



First Christian Church

780 Fairground Street • Cookeville, TN 38501 • (931) 526-4241 • www.fcc-cookeville.org

According to our understanding of the New Testament, here are our answers to several important questions regarding baptism.

Who should be baptized?

All those who are willing to repent of their sins and confess their belief in Jesus Christ should be baptized (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38-39).

How should we be baptized?

The word for “baptism” in the New Testament is the Greek word *baptizo*, which means “to dip or to plunge” in water. Baptism by immersion was the undisputed church practice for the first 1,300 years of church history. In fact, no early church leaders argued that point.

The New Testament says baptism represents the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:1-5). Baptism serves as a symbol of the burial of the old self and the resurrection of the believer’s soul to walk in life with Christ. Therefore, at First Christian Church, we baptize people by immersing them in water.

If I was baptized as an infant, should I get baptized again?

First, you should be grateful that you had parents who cared enough about you to set you apart for God. Your infant baptism was certainly a very special moment for your family. Adult baptism is not a sign of disrespect for what your parents did. In fact, it can be seen as a fulfillment of their prayers. At First Christian Church, infant baptism is similar to what we call “Baby Dedication.” Be thankful for the heritage of your concerned parents, but don’t be negligent of your responsibility as an adult to make your personal pledge toward God in baptism.

When should we be baptized?

A person should be baptized at the time he or she trusts in Christ. The Bible teaches we are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), but in the New Testament church, a person’s baptism was always the first expression of faith, not separate from it. So baptism was not just a symbol or a memorial of faith, but was intended to offer a means of union with Christ and a benchmark of transformation, marking the place and time when a person made a commitment to Christ (Rom. 6:1-8). At First Christian Church, we are attempting to restore the original intent and practice of baptism. Therefore, we ask a person to be baptized at the point that he is ready to make a commitment to Christ.

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A person should be baptized to follow the example of Christ (Matt. 3:13-17), to obey Christ's command (Matt. 28:18), to accept forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), to express trust in Christ (Acts 8:12-13), and to testify to God's work in his or her life (Rom. 6:1-8; Gal. 3:27). Baptism also serves to cleanse a guilty conscience (1 Pet. 3:21). The Holy Spirit prompts individuals to recognize their sin and guilt. The only method by which the human soul can be wiped clean of sin is through the blood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:27-10:7). This "washing away" of sin is most clearly symbolized in the act of baptism (Acts 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21).

Since one of the biggest obstacles between God and man is human pride, baptism also offers a venue by which believers humble themselves before God and others and admit their need for Christ's redemption (James 4:6). In addition, baptism meets a God-given human need for expression. Everyone needs an outlet for emotion, or an expression for an impression. Baptism is the outlet for an expression of faith in Christ.

The act of baptism cannot save an individual. The work of salvation is a finished work by Christ on the cross. We are saved only through accepting Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Baptism has no redemptive powers of its own. There is nothing special about the water. Baptism demonstrates the believer's acceptance of Christ and is the point of time when the believer receives assurance of his or her faith.

What if a person is not baptized? Can he or she be saved?

It is clearly established in the Bible that you become a Christian by accepting God's free gift of grace. While baptism is not what saves us, baptism is the occasion associated with receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit and beginning your faith-journey. Furthermore, God's Word commands it. All genuine Christ-followers should want to obey God's Word by doing what it says and by doing what Jesus did.

We do not assume that a person who has not been baptized is categorically a lost soul in need of salvation. We teach that such a person either does not understand the New Testament teaching on baptism, or has chosen to disregard it. Because the New Testament does not address the concept of an unbaptized believer after the resurrection of Christ, we leave the judgment of the state of their salvation to God Who knows the hearts of men and makes the entries in the Book of Life.

This question may be best answered with another question, "Why haven't you been baptized?" There are three possible answers:

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1) *"I never understood baptism."*

Maybe you were never instructed to be baptized. Maybe you've never been challenged to consider the issue. That's entirely possible. If this is the case, we urge you to give thought to what God says about baptism. This doesn't negate your faith up to this point. Part of maturity is an openness to understand new areas of the Christian walk.

2) *"I don't want to be baptized."*

Let's analyze this response for a moment. God humbles Himself by leaving Heaven and being born in a feed-trough. The God of the universe eats human food, feels human feelings, and dies a sinner's death. He is spat upon, beaten and stripped naked, and nailed to a cross. He takes our eternal condemnation on Himself in our place. He then offers salvation as a free gift and asks that we say "Yes" to Him in baptism and someone responds, "I don't want to." Such logic does not add up.

Such resistance doesn't reveal a problem with baptism. It reveals a problem of the heart. True believers not only offer their sins; they yield their wills to Christ. Baptism is the initial test of the believing heart. If one won't obey Christ in baptism, what will they do when he calls them to obey Him in prayer? Or evangelism? Or service?

The highest motive for doing anything is because God asks you to do it. The heart of the saved says, "If you want me to be baptized in a pile of leaves, I'll do it. I may not understand every reason, but neither do I understand how You could save a sinner like me." If one is resistant on the first command, one might wonder if there has been a true conversion experience.

3) There are those who are not baptized for a third reason. They ask, *"What about the ones who die before they have a chance? What if I entrust my soul to Christ and before I can tell anyone or arrange to be baptized, a swarm of killer bees attacks me and I die?"*

The answer to this question is found in the character of God. Would a God of love reject an honest heart? No way. Would a God of mercy and kindness condemn any seeking soul? Absolutely not. Having called you and died for you, would He cast you away because of a curious sequence of events? Inconceivable.

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Should a person ever be rebaptized?

Any person who has trusted in Jesus as the only Son of God and who has willingly been immersed into Christ may become a member of First Christian Church, whether the baptism occurred at First Christian Church or elsewhere. Rebaptism is encouraged only for those who lack confidence in their initial baptism experience because they don't remember it, they were coerced, or their heart was not right with God at the time. Anyone who has fallen into sin after having been baptized should repent and seek forgiveness, but rebaptism is not necessary (Acts 8:13-24).

Does a person have to be baptized during a worship service?

No. Baptisms at other times are acceptable (Acts 8:38; 16:33), but baptisms during worship services are encouraged at First Christian Church because they provide the opportunity to testify to your faith, show humility, and encourage the family.

What if I still believe baptism is just a "technicality"?

If you're holding off being baptized because you feel it is unnecessary, take some time to examine your motives and pray for God to help you grasp His heart on baptism. Ask yourself, "Why is it that I don't want to be baptized? Am I willfully disobeying?" If you're waiting for God to directly prompt you to be baptized, you need not wait any longer. He already makes that challenge to each Christ-follower in His Word.

Paul encourages all believers to unite, for we are all of "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5). Regardless of our particular beliefs regarding the mode of baptism, it is important for all Christians to seek unity as representatives of Christ's body. **We believe the source of unity is the truth of God's Word, and we pray that baptism will be a place of unity, not division, among believers** (John 17:17-21).

Don't allow baptism to be something it is not. Apart from the cross it has no significance. If you are trusting a dunk in the water to save you, you have missed the message of grace. At the same time, don't prevent baptism from being what God intended. This is no optional command. This is no trivial issue. It is a willing plunge into the power and promise of Christ.

*If you have questions regarding baptism and would like to talk to someone,
please feel free to contact the church office either by email,
info@fcc-cookeville.org or by phone (931-526-4241)*

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