

# WHAT ABOUT BELIEVER'S BAPTISM?

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*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”  
Matthew 28:19*

What are some reasons why people are baptized? Some see it as spiritual fire insurance to guarantee salvation. Others seek it because it is a family tradition or to satisfy a parent or loved one. Still others seek it because Jesus was baptized. However, none of these reasons are justifiable in Scripture. What are the proper biblical motives for baptism?

## *Why be baptized?*

The primary reason for baptism is that Christ commanded it. Jesus said, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”* (Matthew 28:19-20). This is Christ’s great commission to all believers before returning to heaven. A disciple is someone who believes or follows another. Christ commanded His disciples to make other disciples by their witness of the Gospel. Then they were to baptize them as a symbol of their new faith. Baptism was the very first thing every new believer was to do.

Every person who came to repentance in the New Testament was baptized. Peter said, *“...Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for [lit. “because of”] the forgiveness of your sins...”* (Acts 2:38). Because their sins were forgiven when they repented and believed, they were to be baptized to show outwardly what had already happened in their hearts. *“But when they believed... they were baptized...”* (Acts 8:12). Sincere faith always preceded baptism. Therefore, baptism does not save you, but is an act of obedience and a visible testimony of faith to others.

## *Who is to be baptized?*

All who were baptized in the New Testament were old enough to understand clearly and believe. They knew what they were doing. Hence it is called believer’s baptism. However, some today practice infant baptism even though there are no verses that mention infants being baptized because small children cannot understand.

Some fear that if an infant dies, he or she would not go to heaven because they were not old enough

to exercise true faith or be baptized. However, David’s infant son died and it indicates David would see him in heaven one day (2 Samuel 12: 21-23).

Acts 16:30-34 is sometimes used to point out the Philippian jailer’s “household” was baptized after hearing the Gospel. It is argued that infants could have been baptized there since the term “household” can include infants. But it does not demand it. Verse 34 clearly indicates the jailer *“rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.”* Therefore, all baptized had to be old enough to “believe.”

It is true some believers today equate baptism with circumcision in the Old Testament. This is not a valid comparison because it encourages sacramentalism, it doesn’t relate at all in the case of girls, and baptism never replaced circumcision in the early church since the Jews did both.

Note these additional clear examples of those who believed first and were baptized: the Samaritans (Acts 8:12) and Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48).

Should Christians who were baptized after conversion be baptized again if they were confused about why they were baptized the first time? Since baptism pictures salvation it is only necessary once since salvation only happens once. If they thought baptism was saving them at the time, then they should be baptized again for the right reasons. If they were not sure if they were actually born again at the time, then they should seek to understand when they came to clear faith and be sure baptism happened subsequent to that.

## *What is the meaning of baptism?*

Believer’s baptism is not the same as John the Baptist’s or Christ’s baptism. John’s baptism was one of repentance in anticipation of the coming Messiah and kingdom (Matthew 3:1-3). It was for Gentiles and Jews who were identifying with the God of Israel in the Old Testament. This was called proselyte baptism. Christ’s baptism was unique since He was sinless and didn’t need to repent. He was fulfilling all righteousness in his identification

with mankind (Matthew 3:15). His baptism would also picture His death, burial, and resurrection in this act of obedience to the Father who dramatically confirmed it (3:16-17).

Believer's baptism does not cause salvation but follows it. When someone genuinely repents and exercises saving faith in Christ alone, they are truly saved or born again (John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9-13). They are regenerated by the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart.

Believer's baptism is an outward expression of that faith. It is a powerful symbol of what Christ did on the cross. Baptism pictures Christ spiritually washing their sins away by His sacrificial death on the cross. "...*Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name*" (Acts 22:16).

Baptism also pictures the believer's identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for our sin. "*Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life*" (Romans 6:4). "...*Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead*" (Colossians 2:12).

It is said that baptism is to salvation what a wedding ring is to marriage. It does not make one married but is a symbol of committed love. How true!

One should not wait to be baptized until they can live a faultless life. That makes baptism a Christian graduation, rather than identification. New Testament baptisms were all done with little waiting. Some were baptized only an hour after coming to genuine salvation (cf. Acts 16:33).

Since the new believer is identifying with Christ and other believers, it is also logical to formally identify with the body of Christ, the church, in membership. Acts 2:41 tells of the first 3,000 baptisms in the church. This suggests records were kept as a way of tracking those who were "*added to the church.*" Those being baptized are encouraged to take this step of commitment to Christ's body, the church.

A Discovery Class is held periodically at DBC to explain the history, teaching, rights, privileges, and responsibilities of members.

### ***What is the mode of baptism?***

Different forms or modes of baptism have come to be used through the centuries (i.e. sprinkling, pouring, and immersion). Complete immersion is the most accurate picture of what New Testament baptism was. Why?

First, the primary meaning of "baptize" in Greek is to "immerse." The word is also used in Greek literature to refer to ships sinking. "Sprinkling" or "pouring" are only secondary meanings. When the first English bibles were translated, translators were divided over modes of baptism due to different traditions. Rather than translate the primary meaning, they transliterated the Greek sounds of the word (*baptizo*). In this way, they let the reader make up their minds for themselves.

Secondly, the Greek prepositions "into" and "out of" (the water) indicate immersion (i.e. Christ [Mt.3:6, 16] and the eunuch [Acts 8:38, 39]). Was there enough water for immersion? The Jordan River was ample in itself. Archeologists have recently uncovered many Jewish *mikvahs* (large baptisteries) on the south side of the temple mount in Jerusalem. Here large numbers of Jewish worshippers could immerse themselves in ritual purification before entering the temple. Therefore, there was ample water to drink, bathe in, and for the new Christians in the early church, to be immersed in.

It is also interesting that proselyte baptism was total immersion (though self-performed). Gentiles who came to believe and wanted to become spiritual Jews were baptized in this way according to history.

Immersion also best pictures an identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection as the person goes down into the water and comes back up (Romans 6:1-5; Colossians 2:12). The believer is picturing what they have come to believe in and that one day they will also be resurrected.

Church history tells us that sprinkling or pouring came sometime after the first century church in Acts. The Greek language has words for *pour* and *sprinkle*, but these were never used of baptism. Cyprian (200-257 AD) was evidently the first to approve of sprinkling, though it was not generally practiced until the 12th century (cf. *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* by Ryrle).

### ***How do I go about getting baptized?***

If you have clearly trusted Christ, please ask a pastor about baptism. They will provide you with a simple baptismal application form to complete and will then meet with you in person to hear your salvation testimony, answer questions, and discuss the logistics of the actual baptism.

Because baptism is something Christ commanded the church to do, it is usually done in a special church service so the church can witness it. Baptisms in pools, streams, or lakes are all equal as long as there is immersion. We use a safe and heated portable tank. It is a very special day that should be viewed as more important than your birthday, wedding, or graduation because it is a symbol of receiving Christ's eternal forgiveness and salvation. It is a day that outwardly sets you apart as Christ's. For this reason, it is a day of great celebration for the person being baptized and for those who witness it.

A testimony of how you were saved and why you want to be baptized is important. Invite friends or loved ones to be present.



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REV 2021.06.12