

Preparation for Water Baptism

Pastor E. Keith Hassell

1. The Purpose

Water baptism is the first step in obedience to Christ. In the New Testament, there were no “altar calls” as we know them today. The message was clear: “If you want to give your life to Jesus and follow Him, come to the water and be baptized!” There is no biblical pattern for salvation apart from baptism. Water baptism finds its meaning in spiritual symbolism. Water baptism by immersion is the first step of obedience to Christ but is also a public witness of our faith through identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we enter the baptismal waters, we enter in response to our need to be cleansed and saved from sin. It is in baptism that we make public confession of Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior and acknowledge our belief in the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10). When we are immersed under the baptismal waters, we identify with the death and burial of the Lord Jesus Christ. In doing so, we also symbolize and submit to our own death and departure from our old life of sin. When we rise from the water, we identify with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and demonstrate our commitment to walk in a newness of life in Christ apart from sin.

ROMANS 6:4,5 (NKJV)

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life, For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.

COLOSSIANS 2:12 (NKJV)

Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead.

I PETER 3:21 (Amplified Bible)

And baptism, which is a figure [of their deliverance], does now also save you [from inward questionings and fear], not by the removing of outward body filth (bathing), but by [providing you with] the answer of a good and clear conscience [inward cleanness and peace] before God, [because you are demonstrating what you believe to be yours] through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

2. The Body and Water Baptism

Andrew Murray (1828-1917) says in His book, The Holiest of All (Whitaker House, 1996), “*Man belongs to two worlds, the visible and the invisible. In his constitution, the material and the spiritual, body and soul, are wonderfully united . . . It is not only in the interior life of the soul, but in that of the body too, that the power of redemption can be manifested . . . It is in the body, as much as in the spirit, that the saving power of Christ must be felt. It was with this view that our Lord adopted one of the Jewish washings, and instituted the baptism with water. He that believed with the heart, came with the body to be baptized. It was a token that the whole exterior physical life, with all its functions and powers, was to be His too . . . The same Spirit who applies the blood in power to the heart, takes possession and mastery of the body washed with water.*” (pp. 381-382) He goes on further to say, “*It is not only in spirit, but with the body too, we enter into the Holiest of All. It is on us here, where we are in the body, that the presence*

of God descends. Our whole life in the flesh is to be in that presence; the body is very specially the temple, and in charge of the Holy Spirit; in the body the Father is to be glorified. Our whole being, body, soul, and spirit, is in the power of the Holy Spirit, a holy sacrifice upon the altar, a living sacrifice for service before God. With the body, too, we live and walk in the Holiest. Our eating and drinking, our sleeping, our clothing, our labour and relaxation---all these things have more influence on our spiritual life than we know. They often interrupt and break the fellowship we seek to maintain. The heart and the body are inseparably joined---a heart sprinkled from an evil conscience needs a body washed with pure water.” (p. 383).

3. **Water Baptism and the Circumcision of the Heart**

Circumcision was given to Abraham as a seal of his covenant with God (Genesis 17:10-11; Romans 4:11). Although Abraham received righteousness from God by faith before being circumcised (Genesis 15:6), God required that Abraham and his descendants be circumcised as an act of obedience for a “seal” of that righteousness (Romans 4:11). So it is with our salvation unto righteousness with God. We are saved by faith in Christ. As we are baptized into Christ through water baptism, we experience the circumcision of the heart to which the natural rite of circumcision pointed.

4. **In What Name?**

Jesus commanded that baptism should be administered in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20). Since different religious groups also baptized during the days of the book of Acts, it was baptism “in the name of Jesus” that set Christian baptism apart from other baptisms being practiced by the Jews. Baptizing “in the name of the Lord Jesus” was acceptable to the disciples since Jesus represents the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9). Early records of church history reveal that baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit was the normally prescribed pattern. According to the Encyclopedia of Early Christianity (Garland Publishing, 1990), “Triune immersion may have been based on the command to baptize ‘in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit’ (Matthew 28:19). That phrase is frequently attested in the second century as the formula accompanying baptism. Baptism ‘in the name of Jesus’ appears to have been a description of the meaning of the act or a reference to the confession accompanying the baptism and not a formula pronounced at the baptism” (p. 132). Although some would debate the exact form to be expressed in baptism, the real importance should always be placed upon faith in knowing that we are being obedient to Christ’s command to be baptized as one of His disciples. Baptism is *never* to be used by a church, denomination, or ministry in order to make disciples unto itself rather than unto Jesus Christ. Here at Grace Fellowship, water baptism does not mean church membership.

5. **Baptism Statement**

In order to avoid controversy and to be in accordance with correct biblical procedure, we baptize with the following baptismal formula:

On the confession of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and by His authority, I baptize you in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

(Optional addition)

Buried with Christ in baptism, raised to walk in newness of life.

6. **Proper Attire**

The candidate should wear clothes that cannot be damaged when wet (and possibly soiled if the baptism is being conducted outdoors). Do not wear clothing that becomes transparent when wet.

- a. Men should wear a shirt and dark slacks.
- b. Women, please remember that clothing will cling to you when wet. Please wear dark slacks and a dark shirt or blouse made of heavier materials. Preferably, do not wear a T-shirt. A woman's shirt or blouse should be tucked in or secured in such a way that it will not ride up in the water. The shirt should be high enough at the neck to avoid being revealing when wet.
- c. Shoes may be removed if the service is being held in an indoor baptistery or swimming pool. It is advised that you wear shoes if the service is being held in a lake, pond, or river to protect your feet against stepping on sharp objects.
- d. Before the baptism service, remove all personal items that could be lost or damaged, such as glasses, contacts, billfolds, watches, jewelry, pocket change, etc.
- e. Bring a change of clothes along with a towel, hairdryer, etc.

7. The Baptism Process

- a. Meet with the baptism candidates at least fifteen minutes to review the service, procedures, and to answer questions. Review briefly the meaning of baptism and make sure each candidate has a true awareness of salvation and their commitment to follow Christ. Make sure all first and last names are known correctly before going into the service.
- b. It is advisable to have two people assisting the candidate in baptism.
- c. If the baptism is being administered in a swimming pool or in an outdoor service by a pond, lake, or stream, there should be people assigned to help the candidates in and out of the water and give them a towel or something to wrap themselves in.
- d. The candidate should enter the water and stand sideways to the minister facing toward the minister's right. If you choose to use a stream or river for your baptism service, it is suggested that the candidate face downstream so when tipped backward, the water does not rush into his or her nose or mouth.
- e. The minister may allow the candidate to give their own name and a short testimony before being baptized. This adds a special personal touch and meaning to the service. Otherwise the minister may introduce the candidate and share the person's testimony. If this option is chosen, the person is to give testimony through answering the following questions:
 - 1) _____, **do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?**
 - 2) **Do you believe that Jesus died for your sins, rose again, ascended to the Father, and is coming again?**
 - 3) **Have you invited Jesus Christ into your life to become your personal Lord and Savior and are you determined to live for Him from this day forward?**
 - 4) **Are you ready now to be baptized in obedience to Christ's command?**
- f. The minister will raise His right hand as taking an oath and make the following baptism statement:

_____, *on the confession of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and by His authority, I baptize you now in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

Buried with Christ in baptism, raised to walk in newness of life.

- g. It is suggested that the candidate grasp his nose and cover his mouth with his left hand to keep out water.
- h. The minister can then place his left hand under the candidate's neck and shoulders while placing his hand over the candidate's left hand.
- i. The candidate should not resist the baptism into the water in order to become completely submerged for the purpose of symbolism. The time of the actual submersion is only a couple of seconds.
- j. Upon baptism, the candidate exits the baptismal waters and is directed to a private place to change into dry clothing.