

can express his own faith, without any thought of rejecting his parent's faith which had him baptized as an infant. In fact, people in this situation should see themselves as fulfilling the hope their parents had for them. There are also people who wish to be baptized again, even though they were adults when first baptized, because they feel they did not really appreciate the meaning of what they were doing. In these cases we are usually willing to re-baptize that person, but even as we do so we keep in mind that water baptism is not intended to be repeated. By its nature it is something we normally do once.

## ■ How Should I Prepare To Be Water-Baptized?

As we have seen, it is important to understand what baptism represents before being baptized. The power of this beautiful ceremony is released when we are truly expressing the faith which is in our hearts. Just being plunged into water is meaningless without such faith. This is why we ask each person to take a class or meet with a pastor beforehand. We want it to be a day you'll never forget. Here are some passages of Scripture that will help you prepare: Matthew 3:13-17; 28:18-20; John 4:1-3; Acts 2:38-41; 8:26-39; 9:1-18; 16:16-34; Romans 6:1-14; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 13; Galatians 3:27.



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# Water Baptism

Why Did Jesus Command us  
to be Water-Baptized?

by Pastor Steve Schell

## ■ Why Be Baptized?

The most important reason for a believer to be baptized in water is because Jesus commanded it. In His “Great Commission,” Jesus instructed that all who became His disciples are to be baptized (Mt 28:19). Since every true believer chooses to obey Jesus as “Lord” no better reason can be given. If He wants me to be baptized then I will gladly be baptized.

## ■ What Does The Water Represent?

When the New Testament speaks about baptism, the word it uses indicates that people were lowered down under water and raised up again. This action symbolizes a burial and resurrection. The water itself represents a “watery grave.”

## ■ Must I Be Water-Baptized To Be Saved?

Absolutely not! We are saved entirely by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (Eph 2:8, 9). But water baptism is a God-ordained way to declare the faith we hold in our heart. Just because it is possible to be saved without participating in this symbolic act does not mean a healthy Christian should refuse to do so, anymore than they would refuse to take the Lord’s Supper (communion). We certainly do not have to take the bread and cup to be saved either, but taking these powerfully builds our faith. Likewise, if a believer understands the meaning of baptism it will be one of the most important moments in his life and will always serve to remind him of his decision to follow Jesus.

## ■ What Inward Decisions Am I Declaring By Water Baptism?

There are at least four very important statements being made when a person is baptized:

### 1. “I am not ashamed of Jesus Christ!”

Being a true Christian is not simply having a little faith hidden away somewhere in the back of our hearts. It requires a radical decision to follow Jesus Christ. Though some people try

to soften the demands of Jesus, anyone who honestly reads the gospels will recognize that He requires we follow Him openly. He said, “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory...” (Lk 9:26). On another occasion He said, “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father...” (Mt 10:32, 33). By these statements Jesus certainly means we are to live lives that are openly identified with Him. Water baptism is a way of saying we are beginning such a life. By it we are openly telling the world we are not ashamed of Him, and will die for our faith if necessary.

### 2. “I surrender my life to become His

**disciple!”** Jesus said every person who follows Him must decide whether or not eternal life is worth more than all the riches and pleasures of this world. That is the clear meaning of His parables about the “hidden treasure” and “pearl of great price” (Mt 13:44-46). Such surrender to Jesus will always lead to a life of selfless sacrifice and may even bring persecution or death (Lk 9:23-26). So I begin my Christian life by saying “I have chosen to deny myself and take up my cross daily and follow Him.” The goal of my life will be to serve Jesus and not myself.

### 3. “I have died with Christ!”

Here is an amazing truth. My decision to die with Jesus Christ by faith is accepted in the spiritual world as my literal, physical death. The “old me” is considered by God to be dead and buried. And since His laws only have power to judge a person who is “alive,” sentencing to death those who sin, once I have died the law’s authority has ended (Ro 7:1). This is why, “...there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Ro 8:1). Believers have already died with Christ. The penalty of death has been paid (Ro 6:23). Therefore, in water baptism I declare that my sinful past is buried forever.

### 4. “I have risen from the dead with Christ!”

Baptism requires two symbolic actions: First, we are lowered down into a grave, but second, we

are raised up again. This rising up declares that we will be resurrected from the dead at the end of this age (1Co 15:12-57). Just as I join Christ in His death, I will also join Him in His resurrection. But I don’t have to wait for that day for the power of His resurrection to begin working in me. The Holy Spirit immediately enters each believer and joins Himself to our spirit (Ro 8:9, 11). His presence in me means I am free from the old forces that once controlled me (Ro 8:2). I now have the power to live a brand-new life. Not only have I died to God’s judgment, but I have died to the power of sin. It can’t control a corpse (Ro 6:7). So in water baptism I have the joy of burying my old ways of life. I can boldly say, “I am a new creature in Christ” (2Co 5:17). I am agreeing with Jesus when He said, “...if the Son makes you free you will be free indeed” (Jn 8:36).

## ■ Should Children Be Baptized?

This is a very sensitive subject since many people have been taught that water baptism is necessary for salvation. If that were true then obviously we would want to baptize a child as soon as possible. But since it’s not true, and since baptism is meant to be the outward expression of a person’s inward faith, then it’s best to wait until a child is old enough to make the decisions that water baptism represents. The Bible says that before children are old enough to choose Christ they are blessed by God because of the faith of at least one parent (1Co 7:14). So, at Northwest Church we prefer to wait until a child is at least 12 years of age before baptizing him. However, recognizing that some children mature spiritually earlier than others we provide an optional class for those aged 9 to 12 in which we will teach them about baptism and discern whether the child is ready to be baptized.

## ■ Should I Be Baptized More Than Once?

This question is particularly asked by those who were previously baptized as infants. Our belief is that infant baptism says more about the parent’s faith than the child’s. So when that person becomes an adult, it is best to be baptized so he