

Baptism

It is apparent from the scriptures that once we have repented, we need to be baptised. Acts 2:38, *'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.'* Jesus himself commands His servants, Matthew 28:19, *'baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'* It is also clear that we are not referring to just a sprinkling or pouring of water, but of the need for total immersion. John 3:23, *'John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized.'*

Counselling for baptism is not strictly required by the Bible but it is a good thing to do to prepare candidates for both the experience and the following events.

Questions to ask the candidate before baptism could be –

1. Have you put God, His word and His work, first in your life?
2. Have you reconciled with family members by forgiving offences?
3. Do you bear animosity for anyone? *We must learn to love even our enemies.*
4. Do you discipline your thoughts to avoid impurity? *Remember what Christ said about adultery.*
5. Are you honest and generous in all your deeds?
6. Are you learning to serve like Jesus Christ, and willing to overlook faults?
7. *Smoking, alcohol and drugs are all forms of idolatry.* Are you actively trying to conquer any harmful habits?

These are the signs of true repentance required before baptism.

Steps to Baptism –

• I must be baptised

Matthew 28:19	Jesus commands baptism
John 3:23	I must be immersed under water
Acts 22:16	My sins are washed away
Romans 6:1-4	The 'old' me is 'buried'. The 'new' me is 'raised' with Jesus

• I must receive the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:38	God promises to give His Spirit
Acts 8:18	I receive it by laying on of hands
Romans 8:16	It declares me God's child
1 Cor 12:13	God adds me to the Body of Christ, the Church of God
Gal 5:22	I will show the fruits of the Spirit
1 Cor 12:9	God may give me spiritual gifts

• I must be active in God's family

2 Tim 2:2	I must be a witness of Jesus
2 Cor 9:8	I must abound in good works
John 13:34	I must love my fellow Christians
James 1:27	I must visit the afflicted
Gal 6:2	I must bear others burdens
2 Thess 3:1	I must pray for those preaching
2 Peter 3:18	I must grow in grace and knowledge
1 Tim 4:12	I must set an example of purity

• God helps me overcome all difficulties

Luke 14:16	What are my priorities?
Hebr 4:11	I must labour to enter into life
Romans 2:7	I must patiently continue

2 Cor 4:17 My light affliction works for glory
 Hebr 10:26 I must never reject Jesus
 Matt 24:13 I must endure to the end
 Matt 19:26 With God all things are possible
 2 Thess 2:16 Jesus and Our Father love us and give us hope!

- **I must expect to be glorified with my elder brother, Jesus, in the Father's family**

John 6:39-54 Jesus will lose no one
 1 John 3:2 I shall be like Jesus
 Rev 22:5 I shall reign with Jesus forever
 John 17:3 I will be with my Father forever

The act of baptism is deeply symbolic. We are immersed in water after repentance because it is symbolic of the washing away of our sins, Acts 22:16, *'And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'* We are actually baptised into Jesus Christ's name, because He it was who paid the penalty for our sins, not God the Father or the Holy Spirit. In all the references to baptism after the death of John the Baptist, they are all carried out in the name of Christ except one (cf Acts 2:38, 10:48, 19:5, Romans 6:3, 1 Corinthians 1:13, Colossians 3:17, Luke 24:47, Galatians 3:27) That one is Matthew 28:19, *'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'*

The overwhelming evidence indicates that this verse was altered by Roman Catholic sources in the 3rd century AD. The New Revised Standard version says it was later (Catholic) Church tradition, Eusebius says "In my name". The old English Celtic Church from the 1st century AD used 'in Jesus' name', Jesus used 'In my name' on 17 occasions.

When we are totally immersed in baptism, it pictures the burial of our old selves. We are raised up out of that symbolic watery grave as a new man or woman, totally forgiven of all our sins, Romans 6:1-4, *'What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.'*

This symbolic death is required in order that we may receive the begetting of the Holy Spirit, then passed on to us by the laying on of hands by one who already possesses the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:38, *'And Peter said to them, "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.'* Acts 8:18, *'Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money.'* It often occurs that baptism is followed by tests, trials and difficulties, as Satan attempts to divert the new convert. We can feel even worse about our weaknesses *after* baptism, but this is evidence of the Holy Spirit working. Do not expect, as one man did, that your main problem will disappear, immediately after baptism. His didn't, and he was so discouraged that we never saw him again.

Repentance is a life-long, ongoing experience as we gain an ever deeper awareness of our sins and a deeper repentance. However we should not doubt our baptism, because we should also be able to recognise the spiritual overcoming which we *have* achieved.

At that stage we are begotten only. Not born again. That only happens when we are fully born into the spirit family of God at our resurrection, whether it be the first or second resurrection or even for some at the new heaven and new earth when the first earth passes away, 1 Corinthians 15:52, *'in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.'* Revelation 7:17, *'For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'* Revelation 21:4, *'He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'*

It is evident from the Bible that laying on of hands is a vital part of the salvation process, Hebrews 6:2, *'You don't need further instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.'* We should seek out a Christian who is able, from the fruits visible in his life, to show that he himself possesses the Holy Spirit, to baptise us. Though it is likely that such a person may have been ordained, and so be male, where this is not available at all, any member of the Church of God, involved in its work and keeping God's commandments,

Sabbath and Holy Days, is able to baptise. 1 John 3:22, *'and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.'*

We have seen that the Bible reveals that a very few have received the Holy Spirit before or without baptism, but that is exceptional in New Testament times. Don't expect a physical sign that you have received the Holy Spirit after baptism, but God has promised to provide it to all, upon repentance and baptism.

If anyone asks if they have committed the unpardonable sin and are obviously concerned about this, they have not done so, for it is only unpardonable when it is unrepented. Only those who deliberately commit sin, wilfully, rejecting the influence of the Holy Spirit with malice aforethought, rather than through weakness, should be fearful that they have committed the unpardonable sin. Normally, 18 plus is acceptable for baptism.

Practicalities :

Make sure that there is enough water for total immersion – it matters not whether it is in the sea, river, lake, swimming pool or bathtub, providing immersion is assured, but preferably provide clean and comfortable conditions. Tell them what to wear, avoiding transparent garments when wet. Check to find out if they have any fear of water. When in the water, the candidate should hold his/her left arm against chest and hold nose with left hand while you support their neck/shoulders as they recline. Make sure that they are totally immersed (a helper could hold down their feet).

Remember, this is a joyful occasion on earth and in heaven, and family/friends can be present if the candidate wishes. If the candidate is female, always have others present – it is best for the baptiser to wear trousers and shirt rather than swimwear.

Baptism Service

- Ask God's blessings on the service
- Read Romans 6:1-11

Once in the water: – (a prompt)

- What is your full name?
- Have you...[name] accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour and Lord? Acknowledged and repented of your sin, and turned to God and His ways?
- Do you wholeheartedly accept Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, and Lord?
- [name] ...I now baptise you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of all your sins.
- Baptism
- Then say "Your sins are washed away."
- Laying on of hands, asking God to give His Holy Spirit, begetting [name] as a son/daughter of God. Ask Him to give gifts as He sees fit for the building of the church.
- Prayer of thanksgiving to God for this new member of His family.

Traditionally, hands are laid on after all involved are dried off and dressed, though in ideal circumstances it can be done while still in the water.

A celebration, maybe refreshments and congratulations, a welcome to God's family, and maybe a remembrance card, can follow.

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