



COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISM

We understand that there are diverse views among Christians regarding the role and specifics of baptism. The information below is not intended to be critical or judgmental of others' point of view, but simply to be a concise explanation of our understanding of what the Bible says about baptism.

In the lines below we will speak to some of the questions people bring to us, as well as other matters that we encourage you to explore. In the Bible God has said very important things about this topic — things you'll want to know. We encourage you to read for yourself what the Bible has to say about this topic. If you do not have a Bible, please let us know.

On the next page is a list of questions that will be addressed in this booklet. If you have questions that aren't addressed in this booklet please don't hesitate to ask us in person, by phone (306-343-7922) or by email (ask@skchurch.ca). We hope you find this a useful guide on your journey with God.

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1. “Why is understanding baptism relevant and important at all?”

The Bible makes it clear that being baptized in water is part of becoming a Christian — not something to be done afterward. Without it your relationship with God will be incomplete. With it, God can give you the full blessing He wants to give to all who call on Him.

2. “What is your source of information about baptism?”

The Bible is our only *authoritative* source for God’s point of view on baptism. Ultimately we all must deal with God on His terms, not ours. He wants to help us to do this, and we want to receive His help. We work hard to understand the Bible accurately, in its original context, on its own terms, so that we can hear God’s terms and respond to Him.

Over the centuries many religious traditions have developed which do not accurately reflect the Biblical teaching. There is no guarantee that by simply going along with popular religion’s approach to baptism you will receive and act on accurate information. Fortunately, the Bible speaks quite clearly on this issue. Be sure to look up the references listed on this page, and at the end of this article.

There is also a lot of secondary information available to us through the historical writings of Christian people over the past 2000 years. While this information doesn’t have God’s authority for us, it does provide context that helps us understand the Bible — and what’s happened to faith since the early times.

3. “What is baptism?”

In the original language of the Bible’s New Testament, the word literally means “*immersion*.” In the Bible, with very few exceptions, it always refers to an immersion in **water**. See *Mark 1:9-10*; *John 3:22-23*; *Acts 8:36*; *Acts 10:47*. The word also has connotations of being saturated, soaked, sunk, overwhelmed. In terms of faith, baptism always refers to a “*new beginning*,” an “*initiation*.”

4. “What does being baptized in Christ mean?”

It basically means that the person being baptized is moving out of something old and being initiated into something new. *Colossians 2:11-12* states that baptism is the time when the old sinful nature is “put off,” when one is “buried and raised from the dead with Jesus.”

Other ways of expressing this are found in *Acts 2:38* (forgiveness of sins, receiving the Holy Spirit); *Titus 3* (washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit); *John 3:5* (born anew of water and Spirit); *Romans 6:2-5* (baptized into Christ, into His death and resurrection).

Baptism is the point at which a person leaves behind an old life and is initiated into new life, is “born from above,” is “saved,” and becomes a Christian. It is complete saturation with the Holy Spirit when one is saturated with water. See *Ezekiel 47*, *Isaiah 35*, *John 7:37-39*.

5. “Aren’t we saved ‘by grace through faith in God through Jesus Christ’ not by our own actions or rituals?”

Yes. The whole world is in serious trouble, and in its present form will not survive the times to come. Jesus Christ was sent by God to rescue humanity: to show us who God really is, to die for our sins on the cross, and to be raised from the dead for us. He did for us what no one else could do, what we couldn’t do for ourselves

to bring us out of darkness to God. Baptism is the physical expression of our faith in God's grace-gift of salvation in Christ. Baptism is the event, the time and place, where we "receive the gift."

The core events of the Good News are that Jesus is God in the flesh, come to earth to live among us as one of us, showing us God's heart and power. He died for us and was raised from death (*1 Corinthians 15.1-4*). As the first to be raised from the dead, He heralds the new creation that God is bringing in — our guarantee that God will do it. Our response is to believe the Good News and act out that belief in what Jesus did for us by "dying with him, being buried with him, and being raised with him to walk in new life" in baptism. (*Romans 6.3-4*)

Baptism is very frequently directly connected with faith, (see *Colossians 2:11-12; Galatians 3:26-27; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 8:12; Acts 16:31-34; Acts 18:8; Acts 19:4-5*). We're not putting our faith in baptism — we're putting our faith in God, in what He has done for us in Jesus. Baptism is the doorway into what He has done for us. It's the defining event of putting our faith in God!

It is also connected with repentance (see *Acts 2:38*); "calling on the name of the Lord" (*Acts 22:16*); washing sins away (*Acts 2:38, 22:16, Titus 3:5*); entry into Christ (*Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27*).

Baptism is more than "one command among many to be obeyed," more than a "symbol of salvation": it's the time and place where everything Jesus did for you in His death and resurrection happens to you.

6. "Who should be baptized?"

Everyone who has decided to believe the Good News of Jesus Christ, wants what He has done for them, and is willing to let God be their Director (the meaning of "repent"). Notice the "every one of you" and "all" of *Acts 2:37-41*. Baptism is not presented as something optional. The first believers understood it as a command for everyone who "received the word." (*Acts 2:41*)

This was also the belief and practice of the ancient believers for the first several centuries. Everyone understood that the "normal birth into Christ" always included faith in the Good News, turning away from the old way of life, and baptism into Christ. The writers of the New Testament would never have understood baptism as optional, and would not have considered one a Christian without it.

7. "When and where should a person be baptized?"

As soon as you decide that you believe in the Good News of God's gift of salvation in Jesus' death and resurrection, and that you want to leave your old life and live a new life in obedience to God, you are ready. Our church building has the facilities and is available any time — there are no "designated times or places."

8. "Should my baby be baptized?"

No. God loves your baby, and specially cares for him or her already. Since baptism is always connected with believing, repenting, etc., and babies are simply incapable of this, it is not necessary. Your child needs to be raised in an environment where he or she can hear the Good News, so that when they become capable of believing and repenting, they'll have the opportunity to make *their own informed decision* and *develop their own walk with God*.

Your baby is important to God. Part of our aim as a church is to help you provide a nurturing environment which supports the development of informed faith. Also, we would be pleased to provide special prayer for your child and for you as a parent wishing to raise your child in a way that will help them come to know God when they are older.

The idea that babies should be baptized doesn't show up in the Bible at all. This practice began in the late 2nd century, more than 100 years after the New Testament documents were written — and it only slowly became a common practice by the late 4th century. It had the unfortunate effect of separating people who grew up in “the Church” from the dynamic power of normal experience with God. It separated the Good News from baptism, faith from baptism, forgiveness from baptism, and the Holy Spirit from baptism. In short, infant baptism did exactly the opposite of what it was intended to do.

Our practice as a church is to follow the ancient way, and to encourage faith in God and His response of grace, poured into our lives!

9. “How perfect must I be before I’m baptized? How can I be good enough to be baptized?”

“Being good enough” isn't a requirement for baptism! None of us is good or perfect enough to earn God's gifts, and so we trust in God's goodness to us – not in our own goodness. Jesus Christ died for us so that we can know God as a Father and be helped by Him. As we grow in faith He will help us become more like Him. As part of this faith community, you'll grow into greater maturity in Christ.

However, since in baptism you will be making God the Director of your life, it makes sense for you to *begin now* to make lifestyle decisions to obey Him. Since in baptism you are formally becoming His child, it makes sense for you to pray to Him now, to read the Bible and learn from Him now. This doesn't qualify you for baptism, but it shows God — and you — that you're serious about wanting to live in Him, and it builds faith for your new life with Him after you're baptized. (See *Luke 3:8*)

10. “I was baptized as a baby. Do I need to be baptized again as an adult?”

Yes. God wants you to have your own faith in Him, so that you can have genuine relationship with Him. Only your own, personal decision can generate that.

11. “I was born in a Christian country/Christian family. Do I need to be baptized?”

Yes. God's call to people is *personal*. Sometimes one's country or family can be very helpful in creating a supportive environment for informed faith — sometimes they are a hindrance. God's love, forgiveness, and Spirit are personal gifts from Him — not inherited from one's family heritage or nationality.

Your decision to belong to God through the Good News of Jesus Christ is the only one God wants for you. His call is serious and urgent, and the results are permanent. To believe in Christ and be baptized is the most important choice you will make in your entire life. He created you with the capacity to respond to Him. He values and respects you too much to allow someone else to make that choice in your place.

12. “I was baptized as an adult in another church. Do I need to be baptized again?”

That depends: Was the “Good News” you believed and your previous baptism the same as what is described in the Bible? See *Ephesians 4:4-6*. See also *Acts 19:1-6* for an example of people as adults being “baptized again.” In our experience, some do need to be baptized, and others don't. If you are uncertain about this, you're welcome to ask us for help in finding out.

13. “Does being baptized mean that I’m joining the church?”

Yes. Specifically, you are “baptized into Christ” (*Galatians 3:26-28*), into the “body of Christ.” God adds you to this local gathering of believers, and other Christian communities all over the world (*Acts 2:41,47; 1 Corinthians 12:13*). (This doesn't mean that you should consider yourself a part of organized religion generally.) God puts us into His faith communities so that we can experience Him, grow, and serve Him in a dynamic way.

14. “When am I baptized in the Holy Spirit?”

The Biblical evidence indicates that being “baptized in the Holy Spirit” is an experience that is given to *everyone* who is baptized into Christ in water — see *Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; 1 Corinthians 12:13*. “Baptized in the Holy Spirit” appears to be the same thing as initially “receiving the Holy Spirit, and is related to the Spirit “coming upon” a person (*Acts 2:38; 8:15-17; 10:47; 11:15-16*, etc.) Jesus gives the Holy Spirit at the time when one is baptized in water. This does not appear in the Bible as a normally separate experience, either before or long after water baptism. See *John 3:3-5; Titus 3:3-7* — though in unusual situations it did occur at different times.

In the normal “new birth” you receive forgiveness (release) from sin, and the presence and power of God for your new life through the Holy Spirit. You will grow and change as you mature in Christ, and God may sometimes give you specially blessings and “gifts.” But you are “born complete,” with everything you need provided by God through His Spirit, the message of the Bible, fellowship with other Christians, and His new purpose for your life.

Your initial reaction to being baptized in the Holy Spirit often depends on expectations learned from others. Your experience may range from a calm, quiet assurance to exuberant, overwhelming joy. You may feel a strong desire to pray, sing to the Lord, or talk to people about what God has done for you – and you may find new words and “focus” as you speak. You may find that God answers your prayers in unusual ways. If these things don’t happen at the time of your baptism, they’ll occur later as part of your growing up in Christ with us.

15. “I’ve experienced a deep sense of personal closeness to God/unusual spiritual events/answers to prayer/major life changes because of my present faith in God. Should I still be baptized?”

Yes. Many of these things do happen to some people before they are baptized. God loves you and is using these ways to reach to you. His plan is for you to have a full relationship with God via the Good News, faith and baptism into Christ and faith community — not as evidence that one is already a Christian.

See *Acts 10* for a Biblical example of Cornelius, who was devoted to God “as he understood Him” and had very unusual experiences. His response to these events was to seek out God’s Good News (*10:33*), to believe and to be baptized — rather than to assume that he already had everything from God that he needed.

God gives all kinds of blessings to everyone, in order to draw attention to Himself and initiate relationship (*Acts 14:16-17; 17:25-31*). We want to allow His blessings to fulfill their function of leading us to Him — not to become an end in themselves. Jesus warns that misreading unusual spiritual manifestations as evidence of right standing with God is potentially deceptive and dangerous — see *Matthew 7:21-23*.

As we said earlier, the Bible is our authoritative source of information — our experiences are not. Regardless of special experiences (or the lack of them), God builds genuine relationship with people who have obedient hearts, who want to do whatever He wants. That’s ultimately the attitude that water baptism expresses: “dead to self, alive to Christ.” (*Romans 6*)

16. “What happens at a baptism? What’s the ceremony like?”

Baptism can be done anywhere there’s enough water to immerse someone – lakes, rivers, swimming pools, etc. Our own church building has a small tank which you can see and use any time.

The ceremony is quite simple. (For ease of description, we’ll assume that “I’m” the one doing the baptizing, and “you” are the one being baptized.) You will enter the water and sit on the lowest step with the water level roughly above your stomach. I’ll ask you if you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Once you say

it, I'll say something like "I baptize you in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". Then I'll gently lean you back until you go fully under water and then lift you back up again. Afterward, I will say a few more words and pray for you and your new life in Christ. Other times, we might wait until you've had a chance to dry off and be greeted by your friends first – then we'll all pray for you together.

Anyone can do the actual baptizing – there are no Biblical restrictions on that. What makes baptism effective is that you do it because you believe in God through Jesus Christ. You can be baptized privately at any time or at a pre-arranged time with friends and relatives there to witness it. You can also be baptized during our Sunday assemblies, with the rest of the church present. We especially encourage this, because part of the blessing of being baptized is being incorporated into God's new community.

You might want to consider wearing old clothes for your baptism — bring dry clothes you can change into afterward.

Being baptized is a deeply joyful experience! God responds to your faith, forgives your sin, and comes to live in you through His Spirit. It's like you were dead, but you've been made alive again (*Romans 6*), a whole new beginning. It's the faith-doorway into new life with God now, the promise of permanent life with God at the End, and a new family of people to encourage you and be blessed by you. God will instill a new sense of meaning and purpose in your life as you live with Him every day.

17. "Can a person be 'saved' without being immersed in water?"

No one in the Bible ever asked Jesus or any of the inspired apostles this question – no one in the first several centuries of our faith shared the modern religious confusion about the place of baptism in the process of conversion to Christ. But certain things are quite clear

We gladly affirm that God Himself is the final Judge regarding who is "saved" and who is not. After all, He made us, and Jesus has lived here among us and understands our condition by firsthand experience! We trust God's heart to be as generous as possible, and as fair as possible, to every human who has ever lived. Everyone who is saved at all is saved by His graciousness, not by any good we have done, nor any perfect understanding we might have.

However, to insist that "Yes, a person can be saved without baptism" presumes too much: it is to disagree with the clear teaching of the Bible that baptism in water is part of becoming a Christian. It is much better to trust God's Word and obey Him than to deliberately test His willingness to grant an exception for you at the Judgment.

We believe that the best way to deal with this question is to determine to trust and obey God as He has expressed Himself in the Bible, whatever past experiences you might have had and regardless of what anyone else says or does – and to encourage others to seek the same clarity of faith and obedience (*Romans 1:5; 16:26*). This honors God's authority by upholding Biblical

teaching, and by recognizing God as the final Judge. It puts God in His place and keeps us in our place of receiving His blessing. The Word of God on baptism isn't hard to understand. To believe the Good News of Jesus Christ and to "repent" (making God the supreme authority of your life) are His requirements to "qualify" to respond to Him in baptism. Grace, the Holy Spirit, a new community of friends, and the destiny of eternal life in a new creation – His reply to our response of faith in Jesus and baptism – are well worth whatever it takes for us to come to Him.

In the Good News of Jesus, God has paid every price, He has endured every assault, He has torn down every barrier between people and Himself because He wants to be with us. He hopes you will want to be with Him enough to trust and obey Him.

A CLOSER LOOK

This is a straightforward, more literal look at some of the New Testament verses mentioning baptism, referring to the original language.

- *Matthew 28:19*: “baptize them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit ...”
- *Acts 2:38*: “... be baptized, every one of you, upon the name of Jesus Christ, into the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
- *Acts 8:16, 19:5*: “... baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus ...”
- *Romans 6:3-4*: “... baptized into Christ, baptized into His death? ... buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as He was raised ... we too may live a new life.”
- *1 Corinthians 12:13*: “... for in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ...”
- *Galatians 3:27*: “... for as many of you as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ ...”
- *Colossians 2:11-12*: “... you put off the sinful nature, having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him ...”
- *1 Peter 3:21*: “... [the water of Noah's ark] symbolizes baptism that now saves you also ... It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ ...”

If you're interested in being baptized, let us know. We'll be glad to help you deal with any other questions you might have, so that you can make an informed choice about it.

Baptism in water is ultimately about living with God. It's very important to study the Bible to know more about Him and what He wants to invest in our lives. As you explore questions like the ones above, we especially recommend that you take a look at some of our other Bible study materials, too.

Thank you for taking the time to read this material. The best news imaginable is that the God we're all looking for is looking for us! May He bless your search and help you find Him, too!