



"The Churches of God Outreach Ministries provides leadership, information, and biblical teaching in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:19-20"

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Leadership Guides No. 2

What is Baptism?

Baptism is a joyous occasion for the entire family of God. When a new believer is added to God's family, the angels in heaven rejoice (Luke 15:1-10). There is joy in heaven. It is that "next step" for individuals who respond to God's call and want to become one of His saints. It is necessary and commanded by God for the remission of sins and should be done before the laying on of hands.

The Greek word for baptism is *baptizo*: to immerse, submerge, (be fully wet). Before baptism a person must repent of a sinful way of life and realize the need for the Saviour. A person must also properly "count the cost" because of the lifelong commitment necessary to live Godly in this evil world (Luke 14:25-35).

It may be stated in various ways, but baptism does basically three things in a person's life:

- Baptism is the way we prepare to receive God's Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). It is through the laying on of hands we receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-19). We must have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us to be a child of God (Romans 8:9).
- Baptism is a burial of 'the old man'. By putting to death the old man in a watery grave we emerge a new creature before God (Romans 6:3-6). As we grow spiritually, we still sin, so we must continue to repent (1 John 1:8-10, 2:1-6). Our desire from the time of our baptism to the end of our physical life is summed up in 1 John 1:1-7, especially verse 7 which says, "*But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin*".
- Baptism is the covenant we establish with God the Father through the blood of His Son Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:16-29). We must keep this covenant with God by letting Him write His law in our heart.

Counseling

Counseling is not an exact science! It will vary with the age and understanding of the individual. Each person approaching baptism must be old enough to understand the depth and seriousness of what they are doing. This will vary especially with older teens.

The purpose of counselling is to answer questions and help the person understand the seriousness of baptism and the Christian life. Usually counselling is done shortly before baptism. It is best to counsel someone early enough – well ahead of their baptism - so they have the time to reflect on the discussion and consider if they feel themselves ready for baptism. The primary questions to ask are:

- Why do you want to be baptized?
- Do you understand the importance of repentance and counting the cost?

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- Do you see the need for God's Spirit in your life?
- Are you ready to be baptized?
- Do you realize that it is up to God to grant you repentance, and it is only through a poor and contrite spirit toward Him that He will look to you and hear you? (Isaiah 66:2)

Read scriptures that show the Biblical approach to baptism. Some to consider are: Matthew 3:7-17; Acts 2:38; Romans 6,7,8; Colossians 2:8-15; Hebrews 10.

Baptism Service

Open the service [before entering the water!] with a short prayer thanking God for this person and for His presence during the baptism. A short reading of appropriate texts (eg Romans 6) may be helpful.

It is best to have an extra person to help with the baptism. Go down into the water and, to this effect, ask:

- Have you repented of your sins before your Father in heaven?
- Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour?

If both answers are “yes”, instruct the candidate to hold the nose tightly closed with their right hand and reach across with the left hand and hold tightly to their right forearm. Remind them to keep their mouth closed no matter how cold the water is. (Of course, you will have already discussed these questions before the baptismal service.) Do not delay long in cool water!

Say to them “*I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*”*. Lie the candidate back into the water and make sure they go all the way under all at once [the assistant can check this]. Immediately bring them back up. After they towel dry - and perhaps dress - proceed to the laying on of hands. This should not be long delayed.

[*Some believers may prefer that you use the words ‘I baptize you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins’. This is quite acceptable and is considered by many to be the original]

Laying on of Hands

Hands are laid for the new believer, if repentant, to receive the Holy Spirit. [Olive oil may be used, though our tradition is not to use it.] Several persons may be involved. After hands are placed on the person, ask God in His great mercy to grant His Holy Spirit and to impart appropriate spiritual gifts. Ask Him to help them through the rest of their life to live a life that reflects His presence in them. Thank God for His plan of salvation and for the joy He brings to us all.

NOTES

- If the baptism is to take place at a distance from you, ask the candidate to locate a suitable venue.
- There is no virtue in choosing cold water!
- Ensure he or she knows to bring suitable clothing (not clingy for ladies, bathing hat *etc*; slacks and shirt for men), and knows to bring a towel, and sandals (if in a river, stony *etc*)
- Confirm date, time, location!
- The baptizer should wear slacks and (tee)-shirt - not a bathing costume or shorts
- Encourage the candidate to be baptized before witnesses - *e.g.* brethren, family. But this is their personal decision
- Be sure to find out ahead of time if the candidate has a fear of water. You can usually talk them through this,

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and make appropriate support measures

- You may need to agree on the form of Jesus' name used.
- It is our practice that the one who baptizes should be male, and himself baptized – and not necessarily an elder
- It's a nice gesture to welcome the individual before the congregation at the next assembly, and to mail him or her a card of welcome. Make their baptism memorable!
- Agreeing to baptize someone carries some responsibility. Be sure to follow up with whatever spiritual support may be required – whether attending the local assemblies, or not. It is assumed that the candidate will before baptism have a reasonable knowledge of foundation Bible teachings. Build on this, perhaps referring the individual to *Bible Basics* or other suitable study course, and our published literature.

*[See also the articles: **Coming To Baptism, What Do You Mean - 'Repent'?** and **Guidelines for Your Baptism**]*

Published by:
The Churches of God Outreach Ministries
PO Box 54621
Tulsa, OK 74155-0621
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www.cgom.org

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