

thinking about baptism?

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Title	Page
Introduction	1
1 · Who is Baptism for?	2-5
2 · What is Baptism all about?	6-11
3 · Baptism and Belonging	12-17
4 · What's next?	18-21
My baptism notes	22-25
Bonus Section - Some questions people ask	26-30

This little book should help you understand:

- who baptism is for
- what baptism is all about
- whether or not it's something that you should do

The book is in four main sections. Each of the first three sections has a passage from the Bible which talks about baptism. Alongside it are some questions about that passage, and some other verses from the Bible to help you understand what's going on. Section four gives space to plan the more practical details of your baptism.

As we will discover, baptism is something that takes place in Christian communities. You will be part of a local church, and part of a family. As such, you will need to work through this book alongside a church leader. It could be read with them, and worked through together or you could read each section on your own and then meet up with a church leader to discuss it.

If you are a young person considering baptism, it is important that your parents are involved in thinking it through. This might not be easy but your church leader will know how to do this in the best way.

As you go through the book, don't worry if you are not sure about all the answers. The idea is to help you be confident of your faith in Jesus Christ and understand why you need to be baptised. Sometimes there will be things that you just don't know. That's fine. Most people have questions about baptism. That's why your church leader is there to help you, and why, at the end of the book, there is a bonus section entitled "Some questions people ask".

who is baptism for?

In today's world, it might seem a bit odd to push someone under water and bring them back up again. However, baptism by full immersion (that means going all the way under the water and back out again) has been practised by Christians for a very long time. In fact, Christians have been baptising people in this way since Christianity began. So, it's normal Christian practice. That's important to know. Being baptised is the normal thing to do when you become a Christian. So, the first thing to work out is: are you a Christian?

A bit of background...

We are going to look at a Bible passage from the book of Acts. At this point in the story, Jesus had already died on the cross. He died as a perfect sacrifice, to pay the price for the sins of his people. Though Jesus had lived a perfect life, he willingly took all our sins into himself, and suffered the anger of God against our sins, in our place. When we believe in Jesus, we are fully forgiven and declared right with God. After the cross, Jesus was buried in a tomb, but because God was pleased with his sacrifice, Jesus rose from death three days later, and went back to heaven to reign as King alongside God the Father.

We join the story just as Jesus had sent his Holy Spirit to fill the disciples, enabling them to carry on his mission of telling people how they too can get right with God. One of the disciples, called Peter, is giving the first ever Christian sermon, and we are coming in at his conclusion.

Read the passage below and try to answer the questions.

Acts 2:36-41

³⁶ “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” ³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call.” ⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Questions

What is it that they hear that 'cuts to the heart'? (v36)

What are the two things Peter tells them they must do? (v37-38)

What does it mean to repent? What do you need to repent of?

What does Peter say is promised to those who respond to the gospel in this way? (v38)

Who gets baptised in this passage? (v41)

When did you hear about what God did through Jesus? How have you responded to that gospel message so far?

Are there any questions you have?

Key things to know

Baptism is for people who have accepted the good news of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and repented of their sin. It's not for perfect people, it's for forgiven people - who now want to live lives that please God, instead of pleasing themselves.

Some people think that they need to achieve a certain level of godliness before they get baptised. But the people in the Bible passage were baptised on the same day that they heard and believed the gospel. So what about us? It might not be possible for us to be baptised on the same day that we start trusting in Jesus. Indeed, it might be wise to wait a short time as following Jesus isn't easy, and we must be certain that we are willing to give our lives over to him. But, consistently in the New Testament, there isn't a large time gap between becoming a Christian and being baptised, as if a believer needed to prove themselves first. All they needed was to accept the gospel message, repent of their sin, and then obey the instruction to be baptised.

Added Extra:

Why not read [Acts 8:26-40](#), which is a story of a man who realised his first step as a Christian must be baptism.

Bonus questions in the back

When does the Holy Spirit enter my life?

I was baptised as a baby, won't that do?

Why do I need to go all the way under the water, can't I just be sprinkled?

what is baptism all about?

In the previous section we learned that baptism is for people who have just become Christians, but what is baptism all about? Why do we need to be baptised in this way? What has water got anything to do with faith in Jesus?

The answer is that baptism is a sign, a visual picture that points to something that has already taken place in your heart. It tells the people watching what Jesus has done for you and in you. Baptism by full immersion is a picture of three things - a bath and then a burial and a birth.

Baptism as a Bath

It's a bit like a bath. I don't know when you last had a bath, but whenever it was, the reason you did was to get rid of all the dirt that had stuck to your body. You go into the water dirty, and come out clean.

Becoming a Christian is a bit like that. The Bible says that we are unclean, that our sin has made us spiritually dirty before God. Therefore, we are unfit to be in his presence because God is spotlessly pure and holy. The good news is that through Jesus' death on the cross, we can be washed spiritually clean. Then we can approach God, confident that he will accept us, and ready to serve him ([Hebrews 9:13-14](#)). In [Acts 22:16](#), a man called Ananias says to the apostle Paul, just after he has come to believe in Jesus:

“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”

Baptism is a picture of the spiritual bath that Christians have received through faith in Christ. It is a sign that you have had your sin washed away by Jesus.

Baptism as a Burial and a Birth

When you get baptised, there is a sense in which you go to your own funeral. The act of going under the water is a sign which points to a greater reality; in this case, that your old life is dead and buried. At the same time, your baptism is like going to the maternity ward at the hospital when you are born. As you come out of the water, it is as if you are born again, into new life in Christ. In baptism we see, played out in front of us, the old life being buried and the new life being born. The key passage which talks about this is [Romans 6:1-14](#). These verses come in the middle of a long discussion that the apostle Paul is having about how people are saved. One of Paul's favourite ways of talking about what happens when someone becomes a Christian is that they are 'united with Christ'.

Read this passage below and try to answer the questions.

Romans 6:1-14

¹What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? ⁴We 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.

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

¹¹In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Questions

How is being united with Christ a 'death and resurrection'? (v1-4)

What was your 'old self' like? How is it dead and buried? (v5-6)

What does your birth into 'new life' mean for you now? (v7-13)

What does it mean when it says that 'sin shall no longer be your master' (v14)?

How do you think you have changed since Jesus saved you? How do you think you still need to change?

How is baptism by immersion a picture of what has happened spiritually in the life of a Christian?

Are there any questions you have?

Key things to know

Baptism doesn't make you a Christian. It is a sign of what has already happened in your life as a Christian. Through your faith in Jesus you are spiritually united to him. As a result, these things are already true...

1. Jesus' death has washed your sins away so that you stand clean before him. He has given you a spiritual bath and you now have a relationship with the holy God.
2. You have been united with Jesus in his death, burial and resurrection. As you go under the water, you are saying that your old life is dead and buried because Jesus died and was buried. As you come up out of the water, you are saying that you have been born again into new life with Christ because he rose from the dead to new life.

Added Extra:

Why not try and memorise the verse below?

Romans 6:4

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.

Bonus questions in the back

Why was Jesus baptised if he didn't sin?

I don't feel good enough to be baptised...

What if I am baptised and then mess it up afterwards?

What if some people mock me or mistreat me for being baptised?

baptism and belonging

Hopefully you now understand who should be baptised and the inner reality to which baptism points. We learned that baptism is a sign of those things. But baptism is also a seal. When you welcome Jesus to be your Saviour, the Holy Spirit seals into your heart the truth that you belong to God as his special child. Baptism physically affirms what the Holy Spirit has already done in your heart.

But there is one truth that baptism assures us of that we have not yet discussed. And that is the knowledge that we now belong to God's people as well as to God.

In the Old Testament days, if you wanted to become one of God's people (a Jew), but were a foreigner (a Gentile), you needed to be baptised. It was a way of saying publicly "I have left my people and joined God's people". In the

New Testament, and today, being baptised doesn't mean you become a Jew or that you abandon your ethnic or cultural background, but it does mark the truth that you have left 'the world', to which you belonged, and have joined God's people - now called 'the church'.

A bit of background...

The next passage we will look at is a well-known bit of the Bible which is often called "The Great Commission". Here we have some of Jesus' last instructions to his disciples (those who are going to start the church) before he returns to heaven. These instructions are not just for them, but are for all the disciples who would follow - including you. Jesus is commanding his disciples to be involved in his great global mission work.

Read this passage and have a go at answering the questions:

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Questions

What confidence does **v18** give us?

What are the four commands that Jesus gives us? (**v19-20**)

In **v19**, 'make disciples' is the primary command in the sentence.

What do you think a disciple is? How are they 'made'?

Why is it important that disciples from all nations are baptised into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit? (**v19**)

After becoming a disciple of Christ and being baptised, what does Jesus say being his disciple is all about? (**v20**)

What confidence does the end of **v20** give us?

Are there any questions you have?

A bit of background...

The passage below is a part of Paul's letter to the church in a place called Ephesus. The church in Ephesus was full of people from all sorts of different backgrounds who had one thing in common - they were united with Christ. Here, Paul describes God's people by using another picture, that of a body. This means that Christians are connected together under Christ, who is the head, meaning he is in charge.

Read this passage and have a go at answering the questions:

Ephesians 4:1-6

¹As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Questions

What does Paul urge God's people to do and how are they to do it? (**v1-3**)

How is it that we are united with each other? (**v3-6**)

Why do you think baptism is mentioned here? (See **Matthew 28:19**)

How then does God use baptism to help you to know where you belong?

Are there any questions you have?

Key things to know

When you are saved by Jesus, you become part of God's worldwide, throughout history, heavenly family - the church. When you get baptised, you declare publicly "I belong to God's family, the church. I am committed to them." And through the Holy Spirit, you gain a seal upon your heart that this is really true.

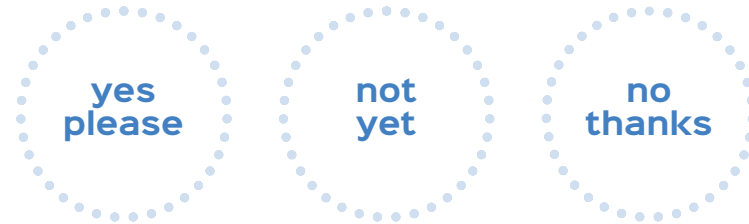
However, though baptism means belonging to a global people, it is always experienced locally. You will need to join a local church family in order to grow up as a child of God, to be taught how to do what Jesus says in the Bible and to be encouraged to keep going in your new life with Jesus. It's also important that you find a place to serve Jesus, and a church local to where you live is the best place to do that.

Decision Time!

We have gone through all the basics, you have all the key information, now's the time to make a choice.

Are you going to get baptised?

Make a decision and circle one of the options below



Whatever decision you have made, you need to talk it through with your church leader. They will then help you to think through the next steps you need to take.

Bonus questions in the back

Do I need to be baptised to take part in communion?

Do I have to be baptised in front of the church?

My parents don't want me to be baptised, what should I do?

Is there a good reason to not be baptised?

what's next?

This section is going to assume that you said 'yes' at the end of the previous section. But even if you said 'not yet' or 'no thanks', it is still worth going through this section so you can see how it works (and just in case you change your mind!). If you feel you aren't ready to go ahead, it's good to keep thinking about it - even though baptism doesn't save you, it is a command of Jesus and his people should want to obey him. If you are ready though, the following section should help you to begin organising it.

When, where, who, what?

Each of these things needs to be worked out with a church leader and there are spare pages in the back for you to make notes.

When?

You need to fix a date and a time. If you don't fix a date and time you will probably never get round to it. It is worth choosing a time that most of your family and friends can make, so that as many people as possible have a chance to see and hear what Jesus has done for you. It might be that the church has already got a date in mind, maybe because they are baptising other people then too.

Where?

Somewhere there is lots of water. It can be a river, lake or sea, even a bath or swimming pool, but most churches have somewhere they prefer to do it, and they are well set up so that people can see and hear clearly what is happening without distractions.

Who...

...will baptise me?

Your church leader will tell you who will baptise you. It will normally be one or two of the church leaders. It's a good idea to have a Christian friend or family member there to deal with practical issues. They can look after your belongings and hold a towel for you to use at the end (especially if you will be waiting to watch others be baptised too).

...will I invite to see it?

The local church you are part of will be greatly encouraged to see your baptism. But remember that it is a witness to others of the good news of Jesus Christ. Baptisms are great opportunities for people to see what Jesus has done for you and what he could do for them too. Do not worry about whether they will come or not, invite them anyway.

What...

...will I wear?

Avoid anything too skimpy, saggy or see-through when it gets wet, otherwise it could get a bit embarrassing. Make sure you bring a towel and change of clothes too. Also, make sure you take off your watch and take your phone out of your pocket!

...will we sing?

If songs are a part of the service, it might be that you can suggest one or two that have been special to you as you have started your new life. Most churches would be happy for you to do this.

...will I say?

When people were baptised by John, they confessed their sins aloud for others to hear (**Mark 1:5**). They did this because they wanted to publicly say that they had got it wrong and needed God to forgive them. It was good for them to do this. In a baptism service, many churches will have a set of questions for you to answer as you are baptised. This is so that you can declare what you believe about the Lord Jesus and the salvation you have received.

Another thing churches often do is allow you to tell something of your story. Christians often call this your 'testimony'. It is a great opportunity. But remember, it isn't actually about you. It's about Jesus. So tell them what you were like before Jesus saved you, how Jesus saved you, and the difference Jesus is making in your life now. Tell them what you would be like without Jesus in your life. And please do not believe the lie that your story is boring, it's not. Jesus isn't boring and he has brought you from darkness to light, from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God, from death to life. That is not boring.

Some people get nervous about standing in front of people and doing this.

That's normal. But if you can do it there, you will probably find it is easier to do it at other times. If you are anxious about it, write it down and read it out. In truth, writing it down is always a good idea so that if you get stuck you can refer to it. It is also worthwhile showing it to your church leader beforehand, to see if it makes sense to them.

We've reached the end of this book.

I hope it has been helpful to you.

**May the Lord bless you in your baptism,
and may he get all the glory.**

Amen



my baptism notes

When?

Where?

Who will do it?

Who will I invite to see it?

What will I wear?

What will we sing?

What will I say?

What I was like before I was saved...

What difference is Jesus making in my life...

How Jesus saved me...

What would I be like without Jesus...



some questions people ask

When does the Holy Spirit enter my life?

John the Baptist said that he baptised with water, but that Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit. This has led some people to believe that the Holy Spirit is received at some point after conversion. They believe that you need to be baptised with water when you are converted, and then at a later date, you need to be baptised in the Spirit. This is not the case.

When John said this he was talking in terms of history. Jesus hadn't yet sent the Holy Spirit at the point in history that he was speaking. Once Jesus had sent the Holy Spirit to his disciples in Acts 2, this prophecy by John was fulfilled. From then on, those who become Christians receive the Holy Spirit at the exact same moment they believe. Indeed, it is the Spirit who enables us to believe in the first place! If you trust in Jesus, he has come to live in your heart by his Spirit.

I was baptised as a baby, won't that do?

Some Christians believe that the Bible teaches us to baptise the children of believing parents. They believe that baptism is a sign of the New Covenant just as circumcision was a sign of the Old Covenant; as such it is to be performed shortly after birth. Although they do not believe that such baptism brings about salvation in the child, they say it is a sign that anticipates the salvation that will come later on, when the child believes in Christ for themselves. Churches that practice infant baptism would baptise a person as an adult who had not yet been baptised, but many would not baptise a person a second time.

The view of this book is that baptism is for people who are able to give a credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus. Baptism is a sign given to indicate new spiritual birth into the Kingdom of God, rather than physical birth into a Christian family or community. Some churches that hold this position would baptise a person a second time, because they believe that infant baptism is invalid.

Given the different views, it is important to talk this through with your church leader who will help you to work out what to do.

Why do I need to go all the way under the water, can't I just be sprinkled?

Some churches today would practice baptism by sprinkling or pouring water over the head of the person. This isn't wrong necessarily. The Bible doesn't describe exactly how the early Christians went about baptism. However, the Greek word for baptise means 'to wash, dip, plunge or submerge', so it seems to be a bit more than sprinkling. It is most likely that the New Testament church baptised believers by immersing them fully under water.

In addition, though the method of sprinkling does convey the sign of washing sin away, full immersion conveys both the sign of washing, and that of death, burial and resurrection. It gives a full sense of the meaning of baptism to those who are baptised and to those who witness it.

However it may be that for health reasons, such as when getting into a pool of water is difficult due to disability, sprinkling could be more appropriate.

Why was Jesus baptised if he didn't sin?

You can read the story in [Matthew 3:13-17](#). Jesus didn't sin, so he didn't need to repent of anything. John seems to realise this and thinks Jesus doesn't need to be baptised either. But Jesus tells him that he needs to go ahead with it in order to "fulfil all righteousness". What does this mean? There are three things it could mean. Firstly, simply that Jesus was doing what is right. We also know this because after he came up out of the water, Father God said he was pleased with him. Secondly, that Jesus was giving us a sign of what he was going to do later, when he died, was buried and rose again. And thirdly, that Jesus was identifying himself with us. He stands in the place of sinners.

I don't feel good enough to be baptised...

You aren't good enough! But as we have seen, baptism isn't for 'good enough' people, it's for repentant people. It's for people who have accepted the gospel message, have been forgiven of all their sin and are repentant. Repentant people aren't perfect, but they are sorry for their sin and want to change. If you wait until you feel good enough, you might be waiting a long time.

What if I am baptised and then mess it up afterwards?

You will mess it up afterwards! In the same way that you don't have to be perfect to get baptised, baptism doesn't make you perfect either. Sometimes people put off being baptised because they are worried about what people will think of them if they have been baptised and then fall into sin. Baptism in itself doesn't make you more or less likely to mess it up, but it is a public declaration that you are determined to go God's way instead of your own way, and have welcomed God's help to do it. When you do get it wrong later, which you will, it is important that you keep going back to God, confess it to him, repent, and ask for the Holy Spirit's help to change ([1 John 2:1-2](#)).

What if some people mock or mistreat me for being baptised?

It might happen, but that isn't a good reason to not get baptised. Jesus warns us that people will hate us in the same way that they hate him. If you are living boldly for him, and are telling people about him, then some sort of negative reaction is going to come your way. It's not nice, but Jesus promises that it will be ok. He gave his word that he will be with you, and will give you the strength, by

his Holy Spirit, to keep going. If you keep your eyes fixed on him, he will see you through.

Do I need to be baptised to take part in communion?

Communion is like baptism in that it is something that God tells us to do; is a sign of something that has already happened; and, by the Holy Spirit, is a seal upon our hearts. We are told that when we gather together, we are to eat bread and drink wine to remember the sacrifice of Jesus ([1 Corinthians 11:17-34](#)). Jesus started this with his disciples on the night before he was crucified. He said that the bread and the wine symbolise his body and blood. As we eat and drink them, we remember Jesus' death on the cross, and what it has achieved. And by the Holy Spirit, it is made real to our hearts, assuring us of our salvation. Like baptism, communion is also about belonging to the family of Christ - the church. If you like, where baptism (which we only do once) marks our beginning in God's family, communion (which we do a lot) marks our continuing in God's family. The normal pattern is that people are baptised first and then start taking communion after that. If you've taken communion before you've been baptised then you haven't sinned, but you should get baptised.

Do I have to be baptised in front of the church?

Again, it's not specifically commanded in the Bible, but baptism is a public event, and it makes sense for it to happen in front of the church. The church wants to see it. It acts as a sign to them of the gospel, and it will greatly encourage them when they see what God has done to rescue you.

My parents don't want me to be baptised, what should I do?

This requires wisdom. We want to be obedient to God's word and get baptised. But we also want to obey our parents, which is another command in God's word. If this is your situation, be careful to explain to them why you want to be baptised, and what it is about. You could ask your church leader to meet with them too. And then wait and pray for them. It may be that they will change their minds in time, so you can keep both commands. And if they don't, wait until you are old enough to make this decision without their permission, explain again carefully why it is important to you, and then go ahead with your baptism.

Is there a good reason to not be baptised?

Yes, baptism is serious, and there are reasons someone should not be baptised. First, that the person does not believe in Jesus. It is unhelpful to baptise someone who is not a Christian, as it gives false assurance of salvation.

Second, you don't feel that you understand what baptism is about. This isn't a reason to never be baptised, and it shouldn't become an excuse, but it is important to understand what the Bible teaches. Hopefully this book has helped with that, but if you still have questions keep speaking to your church leader. Third, sometimes people want to get baptised simply to please their parents, church leaders or friends. Certainly, it will please others, but it must not be the motivation. The motivation must be faith in the Lord Jesus, expressed in obedience to his command.

Finally, though there are good reasons to not be baptised yet, we must be careful not to put baptism off for bad reasons. We are very good at making excuses for ourselves, putting off things that we know are right out of fear, or laziness, or plain disobedience. Remember, the command to be baptised comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. From Jesus, the King of the whole universe and the most loving person who ever lived. He says to his disciples that baptism is what we should do. So, in the end, there is every reason to do as he commands.

At what age should a young person be baptised?

The Bible does not put an age on when someone can be baptised, so we need to use wisdom. If the child can give a credible profession of faith and the church leaders are confident it is their own faith and not merely that of their parents or friends, then they can be baptised. It is important to affirm children in their faith and not cause them to doubt Jesus. But at the same time, we need to wisely guide them, and it may be appropriate to suggest that they wait until they are a little older. Perhaps a good way to tell if their faith is genuinely their own, is to ask if there is evidence that their faith has been tested in some way. For example, have they had to speak up for Jesus to their friends? Or have they kept trusting Jesus through a hard time in their lives? These questions are good questions to ask adults too, and they can help to discern what is right in each case.

This practical little book unpacks what baptism is all about - with Bible passages, clear explanations, and questions to think through.

Christians who are considering being baptised will find this step-by step approach helpful as they decide what they should do.


BeaconLight
biblical truth to share



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