

Baptism Summary

- † Jesus commanded his disciples to baptize all new disciples [Matthew 28.19]. Therefore, we know that all people should receive water baptism when they come to faith and that this is an important activity for the church to administer [see also Acts 2.38-41; 8.12, 36-39; 9.18; 10.47-48; 16.15, 33; 18.8; 19.5].
- † In the church activities of the New Testament, only people who had come to faith in Christ through the gospel received water baptism [see the same examples as above]. Thus the church should refrain from baptizing children too young to understand and believe the gospel or anyone else who does not believe. Those who have been baptized in some way before believing in the gospel of Christ should receive baptism again as believers after coming to faith [see example in Acts 19.1-5].
- † Water baptism is meant to be by immersion into the water [Matthew 3.16; Acts 8.38-39], but the early church recognized that there were times when this was not practical, and so allowed pouring of water three times over the person [*Didache* 7.3]. It now is common to immerse only once, but an implication of the teaching of an alternative being to pour water three times is that immersion was three-fold as well, and this was standard practice by the second century [Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 21.12-18; note also the plural “baptisms” in Hebrews 6.2].
- † Water baptism involves a confession of faith in the Triune God. The church baptizes new believers in the name of God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit [Matthew 28.19], but this is not merely ceremonial. Rather, the one being baptized confesses faith in each member of the Triune Godhead, in response to questions from the pastor baptizing [evidence of this early church practice comes from Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition* 21.12-18]. The church must give adequate theological instruction to all new believers before baptism, so that they understand to what they are confessing and to what they are committing [see *Didache* 7.1].
- † Water baptism symbolizes our unity with Christ in his death to sin and in his resurrection to new life with God the Father [Romans 6.1-10; Colossians 2.12-14]. In baptism, we are identified with Christ, this being the believer’s public confession of faith in, and dependence on, Christ’s work for him. Thus the church must ensure the new believer fully understands what Christ has accomplished for the believer through his death and resurrection.
- † Water baptism is a commitment to repenting from a life of sin and into a life of following Christ in submission and obedience [Matthew 28.20; *Didache* 7.1 and earlier]. It is easy to see from Scripture that believers are called to make this shift in lifestyle that reflects their shift at salvation from dwelling in darkness to dwelling in light [Romans 6; Ephesians 5.8; Colossians 1.13; 1 Peter 2.9]. While the new believer will not be very mature in walk at the time of baptism, it is important to make a commitment [1 Peter 3.21] to living the sanctified life at this time, before becoming a member of the church [Martyr, *1 Apology* 61].
- † Water baptism symbolizes our unity with each other as the body of Christ [1 Corinthians 12.13; Galatians 3.27; Ephesians 4.5]. In baptism, we are identified with each other as the church; the mystical Spirit baptism that occurs at salvation unites us spiritually, and water baptism, as a symbol of that unity, formally unites us in practice. Thus the church must educate the new believer in what it means to be a part of the body of Christ, and to be a part of this specific local church. The believer should be ready to commit to the church, just as the church commits to the believer.