiced by apostles. Typically, this was done once only, immediately following conversion.

Early Church	By the end of the second century, we find mention of infant baptism (in the teaching of Origen of Alexandria), and by the fifth century it had become predominant.
Protestant Reformation	Baptism by immersion did not reemerge until the Protestant Reformation, and initially only among a small minority, dubbed “anabaptists” by their opponents. They suffered severe persecution, including death by torture, at the hands of both Roman Catholics and Protestants. King Ferdinand I, Holy Roman Emperor, declared drowning (called the <i>third baptism</i>) “the best antidote to Anabaptism”.
Modern Evangelicalism	Baptism by immersion became increasingly common over the past few centuries and is now practiced in most forms of evangelical Christianity, particularly in the United States.

Question #3: Given its evolving and contentious history, why is believer’s baptism still important today?

Answer #3: Believer’s baptism matters:

- 1) Not as a:
 - a) Means of salvation.
 - b) Rite or sacrament.
 - c) Requirement for church membership.

- 2) But because:
 - a) It symbolizes our spiritual baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection (Romans 6:3–4): ³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

 - b) Jesus commanded it as foundational to becoming His disciple (Matthew 28:18-20): ¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*” Amen.

 - c) Obedience demonstrates our love for Him (John 14:21): ²¹ He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

Conclusion: Identifying with Christ and obeying Him isn’t what we do just when we first believe, it’s how we grow our relationship with Him ever after.