

# What Does The Bible Say About Baptism And Infant Dedication?

## HOW ARE WE BAPTIZED?

In the Old Testament there were many ceremonial uses of water. These symbolized inner cleansing from sin after the analogy of the outward washing of the body with water. In keeping with this ancient Jewish usage, John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, came baptizing with water those who repented of their sins. In this way he prepared for the coming of the Messiah. In like manner, Jesus, after He rose from the dead, commanded His disciples to baptize their converts into the name of the triune God whom Christians worship; the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Most scholars agree that this sacrament of Christian baptism was performed by plunging a person under water and then lifting him out of it. Our English word “baptize” comes from the New Testament Greek word “baptizo” (βαπτίζω). “Baptizo” generally means to immerse, dip, or sink. It was used to describe the sinking of ships or the dipping of cloth in and out of dye vats.

**Baptism is administered by an authorized minister and is by immersion in water.**

Matthew 3:6            *“They were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.”*

Matthew 3:11        *“...I baptize you with water....”*

Matthew 3:16        *“And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water....”*

John 1:31            *“...I came baptizing in water.”*

Acts 1:5             *“For John baptized with water.”*

Acts 8:38            *“...they both went down into the water....”*

## WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR BAPTISM?

Since baptism signifies and seals the truth that our sins are taken away by our engrafting into Christ and partaking of the benefits of His death and resurrection, Christians believe that only **those who are truly united to Christ by faith should be baptized**. Baptism is an act of personal identification with Jesus Christ.

There is no salvation in water baptism. But, a person is baptized because he has been saved. In this sense, baptism is a public confession of one’s salvation experience.

The examples of the New Testament are clear that the person being baptized always understood and believed the Gospel. Believer’s water baptism then refers to people who are able to personally respond to the Gospel.

Matthew 28:19        *“...make disciples of all nations, baptizing them....”*

Mark 16:16          *“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved....”*

Acts 2:41            *“...those who had received His word were baptized....”*

Acts 8:12            *“When they believed Philip preaching the good news about the Kingdom of God and the*

- Acts 8:13                    *name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.”*  
*“Simon himself believed, and after being baptized....”*
- Acts 8:36,37                *“See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized? If you believe with all your heart, you may.”*
- Acts 16:14,15              *“The Lord opened her heart....and when she was baptized....”*
- Acts 16:32,33              *“They spoke the word of the Lord to him....and he was baptized at once....”*
- Acts 18:8                    *“Cripus....believed in the Lord....and many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized.”*
- Acts 19:5                    *“On hearing this, they were baptized....”*

## **WHAT IS THE MEANING OF BAPTISM?**

**When a believer is baptized it signifies that a person has died to the old life and that he has been resurrected in newness of life in Jesus. The believer’s water baptism is a public testimony to the fact that his/her salvation is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

The significance of one being immersed in water is to picture the death of Jesus as the complete submersion of the body is a picture of the burial of Jesus. The raising up of the body pictures the resurrection of Jesus.

The believer’s water baptism is an identification with Christians for baptism identifies a new believer with other believers in the Christian life as fellow-members of the Body of Christ. The believer’s water baptism is an act of separation, for the Christian clearly indicates that he/she desires to leave the ways of the world and live fully in the life that Jesus has provided for His glory.

- Matthew 28:19,20        *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I command you....”*
- Romans 6:3,4              *“All....who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death....as Christ was raised from the dead....we too might walk in newness of life.”*
- Galatians 3:27             *“For all of you who were baptized into Christ clothed yourselves with Christ.”*
- Colossians 2:12          *“Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”*

## **WHAT ABOUT INFANT BAPTISM?**

There are two major reasons why the Church practices infant baptism: 1) tradition; and 2) Scripture.

**CHURCH TRADITION** since approximately 75 years after Jesus' resurrection has included the practice of infant baptism. For 1900 years this practice seems to have been almost universally accepted by the Church.

In church tradition, infant baptism is seen as an introduction of the child into God's Covenant of Grace, through His instrument, the Church. Specifically: 1) it sets an indelible mark on the recipient as a member of the Church; 2) delivers from the guilt of original sin and of all actual sins committed up to the time of baptism; 3) works spiritual renewal by the infusion of sanctifying grace; and 4) incorporates the recipient into the communion of the saints and into the visible Church.

It must also be said that the above Church tradition and theology is difficult to prove directly from Scripture. The belief that baptism saves the soul of a child is difficult to harmonize with the previously mentioned passages describing baptism.

It may be said that there is no command in **SCRIPTURE** to baptize infants. There is no single example where we are shown the baptism of infants. However, while the baptism of infants is not clearly stated in the Bible it is not directly prohibited. Additionally, Biblical grounds for infant baptism may be assumed from the following examples.

### **THE SIGNS OF THE COVENANT: OLD TESTAMENT**

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| 1 Peter 3:20,21                | When Noah is saved from the flood, his whole family is received into the ark.  |
| Genesis 17; Colossians 2:11,12 | Abraham was given the covenant sign of circumcision and told to administer it to all the male members of his household.                          |
| 1 Corinthians 10:1,2           | When all Israel (male, female, children) passed through the waters of the Red Sea it was a great act of God's redemption, foreshadowing baptism. |

### **THE SIGNS OF THE COVENANT: NEW TESTAMENT**

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| Acts 2:38,39              | Peter confirms that the promise of the covenant is to all those who come to salvation through Jesus. Baptism is given as a sign of that covenant. |
| Acts 16:14,15             | Lydia and her household are baptized.   |
| Acts 16:31-33             | The household of the Philippian jailer is baptized.   |
| 1 Corinthians 1:16; 16:15 | Stephanas and his household are baptized.   |

As the head of each household believed in Jesus it is assumed that, through the head, grace is also applied to the children of the household. Therefore the children would be baptized as a sign of the Covenant. In this manner adults were baptized as new converts and infants were baptized as the children of believers (1 Corinthians 7:14).

## **WHAT ABOUT INFANT DEDICATION?**

There are many people who find a discrepancy between the instruction of the Bible and the tradition of infant baptism. This is especially true when one compares the theological framework within which infant baptism is practice and the teaching of the Bible regarding salvation.

The Bible teaches that salvation is a person decision between an individual and God (John 3:7; Acts 2:38; 10:43; 13:38,39; Romans 1:16; 9:27; 10:4). As such it is not a decision that can be made for us. However, if one removes the condition of salvation from the practice of infant baptism a different act of obedience emerges.

Infant baptism is a tremendous act of dedication on the part of the parents. It is a recognition that the life of the child is a gift from God and an acknowledgment that its life rightfully belongs to God (Psalm 127). In bringing their child before the church, the parents are also dedicating themselves to teach by word and example what it means to have a saving and growing relationship with Jesus Christ and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to encourage him/her to accept Jesus as his/her personal Savior.

There are no direct commands in the Bible calling us to dedicate our children. However there are examples which indicate that this dedication was done and approved by God. As well, the teaching of Jesus indicates that we are not to prohibit children from coming. In face, we should be encouraging them.

1 Samuel 1:21-28 Samuel is brought to the Temple by his parents to dedicate him to the Lord.

Matthew 18:1-6 Jesus instructs the disciples to receive children just as if receiving Him. As strong warning is given to not cause a child to stumble.

Matthew 19:13-15 Children are brought to Jesus for His blessing. Jesus encourages this act.

Mark 10:13-16 Children are brought to Jesus and He blesses them.

Luke 2:22-38 Jesus is brought to the temple by His parents in an act of obedience and dedication.

## **WHAT DOES INFANT DEDICATION MEAN?**

Infant dedication is an act of faithful commitment on the part of the child's parents. It is a commitment no less serious than their own wedding vows. Each parent is pledging themselves, vowing before God and witnesses, to raise their child in the nurture and instruction of the Lord, encouraging their child to personally accept Jesus as his/her personal Lord and Savior and to follow after Him in faithful obedience.

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 Parents are commanded to diligently teach their children to fear the Lord, to keep His statutes and commandments, and to love the Lord God with all their heart, soul, and might.

Proverbs 22:6 Parents are commanded to train their children. Training involves guiding their child to grow and develop according to his/her God given inclinations and abilities. Training is leading the child to choose for himself/herself the will of God for his/her life. In this sense, parenting is actually partnering with God.

- Ephesians 6:4 A special command is given to fathers not to provoke their children to anger, and to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
- Colossians 3:21 Fathers are to exercise discipline administered with a right and loving spirit. This command is given so that the child will not grow discouraged and loose heart.

## **WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS?**

The primary responsibility of Christian parents is to seek first their own growth as a Christian. This is not to encourage the abandoning of your family to pursue spiritual matters. However, if you yourself are not experiencing a daily growing walk with Jesus where will your child find and example of a personal relationship with Jesus to follow? Parents cannot give what they do not have.

Secondly, as a parent who has brought your child for dedication, it is your responsibility to train and instruct your child in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. It would be impossible in this short space to include a complete guide to parenting. The following are given as suggestions.

- James 3:11-13 A fountain cannot produce at the same time fresh and salt water. A parent cannot give what he/she does not have within them. If the things of God are to flow out of you then they must first flow in. **SUGGESTION #1** is a question. Do you have Jesus in your heart? Do you know Him as your personal Savior and Lord?
- Deuteronomy 6:4-9 When Moses commands parents to instruct their children in the ways of God, he first instructs the parents to live what they are teaching. If you are to encourage your children to love the Lord, to trust Jesus as their Savior, and to follow after Him, the example of this must begin with you. A parent cannot teach what he/she does not know. Of these commands Moses says, *“You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead”* (Deuteronomy 6:8). **SUGGESTION #2** is to live out the truths of God before your children by practicing them first in your own life.
- James 5:16b **SUGGESTION #3** is to pray. God hears our prayers and responds to them. Pray for wisdom as a parent. Pray for Godly guidance. Pray for the protection and salvation of your child. Surround yourself with others (family, friends, church) who will pray with you.
- Psalms 127:3a *“Children are a gift of the Lord.”* Like most gifts, children do come with instructions. **SUGGESTION #4** is to read and follow the instructions. Godly parenting wisdom is contained in the Bible. Additionally, God has blessed us with many excellent Christian teachers, educators, and psychologists. Seek Godly wisdom and apply it in your actions as a parent.
- Matthew 19:13-15 Children were brought to God. As parents dedicating your child you have come together before God. **SUGGESTION #5** is to keep coming together as a family to God’s church.
- Psalms 127:3b-5 Children are a prize, a reward, given by God. **SUGGESTION #6** is to enjoy your children as God’s special blessing to you. Sometimes that may not be easy. However, it is a truth to remember. Your child is a prize to be treasured - a sign of God’s love for you.