
Chapter 9

Instruction about Baptisms

Hebrews 6:2 speaks of “the doctrine of baptisms” in the plural. The Greek term can refer to washings, and Hebrews elsewhere uses related language for ceremonial washings under the old covenant (Hebrews 9:10). Faithful interpreters therefore differ over whether Hebrews 6:2 points primarily to Jewish washings, Christian baptisms, or broad instruction that prepared converts to distinguish them. We should acknowledge that question and teach baptism from passages where its meaning is clear.

Water Baptism

Jesus commanded disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20). In Acts, people who received the Gospel were baptized as a public identification with Jesus and His people (Acts 2:38-41; 8:12; 10:47-48). Baptism pictures union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection and marks the beginning of a life under His lordship (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12).

Baptism Begins a Taught Life

In the Great Commission, baptism is joined to teaching believers to obey all that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). Baptism is therefore not a graduation ceremony for people who already know everything. It is an early act of discipleship that publicly identifies a believer with the triune God, the Gospel of Christ, and the community that will help teach and encourage obedience.

This also explains why the church should not baptize carelessly and then neglect the person. The pattern in Acts moves from receiving the word and baptism into continuing in apostolic teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer (Acts 2:41-42). The church does not merely count baptisms; it cares for baptized disciples as they learn to follow Jesus.⁷

The Church of God practices water baptism by immersion for those who repent. The water does not possess saving power. We are justified by grace through faith, while baptism is the commanded response and public confession of a disciple (Ephesians 2:8-9; Acts 8:36-38; Romans 10:9-10). A believer should not dismiss baptism as unimportant merely because it does not earn salvation (Luke 6:46; Matthew 28:19).

The pattern in Acts is simple: people hear the Gospel, believe, and are baptized (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 16:30-33). Baptism should therefore follow a credible profession of faith rather than replace personal faith. Immersion also gives the church a visible picture. Going beneath the water portrays burial with Christ; rising from it portrays participation in His resurrection and the beginning of a new life under His lordship (Romans 6:3-4). The picture does not produce the saving reality, but it declares that reality openly.

The Spirit's Work in Conversion

Every believer is born of the Spirit, indwelt by the Spirit, and incorporated into Christ's body by the Spirit (John 3:5-8; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13). No Christian belongs to Christ without the Holy Spirit. This must remain clear so that later teaching about baptism in the Holy Spirit never divides Christians into saved and unsaved classes.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Jesus promised His disciples power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and that promise was fulfilled at Pentecost (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4). The Church of God teaches baptism with the Holy Spirit as an experience subsequent to a clean heart, with speaking in other tongues as

the Spirit gives utterance as its initial evidence. Acts records believers receiving the Spirit with observable manifestations after conversion or Gospel reception (Acts 8:14-17; 10:44-48; 19:1-7).

Tongues are the initial evidence of Spirit baptism, but tongues are not the baptism itself. The promised gift is the Holy Spirit, not an isolated phenomenon. This distinction keeps believers from chasing a sound while neglecting the Person who fills, empowers, and directs them. We should pray for believers to receive the Spirit's fullness, not coach them to imitate a manifestation (Acts 2:4, 33; 10:44-46).

Why then do Pentecostals speak of initial evidence when no single verse uses that complete phrase? The doctrine is drawn from the pattern in Acts. Tongues are explicitly present at Pentecost, in Cornelius's household, and among the Ephesian believers (Acts 2:4; 10:44-46; 19:6). In Acts 8, an observable event caused Simon to react, though Luke does not name the manifestation (Acts 8:14-19). The case rests on the repeated narrative pattern, not on pretending that every account contains identical details. That makes careful reading important: we should affirm what Acts repeatedly shows without adding what the text does not say.

This experience is given for empowered witness, worship, prayer, and service—not spiritual status (Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 14:2, 14-17). The Spirit distributes gifts according to His own will; no minister owns the power to activate gifts or manufacture manifestations (1 Corinthians 12:11). All public expressions must operate under biblical order and discernment (1 Corinthians 14:26-33, 39-40; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22).

KNOW THE WORDS

WORD	PLAIN MEANING
Water baptism	Immersion in water after repentance and faith, publicly identifying the believer with Christ and His disciples (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38-41; Romans 6:3-4).
In-dwelling	The Holy Spirit’s presence in every person who belongs to Christ (Romans 8:9-11).
Baptism in the Holy Spirit	Pentecostal empowerment for witness and service, distinct from but dependent upon salvation in Christ (Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4).
Initial evidence	Speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance is the initial outward evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 10:44-46; 19:6).

THINK IT THROUGH

Q Does Water Baptism Save?

The New Testament closely joins faith, repentance, and baptism because converts were expected to obey Christ openly (Acts 2:38-41). Yet salvation rests on Christ and is received by grace through faith, not on the physical action of water (Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Peter 3:21). Baptism is not optional obedience, but neither is it a human work that earns justification.

This question matters because two verses seem, at first reading, to say that the water itself saves. A new believer should not skip past them. Both should be read carefully and in context.

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Peter joins repentance and baptism because the first Christians were baptized as their first public act of faith, not long afterward. Luke’s wider account shows where forgiveness itself is received. In Peter’s next sermon he says, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out,” without mentioning baptism (Acts 3:19). In Cornelius’s house, Peter announced that “whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins,” and those listeners received the Holy Spirit before

they were baptized in water (Acts 10:43-48). God had already accepted them by faith, so baptism followed as the church's obedient response (Acts 11:17; 15:8-9).

Peter also writes that baptism "now saves us," but he immediately explains what he means: "not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God," and its power comes "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). Peter rules out the idea that water accomplishes anything by touching the body. Baptism expresses a conscience that has turned to God, and the saving power belongs to the risen Christ, not to the water. Peter's comparison makes the same point: Noah's family was brought safely through the flood because they were inside the ark God provided (1 Peter 3:20).

Read together, these passages teach the truth found throughout the New Testament. Forgiveness is received by grace through faith in Christ (Romans 3:24-26; Ephesians 2:8-9). Baptism is the commanded, public confession of that faith, and the church should practice it promptly and joyfully (Acts 8:36-38). We should not tell a believer that baptism is unimportant, and we should not tell anyone that water saves apart from Christ.

Q If Baptism Does Not Save, Why Is It Urgent?

Because the authority of Jesus makes obedience important even when obedience is not the basis of justification. The first Christians did not separate trusting Christ from publicly identifying with Him (Acts 2:38-41; 8:36-38). Deliberate refusal raises a heart question: why call Jesus Lord while rejecting a clear command? A delayed baptism does not prove a person is unsaved, but a teachable believer should seek to obey as soon as reasonably possible (Luke 6:46; John 14:15).

WATCH FOR COUNTERFEITS

New believers should avoid two opposite errors. The first is neglect: treating water baptism as unimportant, ignoring the Holy Spirit's power, or acting as though spiritual gifts no longer matter. Jesus commands baptism, and the New Testament teaches believers to welcome the Spirit's work while testing everything by Scripture (Matthew 28:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22).

The second error is manipulation. No one should be pressured to copy another person's experience, repeat sounds to imitate tongues, or accept a leader's touch as necessary for receiving from God. A dramatic reaction is not proof of spiritual maturity, and a quiet response is not

proof that God is absent. The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ, distributes gifts according to His own will, and produces holy fruit (John 16:13-14; 1 Corinthians 12:11; Galatians 5:22-23). Seek all that God promises, but do not pretend, perform, or surrender biblical discernment to please people.

DECLARATION OF FAITH CONNECTION

This chapter supports these Church of God convictions:

- Water baptism by immersion is commanded for all who repent (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38).
- Baptism with the Holy Spirit is subsequent to a clean heart (Acts 1:4-8; 8:14-17).
- Speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance is the initial evidence of Spirit baptism (Acts 2:4; 10:44-46).

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

If you have trusted Christ but have not been baptized in water, speak with your pastor about obeying Jesus publicly (Matthew 28:19). Ask the Father for the Holy Spirit's fullness and power while submitting the experience to Scripture and His will (Luke 11:13; Acts 1:8).

TALK IT THROUGH

1. Why is the plural “baptisms” in Hebrews 6:2 interpreted in more than one way?
2. What does water baptism declare?
3. Why does baptism not earn salvation?
4. What belongs to every believer through the Spirit?
5. What is the purpose of baptism in the Holy Spirit?

FIVE DAYS IN THE BIBLE

Day 1: Baptized Disciples — Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 2:36-42

Write the command, response, and continuing practices.

Day 2: Buried and Raised — Romans 6:1-14

Explain what baptism portrays and how believers should live.

Day 3: Power to Witness — Acts 1:1-8; 2:1-21

Notice the promise, fulfillment, and mission.

Day 4: The Spirit Given — Acts 8:4-25; 10:34-48

Compare the two accounts without forcing every detail to be identical.

Day 5: Gifts and Order — 1 Corinthians 12:1-13; 14:26-40

List what the Spirit decides and what the church must regulate.