

What the Bible says about

Baptism: Before, During, and After

Steve C. Singleton

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PART 1:
**Before
Baptism**



Before we begin our study...

Check all that apply:

- I have never been baptized.
- I was sprinkled as an infant.
- I was sprinkled as an adult.
- I was immersed as a child.
- I was immersed as an adult.

My baptism was for:

- Showing I was already saved
- Joining a church
- Forgiveness of sins
- Uniting with Christ's death



The Meaning of Baptism

Sincere believers disagree over the meaning of baptism. Some say that it pictures what God has already accomplished inwardly. Others claim that it has saving power in itself whether or not the person being baptized has faith in the Lord.

Clearly we should not rely on human authority to settle exactly what the meaning of baptism is. We should go to the Scriptures and listen to what God says through them.

God has provided a way to save men by allowing His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for their sins through His death on the cross. Making provision for forgiveness, God then calls on people to respond to the gospel of His grace.

In responding to God's call, people must have a total commitment to Christ as their personal Savior. This commitment in all of its parts, including a turning away from sin, a commitment to trust Jesus as Savior and to follow Him as Lord, and a declaration to others of that decision, we know as saving faith. Here is the question we seek to answer: Is baptism also a part of saving faith, or does it rightfully come after a person is saved?

The answer is in the biblical passages that reveal the purposes of baptism. In each opening of Part 1 of this booklet you will find a

scripture written out on the left and a brief explanation on the right. A few questions will help you to think through the significance of each passage.

Please regard what you are about to read as an honest attempt to present what the New Testament teaches about baptism. Consider it with an open mind and an open heart.





Ephesians 4:1–6

As a prisoner the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

How Many Baptisms Are There?

Some people say there are seven baptisms. Others say two. Yet in Ephesians 4:5, Paul says there is only one baptism. Why is there so much disagreement?

Here is the reason: the Greek word *baptizō* has a general and a specific meaning. The general meaning of *baptizō* is to dip something. The specific meaning is a ceremony in which a person is dipped in water. The New Testament knows nothing of baptism by sprinkling, a practice introduced centuries later.

When the New Testament uses the general meaning of *baptizō* the word refers to a number of different things. John said that the One coming after him would baptize people in the Spirit and in fire. Jesus said that He had to undergo a baptism, meaning He was about to be plunged into suffering and death. All of these are 'baptism' in the general sense. But it is no less true that there is only one baptism in the specific sense of the word.

Only one baptism was involved in the conversion of every Christian of the first century. The Book of Acts describes this baptism:

See, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized? ...Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.... they came up out of the water.... –Acts 8:36, 38

Can anyone deny water so that these may be baptized...? –Acts 10:47

Questions

1. In the specific sense of the term, how many baptisms are there?
 One Two Three Seven
2. Biblical baptism involves doing what?
 Dipping Sprinkling
 Splashing Pouring
3. Biblical baptism consists of dipping a person in what?
 Water Suffering
 Olive oil Rose petals



Romans 6:3–7

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. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

United with Christ's Death

Many people find it hard to understand why the New Testament puts such a great emphasis on baptism as being essential to salvation if we are saved by Christ's blood. Paul explains the connection between the two in this passage.

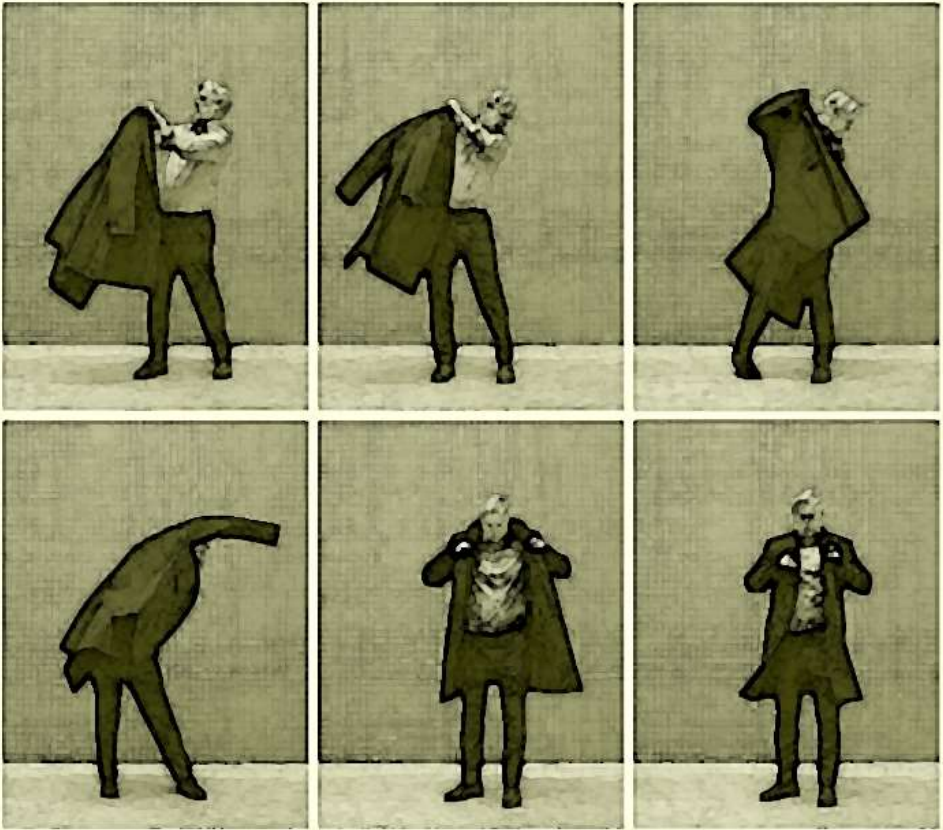
Christ's blood has the power to pay the penalty for the sins of every man and woman who has ever lived. But not all will be saved. And God does not save people in groups, but one at a time. Each person who is willing comes to the cross through baptism so that God may transfer his or her sins to Christ, and may transfer Christ's righteousness to the believer.

Note the three purpose clauses in this passage: *We were buried with him through baptism into death IN ORDER THAT, just as Christ was raised... we too may live a new life. We know that our old self was crucified with him... SO THAT the body of sin might be rendered powerless, THAT we should no longer be slaves of sin.*

Paul says the purposes of baptism are: (1) to live a new life; (2) to render the body of sin powerless; and (3) to escape from the slavery of sin.

Questions

1. How am I united with Christ in His death?
 - By praying and asking Christ to come into my heart.
 - By turning away from my sins in repentance.
 - By joining Christ at the cross through baptism
 - Everyone is united with Christ's death automatically.
2. What are the purposes of baptism?
 - To live a new life.
 - To render the body of sin powerless.
 - To become free of sin's slavery.
 - All three of these are purposes of biblical baptism.
3. Can these purposes be met if I am not baptized?
 - Yes
 - No



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Galatians 3:26–27

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Clothed with Christ

Isaiah says, “...all our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). David adds, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven and whose sin is covered” (Psalm 32:1). When someone becomes a Christian, he or she puts on Christ. Christ’s blood covers the believer’s sins, and their filthy-rags righteousness God exchanges for the perfect righteousness of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Paul tells us in this passage when the exchange takes place. He says that we “put on Christ” when we are baptized. Then, wearing robes washed in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14), we become pleasing to God.

Questions

1. How does the Bible say a person becomes clothed with Christ?
 - By being baptized into Christ, the believer puts on Christ.
 - By asking Jesus into one’s heart, the believer puts on Christ.
 - All human beings are clothed with Christ.
 - By being sprinkled as an infant, and then completing confirmation studies, the believer puts on Christ.
2. What happens if you are not clothed with Christ?
 - You are still wearing your own “filthy-rags” righteousness.
 - You are not wearing a robe washed in the blood of the Lamb.
 - You displease God by refusing what He has offered.
 - All of these things are true.
3. Do you want to wear the rags of your own righteousness or to wear the rich robes of the righteousness of Christ?
 - I want to wear my own “filthy-rags” righteousness.
 - I want to wear the rich robes of the righteousness of Christ.



Colossians 2:11–13

In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the flesh, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins....

Christ as Surgeon

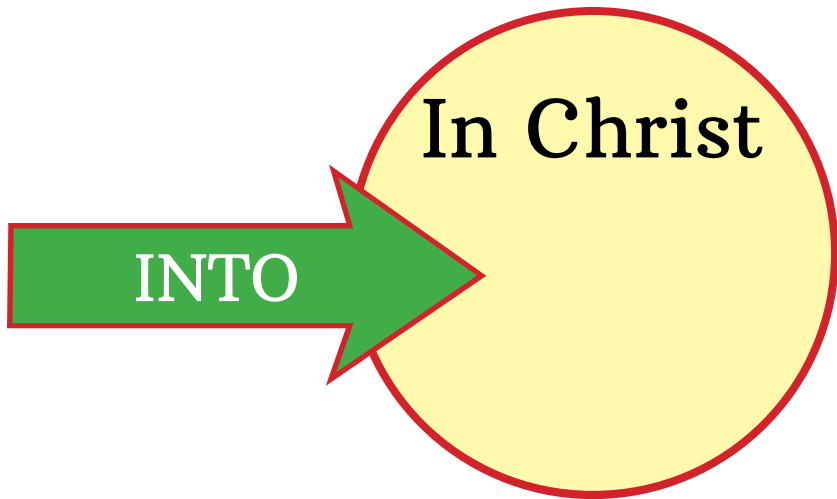
In the first century, when a man was converted from paganism to Judaism, an operation called circumcision was performed on him to show that he would now be a Jew instead of a pagan. A part of his body was cut off

Paul says that Christ performs a spiritual cutting-off of sin. No human can do this spiritual circumcision, Paul reminds us. Only Christ can do it. But when does Christ cut off the sin?

Paul explains that it happens when a person is baptized. Before I am baptized, Paul says, I am spiritually uncircumcised. But then along comes Christ to cut off my sins, and God forgives me, making me alive with Christ. I only trust God to do this for me.

Questions

1. Can I be saved before Christ cuts off my sins?
 - Yes. Salvation does not mean freedom from sin.
 - No. Salvation does mean freedom from sin.
2. When does Christ do this spiritual surgery?
 - When I ask Jesus into my heart.
 - When I repent of my sins.
 - When I am united with Christ in baptism.
3. This operation Christ performs on us prompts God to do what?
 - Forgive my sins.
 - Give me new spiritual life.
 - God does both of these things for me.
 - God does neither of them for me.



Romans 6:3–4

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.

Galatians 3:27

All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Out of Sin, Into Christ

The New Testament teaches that by sinning all people become lost, helpless to get out of this condition on their own power. But God comes to the rescue, offering salvation through His Son.

These two passages reveal the point at which God brings us out of sin and into Christ. The transition occurs when we trust Christ enough to be baptized. At that point, all the spiritual blessings that are in Christ Jesus come to each person God has rescued out of sin and brought into Christ.

Blessing: "in Christ"

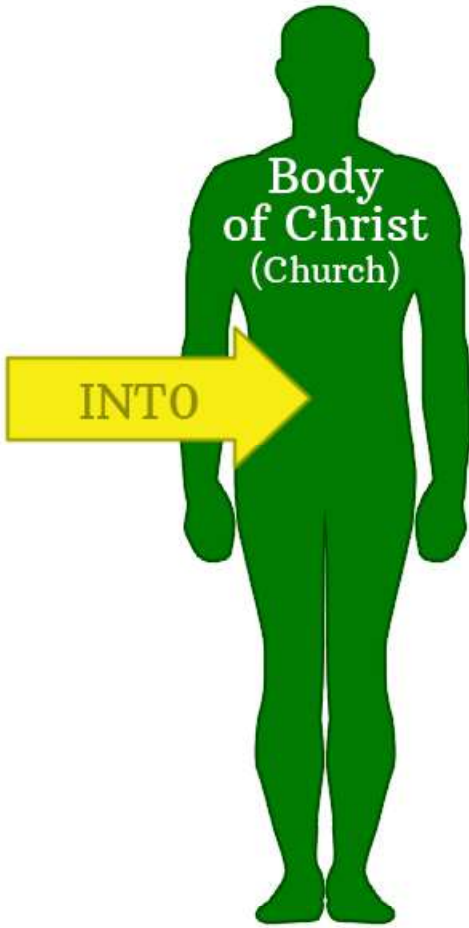
All spiritual blessings
Brought near to God
Not condemned now
New creation
Grace
Salvation
Eternal life

Passage:

Ephesians 1 :3
Ephesians 2:13
Romans 8:1
2 Corinthians 5:17
2 Timothy 2:1
2 Timothy 2:10
1 John 5:11-12

Questions

1. Can I be saved without being in Christ?
 - Yes. Salvation does not depend on being in Christ.
 - No. Salvation is only found by those who are in Christ.
2. Are Christ's blessings available to anyone not in Christ?
 - Yes. It doesn't matter whether you are in Christ or not.
 - No. These blessings are only for those who are in Christ.
3. How can I be brought into Christ?
 - The change-point is when you ask Jesus into your heart.
 - The change-point is when you repent of your sins.
 - The change-point is when you are baptized into Christ.
4. Did Christians in Galatia or Rome get into Christ any other way?
 - No. "All of us" means this is the way all Christians experience.
 - Yes. Some of them probably got into Christ some other way.
5. Had Paul himself entered into Christ by some other way (note the "us" and "we," instead of "you")?
 - No. Paul was baptized to wash his sins away (Acts 22:16).
 - Yes. He received Jesus on the road, three days before his baptism.



1 Corinthians 12:13

For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Out of the World, Into Christ's Body

The New Testament teaches that all saved persons are in union with the Father, with His Son Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). The Lord adds new Christians to their number (Acts 2:47). This group of all saved persons is called the body of

Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:23; Colossians 1:18; etc.), or the His church (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 9:31; etc.). God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit work together to bring us—through baptism—into Christ’s Body.

But perhaps you are wondering whether this is a different kind of baptism, one that is not in water. Remember our first passage (Ephesians 4:5)? There is only one baptism.

Consider also two passages: Acts 2:38–47 and Titus 3:5–7. In the first, Peter tells the people to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, promising that God will give them the gift of the Holy Spirit. When the people respond to Peter’s message, God adds them to the community of Jesus’ disciples. In the second passage, Paul links baptism to the renewing work of the Spirit when he calls baptism the “washing of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.”

The Spirit participates in the one baptism: on the outside (the physical world), a person’s body is dipped in water. On the inside (the spiritual realm), he or she is dipped in the Holy Spirit and drinks in the Spirit. All who experience this become members of the Body of Christ, the church.

Questions

1. How do I enter into Christ’s Body (His church)?
 - I have to be voted in by the members of a local church.
 - The Lord Himself adds me when I am baptized into Christ.
 - I apply for membership and go through months of instruction.
2. Where am I if I am not in that Body?
 - It is not important because people of all religions believe and practice basically the same things.
 - If I am not in the Body of Christ (His church), then I miss all of the blessings of being in the Body.
3. If the Body of Christ is composed of the saved, what is the world (everyone not in the Body of Christ) composed of?
 - The lost. The saved, for no one is really lost.



1 Peter 3:20–22

...God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of filth from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.

Saved from Wickedness

The Apostle Peter explains that the way God saved Noah from the wickedness of his day corresponds to the way He uses baptism to save us. Peter does not focus on how the ark saved Noah from the flood, but on how the water saved Noah from the wickedness of his world. That is why he says that Noah was “saved through water.” God washed away all ungodliness, cleansing the globe of evil. In the same way, when we are baptized, we are trusting God to cleanse us of our transgressions.

Like Paul, Peter ties baptism to what Jesus has done for us. His resurrection corresponds to when we are raised from the water of baptism. As Noah stepped out of the ark, he met a world washed clean of the terrible evil that had stained it. As you come up out of the water, your conscience receives a similar kind of cleansing. You can't do this on your own, only God can purify the heart.

Questions

1. How does God use baptism to save me?
 - It has saving power in and of itself.
 - It saves because of its close connection with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
2. Which people did God save, those who drowned in the flood or those who lived through the flood?
 - Those who drowned in the flood.
 - Those who lived through the flood.
3. Which people will God save today, those willing to come to Him in faith through baptism, or those who refuse to be baptized?
 - Those willing to come to God in faith through baptism.
 - Those who refuse to be baptized.

Should I be baptized?

This is a review of all the passages we have considered. Circle each correct answer, according to what each scripture really says.

1. Ephesians 4:1–5 states that there is only (one, two, three, seven) baptism.

Other New Testament passages tell us that people were baptized by being dipped in (water, olive oil, suffering, rose petals).

2. Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27 say that when I am baptized, I get out of (life, sin, control) and into (sin, death, Christ).
3. Galatians 3:26–27 says that when I am baptized, I become (acquainted, associated, clothed) with Christ.
4. Colossians 2:11–13 teaches that when in faith I am baptized, Christ (proves that He has already saved me, cuts off my sin, considers whether He will save me).
5. Paul says in Romans 6:3–7 that when I am baptized, God joins me to the (death, teachings, reputation) of Christ. He says that I decide to be baptized for two reasons: first, so that, like Christ was raised, I can walk in (oldness, newness) of life; second, if I have (become alive, become dead) to sin through baptism, I have been (set free from, deceived by, introduced to) sin.
6. Peter says in 1 Peter 3:18–22, I am saved by (prayer, faith, baptism) because I am asking God to give me a (guilty, cleansed) conscience.
7. Paul says that the Holy (Spirit, Church) is involved in baptism, putting me into the one (Body, denomination, sect) of Christ.
8. According to the Bible, trusting God to unite me with Christ in baptism is a (very important, somewhat important, unimportant) decision I must make.



My decision is...

Check which one applies to your situation:

- I have already been immersed for the purposes we have studied (that is, I have already been scripturally baptized).
- I have not been scripturally baptized, but I would like to be baptized as soon as possible.
- I have not been scripturally baptized, but I want to wait, for the following reason:

- I am not convinced that this is the biblical teaching regarding baptism.
- I am not ready to make a life-long commitment to serve and follow Jesus Christ.
- I am not aware that I have done anything wrong.
- I want to be baptized, but submitting to it would condemn my unbaptized friends or relatives.

Scripture quotations are from: New International Version (Ephesians 4:1–6; Acts 8:36,38; Acts 10:47; Isaiah 62:6; Psalm 32:1; Romans 6:3–7; Galatians 3:26–27); New American Standard Version (Colossians 2:11–13); American Standard Version (1 Corinthians 12:13); and Revised Standard Version (1 Peter 3:20–22).

Want to go deeper?

Here are some other passages in the New Testament concerning the vital importance of baptism in conversion. As you read each passage, ask yourself, does this scripture fit in with the others I have studied, making baptism essential for salvation? I am confident that you will find the New Testament witness amazingly consistent.

Matt. 28:19–20 Baptism is into the name (that is, into the ownership of) the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the process of making disciples, it is the next step after teaching people.

Mark 1:4 Even John’s baptism was for forgiveness of sins.

Mark 16:16 Those who believe and are baptized will be saved. Unbelievers will be condemned (whether they are baptized or not).



- Acts 2:38** In response to the question, “What shall we do?” Peter commands Christ’s murderers to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and he promises that those who do so will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 8:35–36** Preaching the gospel includes teaching about baptism, since those who heard Philip’s preaching responded by being baptized.
- Acts 8:38–39** Both Philip and the Ethiopian go down into the water, he baptizes him, and then they come up out of the water. (This clearly shows that baptism is by immersion.)
- Acts 16:30–34** When the jailer asks, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul commands him to believe on the Lord Jesus. When Paul and Silas tell him the “word of the Lord,” he washes their stripes (demonstrating his repentance) and is baptized. Then he rejoices, “having believed.” (This shows baptism is part of saving faith.)
- Acts 19: 1–7** People who are baptized for the wrong reason are baptized again for the right reason. Their first baptism, though similar in form, was different in meaning and therefore not valid.
- Acts 22:16** Ananias urges Paul to be baptized, promising him that in doing so he will wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

PART 2:
**During
Baptism**



When should I be baptized?

The simple answer is, when you are ready. One New Testament example describes a baptism “at that hour of the night, Saul of Tarsus was asked, “What are you waiting for?” (Acts 22:16).

Certainly, the casual attitude of delay that some people have today is not what we find in the New Testament.

Who can baptize me? Where can I be baptized? What do I wear?

The Bible does not require that the person baptizing you has to have any special qualifications. Certainly in all of the examples we have of baptisms in the New Testament where we know the details, the person doing the baptizing was faithful, Christian man. Likewise, the place where you are baptized is not important. You just need enough water to go all the way under, because baptism symbolizes a burial as well as a resurrection. If you are being baptized in a church baptistery, they will probably have baptism clothes you can change into and towels for you to use. Otherwise, just wear something you don't mind getting totally soaked.

What happens when I am baptized?

The person baptizing you wants to make sure that you know what you are doing, because the power of baptism lies in what takes place by faith: you meet Jesus and let Him take away your sins. They will probably ask you if you believe Jesus is God's Son and if you are willing for Him to be Lord of your life.

The declaration “Jesus is Lord!” means that you are willing for Him to take over ruling your life and that from now on, you agree to be guided by His words, by the teaching of His apostles and prophets as recorded in the New Testament, and by the example of His life. This declaration is your public announcement that you want to be His follower. (To study more about this, take a look at Matthew 10:32-33, Romans 10:5-13 and Acts 22:16.)



The person baptizing you will probably help you into the water and explain the mechanics of assisting you to go under. Usually he will place one hand behind your back and ask you to hold your wrist with one hand and get ready to hold your nose with the other (as he leans you back). Then he will say something like this: “Because of your confession of faith in Jesus, I am baptizing you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of your sins, and that you might receive the Spirit as God’s gift.” This statement combines the teaching of Matthew 28:19 with that of Acts 2:38. Or he might say something like this, based on Acts 2:38 alone: “I baptize you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, relying of God’s promise that you will receive His gift: the Holy Spirit.”

How long will I be under the water?

Don’t worry. The person baptizing you will lower you into the water only enough for you to be completely under, then will immediately bring you up again. It will all happen in a few seconds. Just be calm and still, and let the person baptizing you do all of the physical work (just like God is doing the spiritual work). If you are large, the person baptizing you might call on someone to assist him.

PART 3:
**After
Baptism**



What do I do now that I have been baptized?

Although the entire New Testament is addressed to Christians, two scriptures in particular, portions of Colossians 2 and 3, and nearly all of First Peter, seem especially written for people newly baptized. Read through each passage, and then consider the brief explanation that follows.

Avoid regulations from the law of Moses (Colossians 2:16–17)

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Here Paul warns new Christians to resist pressure they might get from others to conform to the practices of **Judaism**, with its feast-days, Sabbaths, and food regulations. All of these, Paul says, are only “shadows” of the spiritual realities that are in Christ. They pointed forward to His coming as our Savior and as symbols taught profound truths about Him and His salvation. Now that He has come, however, we cling to Him, the reality of which the practices of Judaism were only the shadowy symbols. Later on, as you mature in Christ, you will want to study about all of this symbolism.

Avoid mysticism (Colossians 2:18–19)

Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Another way you can be led astray is by **mysticism**, focusing on dreams or visions. Paul warns us to avoid centering our lives on

these things because they tend to make the believer conceited and are often only “idle notions.” What you really need to live for God is revealed in His Word.

Avoid a rule-keeping mentality (Colossians 2:20–23)

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Another danger is **asceticism**—following a long list of do’s and don’ts that are nothing more than just someone’s opinion. Paul says rule-keeping has very little value. Instead, focus on our Lord Jesus Christ, and seek to do what He says, as recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and what He says through His apostles and prophets, the authors of the rest of the New Testament.

Focus on Jesus (Colossians 3:1–4)

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

When you were baptized you were “raised with Christ.” Your new life in Him has a different orientation. Now your focus must be on Christ, not on the things of this earth. He should set your priorities and determine your values.

Get rid of your old, sinful habits and attitudes (Colossians 3:5–11)

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your flesh: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

When you were baptized, you became “clothed with Christ” (Galatians 3:27). Just as you “put Him on,” the apostle says you must “take off” other things, such as lust and greed (v. 5), anger, malice, and slander (v. 8), lying (v. 9), and racial prejudice (v. 11). It is true that the Lord forgives us of all of these sins when we trust Him enough to be united with Him in His death and resurrection. But He is saving us *from* these sins, which means He is breaking our connection with them. We cannot go back to them and practice them again without offending our Lord.

Form new, godly habits and attitudes (Colossians 3:12–14)

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

In “putting on Christ,” we also clothe ourselves with His virtues, which means that we imitate Him in our attitude toward others. As

you begin your life as a Christian, make it your goal to replace your old, selfish attitudes with the character-traits of Jesus. This process is not likely to be an easy one, but if you keep at it, you will discover that, by God's help, you are making progress.

Get busy in a good congregation (Colossians 3:15–16)

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

In this paragraph, Paul assumes the new Christian will become an active member in a local congregation of God's people. In this fellowship of faithful disciples of Christ, you as a new Christian will learn what it means to be at peace in Him. You will learn more as you are exposed to healthy Christian teaching and counseling, and you will experience joy and gratitude as you participate in singing praises to our Lord.

Submit to Christ and do all in His name (Colossians 3:17)

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Here is a good rule of thumb to discern the Lord's will in the choices you confront: can I do this in the name of the Lord Jesus? In other words, am I obeying Him in saying or doing what He has directed me to do? Do I have His approval to engage in this or that activity? Does what I am saying or doing cause me to be thankful to God?

Appreciate what the Lord has done for you (1 Peter 1:3–5)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Do you realize how wonderful your salvation is? Not only do you have forgiveness of your sins and the Holy Spirit to empower you to live for Jesus, but you also have an inheritance reserved in heaven for you. And the Apostle Peter says that God is shielding you. Are not these blessings reason enough for praise.

Trials are a normal part of being a Christian (1 Peter 1:6–9)

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

You may soon find yourself wondering, *If, as a new Christian, I am pleasing to God, why am I suffering so many trials?* These verses provide at least a partial answer. God has a purpose for the troubles you are facing: He wants to make your faith stronger, refining it as gold is purified in a furnace. As things “heat up” and you continue to trust Him through trials, you will experience the joy He wants you to have—a joy that is not dependent on external circumstances, but finds its source in Him.

Get involved in a local church

(1 Peter 1:22-25)

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For,

“All men are like grass,

and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;

the grass withers and the flowers fall,

but the word of the Lord stands forever.” And this is the word that was preached to you.

Like the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Peter assumes that you are going to be an active part of a congregation of the Lord’s people. The love that flows between you and your spiritual brothers and sisters, Peter says, must be sincere and must be a deep love, inspired by the gospel that tells of the sacrificial love Jesus has for us. Your new birth puts you into God’s family and gives you spiritual brothers and sisters.

Be active in your own spiritual growth (1 Peter 2:1–3)

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Just like the “put off/put on” passage we read in Colossians, Peter challenges us to be active in our own spiritual growth. This involves two things: getting rid of sinful habits that don’t belong to our new life in Christ and craving “pure spiritual milk” that will help us to mature as Christians. This spiritual milk is healthy teaching about Christ and His will for our lives. You will get this milk from godly teachers and preachers and from your own study of the Bible.

Other passages, e.g., 1 Corinthians 2:1–3:4 and Hebrews 5:11–6:3, distinguish us what is spiritual “milk,” the food of new converts, and what is spiritual “meat,” intended for the spiritually mature. The more you crave and drink in “pure spiritual milk,” the more you will mature. Then you will soon be ready for a stronger spiritual diet.

Connect with other Christians (1 Peter 2:4–10)

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:

*“See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.” Now to you who believe, this stone
is precious. But to those who do not believe,
“The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone,” and,
“A stone that causes men to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they
disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.*

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Peter once more emphasizes the place we have in Christ’s church, comparing us Christians to the stones used to construct a building—and not just any building, but a temple, “a spiritual house.” Within that temple we are holy priests, and we offer spiritual sacrifices to God by the way that we live. Peter points out that not every human

being sees the value of submitting to Christ. To us He is precious; to them He is only something that trips them up.

Resist attacks from within and from without (1 Peter 2:11–12)

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Here Peter addresses the problem of sinful desires, which, he says, “war against your soul.” Satan, our spiritual enemy, wants to trip us up by attacks from within. He wants to pull us right back into the world and into a selfish, sinful lifestyle. He also wants to discourage us by attacks from without. You will discover, if you haven’t already, that being a Christian may cost you some friendships. It may subject you to criticism that until now you have never received from people you thought dearly loved you. Peter says that your life in submission to Christ is meant to serve as a testimony to your non-Christian friends.

Be Christian toward everyone (1 Peter 2:13–17)

Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

This testimony extends beyond your immediate circle of friends. It extends even to government officials, like the police, city employees, judges, and all those on the national level. The honor and respect

you pay to them parallels the way you act toward your Christian brothers and sisters, even when you are suffering mistreatment.

How the Christian acts on the job (1 Peter 2:18–25)

Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

We are not slaves physically, but we may have relationships, especially in the workplace, where we feel like slaves. Peter says that we owe our superiors respect even when they treat us harshly. Follow the example of Jesus, who was willing to suffer mistreatment because of His submission to God and His love for the sinners abusing Him. If you will do this, your effect on them will be similar to the effect Jesus had on those who crucified Him.

Being a Christian as a family member (1 Peter 3:1–7)

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the

purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Your new life as a Christian will make a difference in your family. If you have a husband or a wife, Christ wants you to treat your spouse with consideration and respect, even if your spouse is not yet a Christian. Cultivate the inner beauty of “a gentle and quiet spirit.” Learn how to be considerate, to keep his or her needs in mind as you make decisions. Recognize the value your spouse has to you, and do all you can to help him or her to thrive.

Getting along with other believers (1 Peter 3:8–14)

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

For,

*“Whoever would love life
and see good days
must keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from deceitful speech.*

*He must turn from evil and do good;
he must seek peace and pursue it.*

*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous
and his ears are attentive to their prayer,
but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.”

Once more we encounter a section that describes how we Christians should interact within a congregation and how we must respond to criticism, insult, and mistreatment from outsiders. Jesus Christ wants us to treat each other and even non-Christians with kindness and consideration, trusting in God to help us have the right attitude and deal appropriately with the opposition we might encounter. Being a Christian is not always easy, but it is always worth it.

How to handle non-Christian opponents (1 Peter 3:15–17)

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

The apostle warns us that suffering in this world is inevitable. Would you rather suffer for doing wrong or for doing right? When you are mistreated for doing something right, Peter says, keep Christ on the throne of your heart and think through ahead of time what you might say to anyone who wants to know how you put up with it. Your answer should point them to Jesus and reflect how He is transforming your attitudes.

Suffering helps you stay loyal to Christ (1 Peter 4:1–2)

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

Here is a surprising result of suffering for Christ: if you are willing to stand for Him despite opposition, you are less likely to give up on Christ and return to a life of sin. It's like making an investment—the more you invest, the less likely you are to abandon your investment to pursue something else. If you withstand insult, or ridicule, or job loss, or worse for Jesus, you are unlikely to drift away from Him back into the world.

You may lose friends over your conversion (1 Peter 4:3–5)

For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Broken friendships may be the tragic result of your decision to become a Christian. If you are aware that this may be something you will have to face, you can prepare for it. It's a good idea to get help and encouragement from your new brothers and sisters as well. From the description Peter gives of what these particular friends like to do, you are better off without their influence in your life, anyway. The friends you make among Christians will probably help you stay faithful to Him, not hinder you.

Pray and love (1 Peter 4:7–8)

The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-

controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

The writers of the New Testament agree that the age beginning with the resurrection of Christ is the final age of the world. As you prepare for Christ's return, whenever it will occur, consider that learning how to pray and continuing in fellowship with other believers is essential to your spiritual growth. The more you turn to God and to your fellow-Christians, the more spiritual strength you will develop.

Discover and develop your spiritual gifts (1 Peter 4:9–11)

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

God endows each of His children with spiritual gifts, or abilities, that they can use in His service. You may already know what gifts He has given you, but then again, you may not. If you are aware of the gifts you have received from His hand, devote yourself to exercising those gifts and to developing them to their full potential. If you are unaware of any giftedness, seek counsel from one or more Christian friends whose wisdom you respect. They will help you to discern your gifts and to develop them for God's glory.

As a Christian, you handle troubles differently (1 Peter 4:12–19)

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so

that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And,

*“If it is hard for the righteous to be saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”*

So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

By now we should have dispelled the idea that you may have in common with many new Christians, that your conversion ought to mean the end to all trouble in their lives, that all of their relationships will instantly heal, and that everyone around them will appreciate their transformation. It seldom if ever works out that way. As a Christian, you may not have fewer problems than anyone else, but at least you do have ways to deal with those problems.

You have a Master who has forgiven you of your former sinful life and who continues to forgive you in your ongoing battle with sin. You have God’s word that provides moral guidance and real encouragement. You have brothers and sisters who care about you, many of whom have spiritual wisdom that can help you sort through your choices.

As you can see, your baptism is not the end of your spiritual quest; it is just the beginning. The union with Christ that begins with belief, repentance, declaration, and baptism—the four elements of saving faith—continues throughout the rest of your life, as you submit your will to His. The blessings continue as you continue to trust Him and do what He says.

Can you ever be lost again?

The Bible says that it is possible for you to “fall from grace” (Galatians 5:4), to “fall away” (Hebrews 6:4–6), and to “turn back” (2 Peter 3:20–22), cutting yourself off from Christ and His blessings and losing your eternal salvation. But why would you want to do that? Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). That is what I hope and pray for you: that your new life in Christ will continue to grow and mature right on into eternity.

In 2 Peter 2:5–11, Peter says, “...make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.”

Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

In other words, despite all the teaching and encouragement you receive from your brothers and sisters in Christ and in spite of the work of Christ in your behalf and the ongoing work of the Spirit on your heart, whether you grow to maturity as a Christian is largely dependent on how much effort you put into it.

Peter says “make every effort.” Are you willing to do that? I hope that as you grow in Christ, your experience of all the blessings will convince you it is worth that measure of effort. With Paul, I am confident that “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

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