

Session 6: Baptism- Your Public Testimony

Definition of Baptism:

The English word “Baptism” has its roots in the Greek word “Baptizo” which means to “dip”, “plunge”, “immerse” something. Unfortunately, baptism was changed from its original form of immersing people in water, to sprinkling or pouring little water on one’s head for three reasons.

Firstly, the practice of waiting until late in life to accept baptism. “By waiting so late, some risked dying before getting to a pool of water that was sufficient for a total immersion” (Carl Mitchell). As a compromise, the practice of sprinkling began to occur.

Secondly, “the beginning of baptizing infants, is something that is neither commanded nor illustrated in the New Testament. The practice of baptizing infants began in the late 2nd century” (Carl Mitchell)

Thirdly, it was believed that baptism washed away all the sins a person committed before they were baptized. So, if one was baptized just before they died, they would not need to repent of sins committed after baptism.

At Watoto Church, we baptize people by immersing them in water because it was the method (mode) that was used in the New Testament.

In the Bible, there are a number of instances in which baptism was practiced. For example:

- Many people who confessed their sins were baptized by John the Baptist (**Matthew 3:5-6**),
- Jesus was also baptized by John in River Jordan (**Matthew 3: 13-16; Luke 3:21-22**)
- Jesus and his disciples baptized people (**John 3:23**)
- 3,000 new believers were baptized on the Day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:41**)
- Ethiopian Eunuch who was also a high ranking official, was baptized by Philip (**Acts 8: 36-39**)
- Paul was baptized after his conversion (**Acts 9: 18**)

Why is Baptism Important?

It should be emphasized that everyone who has given their life to Jesus ought to be baptized, because baptism is:

- **A Testimony**

When a person is being baptized, they are in reality preaching the gospel visually.

In that moment, those being baptized are simply saying to the people witnessing their baptism and the whole world in that, *"I died with Jesus Christ, I was buried with him and now I am raised with Christ to brand-new life"*

Apostle Paul writes in Romans 6:3-4 that:

"Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives" (NLT).

Ray Pritchard (a pastor in Illinois) says this about the importance of baptism: *"as you stand in the water waiting to be baptized, you symbolize Jesus dying on the cross. As you are lowered into the water, you symbolize Jesus buried in the tomb. And as you are raised from the water, you symbolize Jesus rising from the dead"*.

Your baptism then tells a story of the old life you've let go and the new life you've taken on because "if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Not only is baptism a testimony to others, it is also:

- **A Celebration**

During baptism, a person who is baptized celebrates their decision to be a follower of Jesus.

We're told that the Ethiopian Eunuch whom Philip preached to and baptized "went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8: 39). He was definitely celebrating his decision to believe in Jesus and getting baptized.

But a person who is baptized is not the only one celebrating. Those who witness it also celebrate.

When Jesus was baptized, God the Father celebrated. This is what Matthew tells us: "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 alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."- Matthew 3:16-17

Baptism is a big deal. It's a special event to be celebrated in church and at home. It's good for families and friends to organize parties for their loved ones who are baptized.

Finally, baptism is:

- **An Act of Obedience**

After rising from the dead, Jesus met with his disciples and told them, "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." (Matthew 28:18-20).

The command to "make disciples" and "baptize them" applies to all the disciples of Jesus in the past, present and future.

In obedience to that command, we regularly conduct baptism at every Watoto church campus. It happens on the second weekend of each month. We don't do it as a time-filler during a celebration service. We do it as something important Jesus commands his church to practice.

But one of the questions that is often asked is "Will a Christian who is not baptized go to heaven?"

The answer is "YES" they will go to heaven because baptism is not a means to salvation. We're not baptized to be saved. We're saved when we accept Jesus as our Saviour and Lord.

However, as a Christian (a follower of Jesus, a child of God), a decision to be baptized is an act of obedience to our Lord's command.

Jesus says: "If you love me, obey (keep) my commands" (John 15:15, NIV).

So, if you love Jesus as his devoted follower, don't hesitate to get baptized as soon as opportunity is available.

Sources of Content

Melanie Brown. <https://bible.org/series>.

<https://bible.org/question/what-are-historical-origins-infant-baptism>

Carl Mitchell, minister, Patrick Gardens Church of Christ, Jamaica

Ray Pritchard, Senior Pastor, Calvary Memorial Church, Oak Park, Illinois