

# Water Baptism

## Introduction

It is important to read the Bible and learn what God has to say to His people. I believe in examining the Scriptures thoroughly in order to know exactly what God has for us. He says His Word is spirit and life. It brings life to those who diligently seek Him and take Him at His Word. It is so important that we get God's truth in every area of our lives.

I was raised in a church that believed in the Word of God. Whatever God said, was the way it was. I was raised in a major denominational church, trained through that denomination and raised in the Word of God. I went to parochial grade school, high school, college and seminary schools.

Through my time in those schools and because of my background, I learned that I was to take God at what He says and believe Him. I really thank God regarding my background. However, as I started to search the Word of God, I found there were some discrepancies between what I was taught and what the Bible actually says.

I believe it is very important to search the Scriptures diligently to find out what God has to say about matters.

When I was pastoring in a denominational church, God spoke inside of my heart. I had a clear impression that the Lord was talking to me about baptism.

Just prior to this I kept having a feeling that I needed to be water baptized. I could not understand this feeling within me, so I asked the Lord about it, saying, "Lord, I have already been baptized." In the background from which I had come, we were baptized as babies. So I asked the Lord further about this and He ministered to me concerning water baptism, what it is all about and who is to receive it.

I would like to share these things with you. Look in your Bible and search the Scriptures with me to make sure that what we are sharing is what God says. It is important not to take something as a truth just because someone tells you it is the truth. Search it out yourself on the basis of the Word of God.

God's Word clearly shows that people are to be baptized in water. "*Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.*" (Matthew 28:19) In Acts 2:38 the people asked "*What must we do?*" And Peter responded, "*Repent and be baptized... for the remission of your sins.*"

The commission is to "go and teach all nations and baptize them. It says, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15, 16)

## Criteria for a Valid Baptism

As to the time and the age when a person is to be baptized, the Word of God does not state specifically, since there exists a free will, faith response on each person's part. However, certain criteria for a valid baptism are set down. What should a person do before he or she is baptized?

1. The first criteria is that the person needs to be taught God's Word. (Again, see Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15-16.) At Cornelius's house, the people were taught and received the Word of God and then they were filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 10:43-48) The Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. Then the question was asked, "*What is to hinder these people from being water baptized since they have the same Holy Spirit that we have received?*"

We learn here that prior to baptism the people are to be taught. "*Go ye therefore and teach all nations.*" Teaching comes before the baptizing. It goes on to say, "*baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.*"

2. The second criteria is to repent before being baptized. Acts 2:38 says that a person needs to repent and then be baptized. To repent is to turn away from living for oneself and Satan and turn toward obeying God, with God as your source.

3. The third criteria for being water baptized is to believe in and confess Jesus Christ as Lord (with your mouth). See Acts 16:31-33, Romans 10:9-10, Acts 8:29-39 and Acts 8:12.

The Spirit of God was ministering to me on this issue of water baptism and I was saying to Him, "Lord, I have already been baptized. I was baptized as a baby. So why do I need to be baptized?" My thought was that I was going to be baptized again. Really, the Bible only talks about one water baptism. (Ephesians 4:5) So, what are we dealing with? The church has taught for centuries and centuries that a baby is to be baptized. So, what do you do? Is it valid?

As the Spirit of God began to minister to me, the Lord asked me several questions. He asked, "What makes a valid baptism?" I gave Him the Word of God concerning repent and be baptized.

He said, "Had you repented when you were a baby?" (To repent is to acknowledge your sin, turn from it and turn to the Lord.)

I said, "No, I had not."

He went on further, "How does faith come?" (Faith is necessary for a valid baptism. The person has to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.)

I told Him, "*Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the word of God.*" (Romans 10:17)

He asked me, "Had you heard the Word of God when you were a baby?"

I answered, "No, I had not heard the Word of God." I had been baptized at about five or six weeks old.

He asked, "If you had not heard the Word of God, did you have faith?"

I had to say, "No, I did not have any faith."

He continued, "If faith makes a baptism valid, you did not have any faith?"

I said, "My parents had the faith."

He explained, "That is fine and good that your parents had the faith, but you did not."

One thing that we learn from the Word of God is that without faith it is impossible to please God. For those who come to Him must first know that He exists and, second, that He is a rewarder of them who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

The practice in the early church was that the parents were to dedicate their children to the Lord. This usually happened on the eighth day. After they had been circumcised, they were then brought in and dedicated to the Lord. This is a response of the parents and a very valid response, because God's people are to bring their children before the Lord, give them to the Lord, dedicate them and seek God's blessing on them. That is what my parents had done in faithfulness and love to God and love for me. However, the issue is, was that a valid baptism according to the Word of God?

As the Lord continued to minister to me, He asked, "What do you have to do to receive salvation?"

I replied, "I have to believe in my heart that the Lord Jesus is just that, the Lord Jesus and confess with my mouth, 'Jesus Christ is Lord' and believe in my heart that He is risen from the dead." (Romans 10:9-10)

He asked, "Had you confessed with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord when you were a baby being baptized?"

I answered, "No, for I could not even talk." The Lord was showing me that all of the Scriptural criteria for a proper baptism, as far as God is concerned (namely, faith in Jesus, confessing God and repentance), had not been practiced by me as a baby. Yet the church had taught that I was baptized in a valid manner.

Again, Acts 2:38 says, "*Repent and be baptized.*" I could not repent as a baby. The Word of God says in Romans 10:9-10, "*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*" As a five or six week old baby, I could not even talk. Most children do not begin to talk until after they are one year old.

We need to test what has happened in our lives on the basis of the Word of God. I challenge you to examine the Scriptures regarding baptism with me. I know in my own experience and in my own heart that the baptism I had when I was a baby was not the water baptism that God talks about in the Bible!

As soon as the Word of God was brought to me in these areas and I started to look at them very closely, I had to go out and get water baptized, believing in the Lord Jesus the way the Bible says to do it in fulfillment, as Jesus did, of all righteousness.

### Dedication of the Children

Jesus was dedicated as a small child when taken to the temple by his parents. But then, at the age of thirty, he was water baptized by John the Baptist. Jesus said at that time, "*It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.*" (Matthew 3:15) It is a matter of obedience and love for God.

I then asked the Lord, "What about the babies? What happens to those little babies then?" He gave me a Scripture out of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:14, which says that the faith of the believing

parent covers the children until they are able to receive the good news of Jesus, repent of their sins and receive the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is another wonderful gift given to you by God, the privilege to be a believing parent, loving your child and giving your child to God. I believe in dedicating those children. I believe that God's special blessing can be on the children through the believing parents, but there comes a time when no one will be able to stand before God and say, "I am carried by the faith of my parents," or "I am carried by the faith of somebody else."

Every individual will have to make that commitment to God himself. Faith will have to be in each one's heart. I cannot blame anyone else. I cannot credit anyone else. I have to stand before God myself and say, "Jesus Christ, You are my Lord. Just like You are raised from the dead, I am raised from the dead to a new life." (Romans 6; Titus 3:3-8)

### What Water Baptism Represents

Water baptism is the outward sign of the beautiful working of God's Spirit within people that makes them born again. The life of God comes into them. When they go down under the water, the old person who did not love or care about God dies and is buried with Jesus. When they come up out of that water, like Jesus was raised from the dead, they are raised to a new life.

This is tremendously exciting! What a blessing from God! They have renounced their sin. They have renounced the devil and they want nothing to do with him. Instead, they want to serve God and by the power of God they are able to.

We find in God's Word, in every account, that before people were baptized in water, they first heard the Word and responded to it by repenting and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. They confessed with their mouth that Jesus Christ was their Lord.

Faith is the thing that saves a person. The person "who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who believeth not will be damned." (Mark 16:16) Faith only comes to a person through the hearing of God's Word as we noted in Roman's 10:17. Without faith being present in the person being baptized, there is no baptism, but, rather, a simple washing with water of no spiritual value.

If you want to dedicate your child to the Lord using water as a physical sign, that is fine, but that is not the water baptism that the Bible is talking about. The practice of parents or sponsors believing in the place of an infant at its baptism is not a Scriptural practice and finds no Scriptural support. In other words, someone else cannot believe God for you. You have to believe for yourself.

### Does God Sanction Baptizing Babies?

It is often thought that Jesus sanctioned baptizing infants when He said, "*Allow the little children to come to me and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God.*" When the Spirit of God was ministering to me concerning water baptism, He said, "Find the passages you have learned that prove that God sanctions baptizing babies and tell them to Me."

This is one of the verses I quoted to the Lord, *“Allow the little children to come to me for of such is the Kingdom of God.”* This is found in Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15-17 and Matthew 19:13-14.

I quoted this to the Lord and He said to me, “My son, take a look at the next verse.” I took a look at the next verse, and it said, *“Jesus took the children up in his arms and he lay his hands on them and he blessed them.”*

Then I was shook up because I had been taught that this Scripture was a proof passage for infant baptism. It did not say to baptize them at all. It said Jesus lay His hands on them and He blessed them, dedicating them to God.

How can we continue to practice what is not found in the Scriptures? How can we use passages such as this to support something that is not Scriptural according to the Word of God? Jesus did not baptize the infants.

The children were not baptized but, rather, blessed. It also makes note that the parents specifically brought the children for the purpose of being blessed, not baptized.

Another verse often used to support infant baptism is, *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them. . .”* (Matthew 28:19-20) We want to note that it says to teach all nations; then baptize.

Many churches reason that since infants are included in all nations, they are to be baptized. However, careful reading would reveal the verse clearly says to “teach all nations.” Another rendering is to “make disciples of all nations” and then baptize them, speaking not about all nations but about those who became disciples by receiving God’s Word. In other words, we do not just go out in a helicopter or airplane and dump water over all of the nations as is being inferred here.

Only those who have received Jesus and are being made disciples are to be water baptized. The “all” of the nations certainly includes children, but not infants. In true baptism, people have received the teaching of the Word of God and then are being baptized in obedience, with the faith that God has produced in their hearts in Jesus Christ. They are moving on with God.

In Acts 2:38, we find that a person is to repent and be baptized. Repentance always precedes baptism. It is clear that infants have not believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, confessing with their mouth that Jesus is their Lord. Confession is made to salvation as God’s Word tells us in Romans 10:9-10.

God’s Word teaches that a child is able to believe, but there is a distinction between an infant and a child. We have to note this: a child is able to believe. (Matthew 18:6) When children are taught by their parents and grow to know God’s love and the gift of life, repent and believe on Jesus, confessing with their mouth that Jesus Christ is their Lord, then it is the time for them to be baptized (and not before).

### Questions and Responsibilities

We find no clear evidence from God’s Word stating otherwise. What about the infants? Here again, as the Lord ministered earlier, the parents are to dedicate their children to God. This is what actually happens when infants are incorrectly called “baptized.” When we were

“baptized” as babies, our parents were dedicating us to God. The parents were seeking God’s blessing on their child and promising at that time to teach the ways of God by God’s Word and example.

In other words, the parents are stating by their faith that they will take the responsibility of training the child up in the ways of the Lord. God’s Word says children are under God’s blessing because of the faith of the believing parents. (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:14) When the children are of age to believe for themselves, then they are to be baptized into the Lord Jesus’ body. Again, there is no specific age. It is when that child has opened up to God and responds to the Word of God.

They are not baptized into a certain type of church as is often mistakenly thought. A person is baptized into the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, not into any specific denomination.

(1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:12-13, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:13-17, Galatians 3:26-29 and Romans 6:1-4).

When we stand before God someday, each one of us will stand individually responsible for what we have done with the Lord Jesus. The faith of someone else will not cover us. We must have responded in faith to God’s Word and love if we are to have life eternal.

Many people were baptized as babies because their parents were afraid if something happened to them, they would not have life with God. Fear is fear, friends. God’s gifts are motivated by love. Perfect love casts out all fear. God gave a provision for those infants. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:14 says the faith of the believing parent covers the infants until such time as they, too, receive the Lord Jesus. They will receive as a result of the parents’ fulfilling their dedication responsibilities to the children and teaching them to know the love of God in Jesus Christ. Think about that.

Examine your own heart and life right now. What happened to you? Were you sprinkled as a baby? Quote, “baptized” as a baby without any repentance in your heart towards God as the Word of God says must be? Did you confess with your mouth, “Jesus Christ is Lord,” as a public testimony and a working of God in your life when you were baptized? Did you have a parent or sponsor do it for you?

The Word of God says you must confess with your mouth, “Jesus Christ is Lord” for baptism and faith to be valid. Had you heard the Word of God and were you responding to it? *“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* (Romans 10:17) Was faith present in your “baptism” when you were a child? Or was it that you were baptized because somebody else wanted you to be baptized and you did not really care about God? If you now love God, you need to find a ministry and get water baptized, confessing Jesus Christ as Lord.

This is what happened in my own life. Again, I come from a major denominational background with people who love God. I love those people. I love God. However, first and foremost, we have to do things the way God says. Put aside religious traditions and doctrines of men. Jesus said in Matthew 15:9, *“But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”*

### Final Words of Encouragement

I believe after you have looked at the Word of God, you will understand it clearly, as the Spirit of God made it clear to me. Valid baptism has to have saving faith and repentance towards God.

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I encourage you to examine your own heart right now. If you have not been baptized according to the Scriptural principles that God has established in His Word for a valid baptism, you need to be water baptized. You are not being baptized again. This is your first baptism.

There is only one true water baptism. When we were children, our parents in love toward God and for us were giving us to the Lord and promising Him they would raise us in His ways. God's blessing is upon those parents who train their children up in the ways of the Lord.

God has a very special reward for us as parents when we minister to our children and care for them. I believe that a part of caring for our children is searching the Scriptures ourselves and teaching our children what God really says so that they might have the fullness of the blessing of God in their lives as well. God will bless you as He blessed me when you respond boldly to God's Word and are baptized, believing in Jesus Christ as your Lord.

The Lord gave me the following verse as I was baptized, believing in Jesus my Lord. Jesus said before his baptism, *"Allow it to be so now, for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."* (Matthew 3:15)