

Water Baptism: An Alliance Position Paper

Water baptism was established by Christ in connection with His Great Commission to the apostles (Matthew 28:19). He said that new disciples were to be baptized in the name of the Triune God. The Christian and Missionary Alliance believes Jesus meant this to be a permanent practice called an ordinance. Its churches encourage water baptism.

Baptism for Believers

Baptism followed repentance and faith in New Testament times. Peter invited his listeners on the Day of Pentecost to

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven.” (Acts 2:38 NIV).

Three thousand persons responded to the invitation, and

"those who accepted his message were baptized" (Acts 2:41).

When the apostles took the gospel across the Roman Empire from Jerusalem, new churches were established, and believers were baptized soon after they turned away from sin and put their trust in Christ for salvation. Acts 18:18 says, “many of the Corinthians who heard [Paul] believed and were baptized.”

Alliance churches follow the same practice of baptism subsequent to conversion to Christ. Those who have repented of sin and put their faith in Jesus Christ for eternal life are encouraged to take this step of obedience.

What Does Baptism Mean?

In early times baptisms were conducted in public places where family and friends could observe. This public witness marked the person as a follower of Christ. Though today baptisms are often done in church buildings for convenience, a public statement still is a part of the meaning. The person who is baptized identifies with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

The apostle Paul explained that baptism also symbolizes the believer's union with Christ:

"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." (Romans 6:3-4).

Immersion in the baptismal waters symbolizes the end of the old way of life. Coming up out of the baptismal waters pictures the new life found in Christ. The person who was previously dead in sin has been made spiritually alive by the same power that raised up Jesus from the grave. United with Him, the believer is released from the power of sin in order to obey God.

Paul portrays this life change as putting on new clothes: “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:27).

Water baptism identifies a person as a disciple of Christ and celebrates the passage from an old life into a new life in Christ. Simply stated, it is an outward sign of an inward change.

How Should You Be Baptized?

The Bible word for "baptize" means "immerse, douse, or saturate." In the two full descriptions of baptism found in the New Testament individuals were immersed in water. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River to identify Himself as God's Son: “As soon as he was baptized, [he] went up out of the water” (Matthew 3:16).

The apostle Philip baptized the Ethiopian by going down into a body of water and coming up with him (Acts 8:38-39). In both of these examples, a large enough quantity of water was required to immerse the person.

Because of the meaning of the word baptize and the mode of the first baptisms, Christian and Missionary Alliance churches practice baptism by immersion.

“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” (Matthew 28:19 NH).

Practical Advice

Though the Bible does not state a minimum age at which a person may be baptized, an individual believer should be old enough to understand the significance of baptism. Baptism is not required to receive God's salvation. However, all who have trusted Christ for salvation are encouraged to follow Him in baptism as a step of obedience.

Persons who were baptized as believers before affiliating with an Alliance church do not need to be rebaptized.

In cases where immersion is impossible due to physical limitations, an alternate mode is acceptable.