

Foundations Lesson #4

Water Baptism, Part 1

As Peter was closing his sermon on the day of Pentecost he instructed his listeners, who were under conviction but hadn't yet been converted, to do three things: "Repent [get saved]... be baptized... and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). It's still God's desire and provision for everyone who comes to him to start their walk with him by doing those three things. This lesson is devoted to the second of these three experiences.

On the fourth finger of my left hand I wear a wedding ring. That ring isn't fancy or ornate, but what it represents, what it signifies, is really important. It's a public declaration. It lets the world know that I'm a married man, that I have an exclusive relationship with one woman, that I belong to her and she belongs to me. I wear it with joy. I'm not in the least ashamed to let people know that for the last 40+ years I have been, and continue to be, a one woman man. Water baptism is like that. The ceremony itself could take place in a beautiful church sanctuary or a muddy river or anything in between, but what it represents, what it signifies, is really important. It's a public declaration. It lets the world know that the one being baptized is a Christian, that he or she belongs to Jesus Christ now. It should be entered into with great joy, being completely unashamed to let people know that Jesus Christ has saved them from their sins; that they've entered into an exclusive relationship with him.

On our outline, Roman Numeral number one deals with the physical act of water baptism. The word for baptism in the original Greek New Testament, βαπτίζω, means to immerse, submerge, or baptize. As the outline says, it has to do with immersing, by submersion and emergence (as in the immersing of a ladle into a punch bowl), or dipping (as in the dyeing of a garment or the drawing of water by dipping one vessel into another); it can even refer to plunging, sinking, or drenching. It's interesting to note that one historian from the first century even used the word to describe a fleet of ships that had been sunk. From the very first occurrence of the word in the Bible (Matthew 3:6), we know that John the Baptist used the Jordan River to baptize those who had repented and confessed their sins. Acts 8:38 speaks of going down into the water to be baptized. It says,

Ac. 8:38 And he [the Ethiopian eunuch] gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

The eunuch was an important official in charge of the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. Certainly, he would have had a flask of water with him as he was traveling through the desert. But baptism requires a lot more water than what can be contained by a mere flask, so both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water. Along with going down into the water, baptism in the Bible then also speaks of coming up out of the water.

Mt. 3:16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.

Mk. 1:9-10 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

Ac. 8:39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

Two places in the New Testament also describe baptism as a burial.

Ro. 6:4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death...

Col. 2:12

having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith...

One last Scripture that shows us what the physical act of water baptism looked like in the times of the New Testament comes from John's gospel. It tells us that plenty of water was needed to baptize people.

Jn. 3:23

Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized.

So from these passages of Scripture and from the definition of the original word used, we get the understanding that the people who were baptized in the New Testament were submerged under the water. In other words, they got wet head to toe. This is consistent with what the Bible says about the meaning and symbolism of water baptism, as we see under Roman Numeral number two on our outline.

Ro. 6:1-11

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

This passage of Scripture gives us a well-rounded view of the meaning of water baptism. The main proclamation being made by the new believer being baptized is that of identification. This is taking place on three levels. The most basic level is that of identifying with Jesus Christ in his death and burial, and then also in his resurrection. By going under the water of baptism, the new believer is asserting his or her identification with Jesus' death and burial, and then by coming back up out of the water of baptism, they're asserting their identification with Jesus' resurrection. It's as if they were preaching, *"I belong to Jesus Christ now. See? I have identified with my Lord and Savior. I believe he died for my sins and rose from the dead. To let everyone know that I now belong to him, I have been buried with him and I have risen with him."*

In addition to this historical identification, there's also spiritual identification. The new believer is proclaiming that they've died to sin, that because their old sins have been buried, they've risen to new life in Christ. Sin has been washed away and the new nature of Christ has taken its place. But there's also personal identification, because going under the water of baptism provides yet another symbolism, that of death and burial to self. With self now dead and buried, what rises is a new life submitted to Christ. Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. One author has said, *"We may never be martyrs but we can all die to self, to sin, to the world, to our plans, and to our ambitions. That is the significance of baptism; we died with Christ and rose to new life."* I believe this is what Jesus meant when he said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

Along with the symbolism provided by Scripture, some authors have given us metaphors that provide additional insight into water baptism. Water baptism has been compared to:

a spiritual birth announcement - Just as parents may post a birth announcement on social media or send it in the mail to their friends, letting people know about the baby that's been born to them, water baptism announces that the person being baptized has been born again, born into the family of God. Formerly, they were dead to spiritual reality, but now they are alive to God in Christ Jesus.

an inauguration ceremony - Just like an important official has an inauguration ceremony before taking on the responsibilities of their new office, so the person being baptized is being inaugurated into their position as a son or daughter of **The King of Kings and Lord of Lords**, and into the family of believers, who've become his or her brothers and sisters.

a funeral service and a birthday party - The old nature of sin and self has died. There's no reason to mourn or cry, because that old nature was of no benefit anyway! It's time to get out the cake and the balloons, and God wants to give the person being baptized the gift of the Holy Spirit (unless that's already taken place).

the filling out of a name-change form - When a person enters into God's salvation, they receive the name "Christian", meaning one belonging to Christ. With that new name comes all the protection, all the provision, and all the responsibilities of being a child of **The Almighty**. Just as a wife receives the last name of her husband in marriage and then notifies people of that change, water baptism is an attestation of having received a new name.

I'd also like to point out here that first century baptisms were public events. It wasn't uncommon to have Roman soldiers there, and occasionally some antagonistic person might even pelt the people in the river with rocks or dirt. Courage was certainly required. The person who was baptized was now a marked individual. Everyone knew where they stood. In a culture where Christians were viewed as being unpatriotic rebels because they refused to worship Caesar, that had its dangers.

Roman Numeral number three on our outline lets us know that there's more to water baptism than meets the eye. Everything God does has meaning and purpose. There are no dead forms in Jesus Christ. Water baptism is not just a ritual to be performed. In some way, **life** is imparted to the new believer. Although the Bible doesn't give great detail or clarity on the subject, three passages of Scripture show us that a lot more happens than just someone getting wet.

Gal. 3:26-27 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

No explanation is given here or anywhere else in Scripture as to how this new clothing functions, what it accomplishes, or what the believer's responsibility might be in maintaining it. I believe it's safe to say that this clothing is spiritual in nature rather than physical, and that it carries with it the essence of Christ, but beyond that there's precious little we know about it. I'd like for us to remember that if we humans proclaim as clear anything God has left vague, we're indeed guilty of great arrogance. So I encourage you to believe the Scripture. Everything it says is true. But for those matters which aren't explained, let's be comfortable in admitting that there's a whole lot that we just plain don't know. Nonetheless, it appears from these verses that the believer who's been baptized has received some kind of spiritual clothing from the Lord which the believer who hasn't yet been baptized can still look forward to receiving.

1Pt. 3:21 and this water [the water under Noah's ark] symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Again, we've encountered a verse that leaves us with many unanswered questions. The

statement is made that baptism saves us. The context would indicate that it seems to save us from an impure conscience, but that isn't totally clear. Either way, those who've submitted themselves to the water of baptism gain, according to this verse, the pledge of a good conscience toward God. So even though we again know precious little about the details, there is a difference between those who have obeyed the Lord in being water baptized and those who haven't. Something really does happen in the believer when he or she gets water baptized.

The third passage of Scripture that indicates some form of **life** being imparted to the believer from God when baptism takes place is from the book of Colossians, chapter two. It reads,

Col. 2:11-13 In him [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raises the dead.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,

This passage compares New Testament baptism to Old Testament circumcision. Under the Old Covenant, if a man who was a Gentile – that is, a non-Jewish person – wanted to have a right relationship with the God of the universe, he had to become circumcised and obey the Law of Moses to demonstrate his faith. His being circumcised then represented the initiation into the Covenant and the seal of his having become a covenant believer, a visible sign that he belonged to God and was bound to him. Paul, the author of Colossians, here indicates that when a believer is baptized, Christ performs a spiritual circumcision, cutting off the sinful nature. From this we can understand that baptism is now also an initiation into the New Covenant and a seal of the New Covenant, but the more important truth is that, as we saw with the other two passages quoted earlier, something takes place in the unseen realm that changes the person getting baptized. What God does may be tough to define or quantify, but he's not a mere spectator. He actively works in the life of the individual who's being baptized, whether anyone notices it or not.

Foundations Lesson #4

Water Baptism, Part 2

Toward the bottom of the first page on our outline, Roman Numeral number four deals with the subject of water baptism being necessary in the life of a believer. Because water baptism is commanded, it's an act of obedience to God. Several verses point that out to us.

Ac. 2:38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Ac. 10:48 So he [Peter] ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. They asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Ac. 22:16 [Ananias speaking to Saul] And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

The attitude of the leaders of the early church was certainly not one of suggestion or asking people if they maybe wouldn't mind just considering getting water baptized. As we read in the

passage from Acts 10, Peter **ordered** that it be done. This is consistent with what Jesus had told his followers shortly before he was taken up to heaven.

Mt. 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Here, at the very closing of Matthew's gospel, Jesus first assures his followers that he has, indeed, been given all authority in heaven and on earth. In the first statement he makes to them as one who's been given this authority, he commissions them to: go and make disciples... baptizing them..., and teaching them. He ends by giving them the promise of his presence as they obey. So if you're saved and you want to obey God, you need to be water baptized. It's that simple.

Scripture also tells us that Jesus himself submitted to baptism at the start of his ministry.

Mt. 3:13-17 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

I find it significant that John the Baptist somehow recognized that Jesus was holier than he was. John's baptism was, after all, a baptism of repentance. But even though Jesus didn't have any sins to confess or repent of, he knew that it was fitting and proper for him to submit to the ordinance of baptism in order to "fulfill all righteousness." His obedience to the will of the Father (and **everything** Jesus did was in obedience to the Father) became the occasion for the Spirit lighting on him and the voice of approval being heard from the Father in heaven.

It only stands to reason that if Jesus was baptized as an act of obedience, we should be, too. After all, he's the example for us to follow.

1Pt. 2:21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Jn. 13:15 [Jesus speaking] I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

Before going on, I'd like to mention that there are rare circumstances when it's not possible to be water baptized. Fortunately, Scripture gives us an example of this. When Jesus was crucified, two criminals were crucified with him – one on his right, the other on his left. Luke records that one of them said to Jesus, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Certainly, this request was one of faith. The dying man must have believed that the man named Jesus being crucified next to him was a king, and that there was some kind of life beyond the grave, which Jesus had control over. Jesus responded to his faith by answering him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." The man had no way of getting baptized, yet his eternal destination in paradise was still assured by the Son of God himself!

Turning to page two of our outline, Roman Numeral number five addresses the timing of water baptism. The pattern of the church as recorded in the Scripture is clear: people were baptized as soon as possible once they had come to faith in Christ. Usually, this took place on the same day.

Ac. 2:37-41 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the

other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Ac. 8:12-13

But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

The timing of water baptism following right behind believing in Jesus Christ is very clearly worded here. About the people of Samaria it says, “when they believed... they were baptized.” And about the man known as Simon the Sorcerer, it says that he “believed and was baptized.” No time was wasted in bringing those who had come to faith in Jesus Christ into the water of baptism. After all, when a person dies, preparation begins immediately for a burial.

Ac. 16:32-33

Then they [Paul and Silas] spoke the word of the Lord to him [the jailer] and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.

Ac. 18:8

Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.

There are three other passages of Scripture listed on our outline that I haven't read. I invite you to look them up in your Bible or you can read them in the **Scriptures & Quotes** document included in the **Additional Resources** section of this web page. In all of the New Testament, there are only two instances where believers were **not** baptized the same day they accepted Christ as Lord and Savior. In Acts 9:1-19, Saul of Tarsus gets saved on the road to Damascus, but because there seems to have been no one available to minister to him, his baptism was delayed three days until Ananias was sent to him by God. Then in Acts 19:1-7, twelve disciples in Ephesus hadn't even heard of New Testament baptism. As soon as it was explained to them, they were baptized.

Before any of us are too hard on much of the church today for not baptizing people as soon as they make a confession of faith in Jesus Christ, I'd like to acknowledge that some other factors need to be considered. By the time the New Testament was being written, the church had already suffered much persecution. If you're a part of a minority that's being persecuted, it's very important for you to know who you can trust, who's on your side, who's going to be loyal when the rubber meets the road. For that reason, it was very important for the leaders of the early church to do their best to weed out, as much as possible, any pretenders or insincere “converts.” One of the ways they did this was to tell people they needed to be baptized. Water baptism is an important indication of a believer's seriousness in their commitment to Christ. As one American author has said, “Baptism separates the tire kickers from the car buyers.” In the early church, those who submitted to baptism were welcomed into the fellowship of believers. It seems that early church leaders had a measure of confidence that conversions were more likely to be genuine when they were immediately followed by water baptism.

Today, especially in parts of the world where there's little or no persecution of believers, people who are ripe unto salvation are generally asked to repeat a prayer of repentance and faith. Once the prayer has been prayed, they might be asked to fill out a “decision card”, or they might be given some literature to help them in their new faith, but usually they're accepted into the church without further scrutiny. Water baptism may or may not even be mentioned; that's almost always reserved for a

future time. I believe one of the reasons for the delay is cultural. In the days of the early church it probably wouldn't have raised any eyebrows to see a person who was wet head to toe walking down the street. Not so in much of the world today. Also, with the huge increase in codes and regulations, especially in larger population areas, finding a public place where dunking someone would be legal could be a challenge. Our church building is blessed to have a baptismal tank in the Sanctuary. We're very grateful for that provision, but it takes about 2¼ hours to fill it with water and another 24 hours to heat the water to where it would be at a comfortable temperature for someone to be baptized. The early church certainly didn't have those issues to contend with.

I mention these factors because we have to understand the difference between the message and the methods that are employed. The message must never be compromised. It is eternal and unchanging. Man is still sinful. Jesus Christ is still the only answer. God still requires admission of guilt, faith in Christ, and submission to his lordship. That hasn't changed in 2,000 years and it won't change for the next 2,000 years if the Lord chooses to delay his coming for that long. The message must remain pure and unaltered. But the methods employed can't be insensitive to the culture. The early church would never have used "decision cards" or gospel literature for two very important reasons: the cost of parchment would have been prohibitive and secondly, only an estimated two to three percent of the population could even read or write. Methods have to be flexible.

Having said that, if you're a new believer I want to encourage you to get baptized as soon as you possibly can. Don't delay. I'd encourage you to find a church family if you don't have one, and find someone, preferably the pastor, who's willing and able to baptize you. Even though the logistics in many areas of the world are different than they were in first century Palestine, our passion to do things according to the pattern of the Scriptures should remain strong. When I got saved in the fall of 1978 in Boston, Massachusetts, I had a strong desire to get baptized right away. It wasn't for another six weeks until my baptism took place. I had nothing to do with any of the reasons for the delay. I can't say that I suffered any long-term spiritual damage because I had to wait, but the ideal is still "when they believed, they were baptized." Let's get as close to that Biblical pattern as we possibly can.

I also find it more than just interesting that in some countries where Christianity is heavily persecuted, the prison sentence for being water baptized can actually be more severe than the sentence for accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They seem to grasp the importance of water baptism better than some believers do.

On our outline, Roman Numeral number six addresses the spoken formula of water baptism. I admit that I'm very grieved and I find it very tragic that this has been an issue of division in the body of Christ. Churches have split and believers have broken fellowship with one another because they couldn't agree on what name people should be baptized into. Personally, I can understand that different Christians could possibly have slightly different views on the subject, but for believers who have "one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (see Ephesians 4:3-6) to divide on such an issue must bring great pain to the heart of the Father, who has a deep desire to see all his children live in "the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." On some matters we should agree to disagree, loving one another and embracing one another as family despite our unique perspectives.

Having said that, the Scripture gives three variations to the spoken formula of water baptism. They are:

- 1) in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
- 2) in the name of Jesus Christ
- 3) into the name of the Lord Jesus

The obvious conclusion we can draw from these passages is that if God, in the holy Word he's written for us, has seen fit to give us three different spoken formulas when baptizing new believers, then for his followers to use any one of those three would be acceptable to him! In my humble opinion, that shouldn't be tough to understand. I'd like to read you the passages from the Bible that give us these three spoken formulas.

Mt. 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Ac. 2:38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Ac. 10:48 So he [Peter] ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Ac. 8:16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Ac. 19:5 On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

In an effort to cause as little disturbance as possible within the church at large, some have endeavored to combine as much of the wording from all three of these expressions as possible. So when they baptize a new believer they say something like, "On the basis of your confession of the Lord Jesus Christ, I now baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." I've used a wording similar to that myself. I'm delighted to report that I've never encountered any friction with other believers because of it. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #4

Water Baptism, Part 3

Going on to Roman Numeral number seven on our outline, I want to address the question of which comes first, water baptism or the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Before looking into the Scripture to see what it says about the order in which these events can occur, I want to be very clear that salvation must precede either water baptism or the baptism in the Holy Spirit. As we learned in Roman Numeral number two, water baptism is an identification with Jesus Christ, a declaration of belonging to him. If a person hasn't yet received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they certainly can't testify that they belong to him. People aren't buried in order to become dead; they have to be dead before they're buried. In the same way, the death of the old nature through faith in Christ must have taken place before the old nature can be buried in baptism. Baptism doesn't make the old nature dead, it's simply the outward testimony that the death of the old nature has already taken place.

Similarly, the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is an overflow of the Spirit. The indwelling of the Spirit at salvation has to take place before the Spirit can then flow over into greater fullness in the life of the believer.

Our outline gives two examples from the Bible where people were water baptized before being baptized in the Holy Spirit. We've already read the passage that's listed from Acts chapter two, so I won't read it again. On that occasion, Peter let his hearers know that they needed to repent, be baptized, and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Verse 41 tells us that those who accepted Peter's message were baptized. Even though it's not specifically mentioned that the believers then received the gift of the Holy Spirit, more than likely that's exactly what happened soon after they'd been water baptized.

Ac. 8:12-17 But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

So we see that on these two occasions, water baptism preceded the baptism in the Holy Spirit. However, Scripture also gives us examples of the baptism in the Holy Spirit coming before water baptism.

Ac. 9:17-19 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Ac. 10:44-48 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

In the two incidents we’ve just read, the believers were baptized in the Holy Spirit and then, shortly thereafter, they were water baptized. Another incident recorded in Scripture relates how these two experiences came at pretty much the same time.

Ac. 19:5-6 On hearing this, they [the twelve Ephesian disciples] were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

So we see from the Scripture that the order in which these two experiences can occur is entirely flexible. Then Roman Numeral number eight deals with the issue of re-baptism. The *ideal* for any believer is, when they invite Christ into their life, to be water baptized right away, and then to continue faithfully loving and serving God for the rest of their lives. When that happens, there's no need to be re-baptized. However, I'm sure we all realize that we don't live in an ideal world. Even in the Scripture, there's one incident where believers were re-baptized.

Ac. 19:3-5 So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?”
“John’s baptism,” they [the twelve Ephesian disciples] replied.

Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

John the Baptist's ministry was very different from the ministry of Jesus Christ. Even though there were some similarities, John's emphasis was to prepare the people of Israel for the coming of

the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. He preached to the people that they needed to repent of their sins in order to be ready for the coming of the Lord. Those who accepted his message and repented of their sins were baptized by him in the Jordan River. For those who received John's baptism, there were important ramifications not only for right then, but also for the future. We read in Luke's gospel that God himself made a clear distinction between those who did what was right in his eyes by submitting to John's baptism and those who weren't baptized by John.

Lk. 7:29-30 (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

It's important to note here that submitting to God not only brings blessing, it also positions us to receive further revelation and grace from the Lord. When a rugged guy who had a strange wardrobe and an even stranger diet appeared on the back side of nowhere and fearlessly proclaimed that people needed to change their lives and get drenched to prove their sincerity (that's right, God has been known to employ some very unconventional methods), those who really wanted to please God came and submitted to a ministry that probably appeared downright bizarre to some. For those who repented and were baptized, I'm sure their submission to God's methods and his messenger pleased **The Almighty**. But **it also paved the way for them to recognize the next and more important message from God**. Our submission to God still does that today.

Getting back to John's baptism, we see that it differed significantly from New Testament baptism, which is a picture of the salvation that's been provided by Jesus Christ. That salvation wasn't even available yet when John was baptizing, because Jesus had not yet been crucified, been buried, or risen from the dead. Turning back to our text from Acts chapter 19, when Paul learned that the twelve Ephesian disciples had only received John's baptism, he had them re-baptized. This certainly was an unusual situation, but re-baptism was the right thing to do under those circumstances.

Another condition under which it's proper to re-baptize someone is in the case of infant "baptism." Unfortunately, there are some churches that "baptize" infants. This practice certainly isn't in harmony with what God has said in his word, because infants don't yet possess the mental capacity to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, which is a requirement for being baptized. I personally support the dedication of infants to the Lord. There is Scripture to support such a practice. Those believing parents who commit themselves to raising their children in the training and the instruction of the Lord, who want to commit those children, even as infants, to the Lord in dedication, should have the opportunity to do so. That's wonderful. But water baptism must be reserved for those who've made a conscious decision to accept Jesus Christ into their lives. So when someone who was "baptized" as an infant eventually accepts Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, they need to be properly baptized after getting saved.

Another condition under which it's proper to re-baptize someone is in the case of their having been baptized by pouring or sprinkling. Again, it's unfortunate, but not every church baptizes their new believers by having them participate in the New Testament imagery of burial, going all the way under the water. So if a believer, after getting saved, is baptized by pouring or by sprinkling, and they later learn about New Testament water baptism being by immersion, and because of that they want to be re-baptized, they should be given the opportunity to do so.

Having covered some instances in which it's proper for a believer to be re-baptized, I'd also like to cover some instances in which it's not proper. I had a friend who was traveling out of state, and he attended a church service where there was an unusually powerful manifestation of the presence of the Lord. During that service, people were getting baptized. So my friend got re-baptized in order to, in his own words, "get in on what God was doing." I'd like to point out that we never draw closer to God by violating principles or patterns he's established in his word. God has designed water baptism to be a picture of salvation. When I asked my friend if he'd gotten saved again, he said no. Based on his own testimony, for him to have gotten baptized again was inappropriate. If he wanted to "get in on

what God was doing,” he could have, for example, asked the elders to pray for him.

I've known some Christians who've been baptized three or four times, mainly because they were disillusioned or dissatisfied with their own lack of surrender or obedience to God after having been baptized. But just like husbands and wives don't get re-married every time they make up after an argument, so Christians don't get re-baptized every time they grow in consecration or surrender to the Lord. Water baptism has never been designed to be a spiritual vaccination which gets repeated if it didn't “take” the first time. Nor do Christians get re-baptized the way people get re-inoculated if after some time the effects of the initial vaccine have worn off. Water baptism is the declaration that a life has now come under new management.

The outline says that in the event of backsliding and subsequent reconciliation with God, it's recommended that the question of re-baptism be resolved by the believer as he walks in light of God's word. As such a person studies the Word of God and actively seeks the God of the Word, they'll know what to do.

The last section of our outline deals with some practical matters concerning water baptism. I'd encourage everyone being baptized to come with a towel and a complete change of clothes. I'd encourage women not to wear wide skirts – pants are practical. Some churches encourage the believers being baptized to testify about what God has done in saving them. Some don't. I'd encourage anyone being baptized at least to be prepared to give a short account of how God in his goodness has rescued them and brought them into his family. I also find that it works best to hold your nose when you're going down under the water. Also, I encourage people to be yielded to the Holy Spirit. He may want to fill right after you get baptized if that hasn't happened to you yet. If you're not sure of what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit, take heart. The very next lesson, Foundations Lesson #5, is dedicated to that subject. Lastly, I encourage people who're standing in the water or who are wet not to touch the microphone if there is one.

Water Baptism should be the cause of great rejoicing. Whether you're the only person being baptized, or others are also being baptized, or you're there just to witness brothers and sisters in Christ being baptized, please remember that it's a celebration of what God has done. God is a great rescuer. He is in the life-transformation business. That's worth getting excited about. Amen. God bless you all.