

Baptism

Today we'll be baptizing three people. I thought it would be beneficial for us to consider the meaning and purpose of baptism.

Most of us have been baptized, and I assume that most of us know the meaning and purpose of baptism. But it's still good to review the topic occasionally, and when we have baptisms, it presents a good opportunity for us to consider that topic.

Perhaps someone here today is not baptized and does not understand the importance or meaning of baptism. So it's good for us to survey what the Bible says about it.

Unfortunately, different churches have radically different views about baptism. Some say that baptism grants spiritual life. Some say that you cannot be saved unless you are baptized. Some say that baptism is no longer required at all. Some churches, like ours, sees baptism as a very important step of obedience and discipleship. There are many different views on baptism. Some of them have more biblical support than others.

Ours is a Baptist church; the name "Baptist" is significant. How we operate the church has much to do with our understanding of baptism. One of the distinctives of Baptists is our understand and practice of baptism. Every believer should have a good understanding of the meaning and purpose of baptism. Our understanding and practice of baptism must follow the biblical guidelines.

So, to that end, let's consider what the Bible teaches about baptism.

I. The definition of baptism

- A. The word “baptize” (βαπτίζω) means “to dip, dunk, or immerse.” We could translate it as “submerge, soak, drench, plunge.”

The word “baptize” in English is not really translated; it’s just the Greek word being used in English. If we were to translate the word, we would say “dip, dunk, or immerse.” That’s the normal meaning of the term.

- B. This definition comes across quite clearly in Acts 8:36-38.

Acts 8:36-38 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

Note that both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water. Why was that necessary? Because Philip dipped/dunked/immersed the man under the water. If baptism were merely pouring or sprinkling of water, there would have been no need for them to get into the water.

- C. We recognize that sometimes the word “baptize” is used metaphorically; that is, it’s not literally referring to being dunked into something other than water.

1. E.g., the Israelites were “baptized” into Moses (1 Cor 10:2). Jesus refers to his death as a “baptism” (Mt 20:22).
2. The word can refer to being submerged in something or overwhelmed by something. To be closely associated with something is to be baptized into it. That would be a non-literal understanding of the term; sometimes it is used metaphorically.
3. The context of the passage usually tells us whether the author is speaking of a literal baptism in water or another kind of baptism.

- D. In the majority of cases, baptism in the NT refers to dipping, dunking, or immersion in water.

Jesus and the disciples baptized in water—they dipped, dunked, or immersed converts. This is why we baptize like we do. Sprinkling, pouring, etc. do not fulfill the basic meaning of the word. To apply a bit of water to a part of the body does not meet the basic definition of the word.

- E. Definition: Christian baptism is the immersion of a person in water, on his profession of his faith in Christ, by a fellow Christian, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

II. The origins of baptism

- A. The Jewish people practiced a form of baptism for centuries before Jesus' time. Baptism for them was more of a cleansing ritual they would go through before worship.

Hebrews 9:10 ... *foods and drinks, various washings (βαπτισμός), and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.*

Archaeologists have found baptismal pools where Jewish worshippers would dip themselves as a part of a cleansing ritual. That was a traditional practice, not part of the OT law. There is no baptism in the OT law.

- B. John the Baptist, of course, baptized those who accepted his message and repented of their sins. The Jews understood the practice of baptism because they had been doing that as part of their religion for centuries.

- C. Jesus submitted to John's baptism and used the practice for his own purposes. John's baptism signified repentance, while Jesus' baptism signified the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah.

John 3:22 ... *Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized.*

John 4:1 ... *Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John*

So it's obvious that Jesus practiced a form of baptism very similar to what John was doing.

- D. Christian baptism follows the pattern begun by the Jews and used by John the Baptist. The *meaning* of Christian baptism is not the same of Jewish cleansing rituals, and it's not exactly the same as the meaning of John's baptism. But the *method* is much the same—immersion in water.

III. The candidates for baptism

Baptism is only for those who have believed in Jesus to be saved. Only those who have repented of sin and put their trust in Jesus to be saved are proper candidates for baptism. We practice believers' baptism.

Acts 2:41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

Acts 8:12–13 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and ... was baptized ...

Acts 18:8 Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

- A. The NT pattern/order is salvation, baptism, and church membership. First you get saved, then you get baptized, then you join the church.
- B. There is no evidence of anyone getting baptized *in order to be saved*. I.e., "Here's an unsaved person—let's baptize him in the hope that he'll be saved."
- C. We know that many churches baptize babies. There are various reasons why these churches do so, but there is no NT basis for the practice. There is not even one undisputed verse in the whole Bible that suggests baby baptism. So babies are not proper candidates for baptism.

- D. Further, it's wise for a church to instruct the believer regarding the meaning and purpose of baptism before baptism. We would not baptize a person who shows no signs of genuine salvation. We would not baptize anyone who does not understand what baptism means. So it's often good practice to provide instruction for the candidate before baptism. That's what we normally do.

IV. The command of baptism

Christians are obligated to obey Jesus' commands.

John 14:15 *If you love Me, keep My commandments.*

John 14:21 *He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. ...*

- A. Just as God commands all men everywhere to repent and believe in Jesus, so all believers are obligated to confess Christ publicly through baptism. To fail to confess your faith through baptism is to disregard Christ's command that believers must be baptized.

Acts 2:38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

It seems very clear that both Jesus and his disciples expected converts to be baptized after they believed the Gospel. In fact, the NT assumption is that all believers will submit to baptism. Believers in Christ get baptized. If you refuse baptism, it must be because you are not a believer.

- B. In the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20), Jesus orders the church to make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and HSp.

Matthew 28:19–20 *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.*

C. We often describe baptism as the first step of obedience after salvation. In the early church, converts were often baptized very soon after conversion, perhaps even on the same day (e.g., Acts 2:41-47).

D. How you feel about baptism doesn't really matter. Any real Christian wants to follow the Lord in baptism. It may not be required for salvation, but it certainly is required for obedience, church membership, discipleship, and service. You cannot hope to receive all the blessings God promises to you if you are unwilling to obey in this matter.

Quote: "Paul would not understand it if [a believer] refused to be baptized; to him such an attitude would no longer be genuine faith."¹

E. And according to the Great Commission, the church is to continue baptizing converts until the end of the age, i.e., until the return of Christ. Baptism is a continuing obligation until Jesus returns.

V. The mode of baptism

A. By "mode" I mean how to do it—the method. We baptize by immersion, and there are good reasons for that. The biblical pattern requires it.

B. Many churches do *not* baptize by immersion; they sprinkle or pour the water on the head of the candidate. There are certain problems associated with that form of baptism.

1. First, the word "baptize" normally means "to dip, to dunk, to immerse, to submerge, to plunge." Pouring or sprinkling do not fit the definition.

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 80. Quoting Schnackenburg, *Baptism in the Thought of St. Paul*, 127.

2. Second, the practice of the early church was baptism by immersion. E.g., Phillip and the Ethiopian—clearly what happened there was baptism by immersion.
 3. Third, pouring or sprinkling does not capture the symbolism of the act. Baptism symbolizes death, burial, and resurrection. Sprinkling or pouring does not show that meaning.
- C. Some people see the mode/method as unimportant. As long as you apply a bit of water to the convert, it's baptism. We simply don't see it that way. The mode of baptism is important. We frankly do not recognize the baptism of anyone baptized by any other mode. The proper, biblical method of baptism is immersion; if you were not baptized that way, you should be.
- D. Without immersion, there is no biblical baptism. Immersion is the only biblical mode; if we want to follow the biblical pattern, we must insist on immersion.

VI. Meaning of baptism

What does baptism do? What effects does it have? What does it signify?

- A. Baptism pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and the believer's identification with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.

Romans 6:3–5 do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,

Colossians 2:12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

1. Baptism symbolizes death and burial; that's shown in plunging the person under the water.

2. Baptism symbolizes resurrection—coming up out of the water. Sprinkling or pouring simply does not carry the symbolism of the act.
3. Baptism testifies that we understand and affirm the central teaching of the NT—Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. Baptism symbolizes our belief in these great truths.
4. Baptism also pictures the believer’s death to self and rising to walk in newness of life.

Rom 6:4 *buried with Him through baptism into death, ... we also should walk in newness of life.* Cf. Gal 2:20a

- B. Further, baptism is a public profession of one’s faith in Christ. One writer calls baptism “a badge of discipleship.”² We often refer to baptism as “an outward sign of inward grace.” This outward sign of baptism symbolizes spiritual cleansing, regeneration, and rebirth. It does not *supply* salvation, but it *symbolizes* it.

Note: This is one way that we differ with other churches; we do not believe baptism supplies/provides salvation. Faith in Christ supplies salvation; baptism merely pictures that reality.

In the early church, no one took your profession of faith in Christ seriously until you were baptized. Baptism was considered to be the mark of Christianity. Without baptism, you were simply not considered to be a Christian. All Christians were baptized. That’s how we ought to see it.

- C. Baptism is also meaningful in that it is the initiation into the church.
Acts 2:41–42, 47 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers ... 47 And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

² Edward T. Hiscox, *The New Directory for Baptist Churches*. (Judson Press, 1894), 121, 122.

The person being baptized joins the church. We would not baptize anyone who does not plan to join the church. If our church is *not* good enough for you to join, then it's not good enough to baptize you.

- D. Baptism is also important in that baptism should come *before* receiving the Lord's Supper. First, you become a disciple of Jesus by being saved, then you get baptized, then you can participate in the Lord's Supper. If you are not baptized, you have no right to communion. If you refuse to identify with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection through baptism, then you have no business partaking of the Lord's Supper.
- E. Finally, as an act of obedience, baptism should produce joy and peace to the soul of the one being baptized. It should result in a deeper discipleship and a closer walk with God. Whenever we obey God and fulfill his expectations, there follows a sense of peace and joy.

Quote: The ceremony implies a vow of obedience, a public and solemn consecration to the service of God. ... Though it is an outward ceremony, it is important, not only as an act of obedience, but as expressing a believer's separation from the world, and consecration to God, ...³

Trans: It should be obvious that baptism is extremely meaningful and important. We dare not treat it casually or flippantly. We dare not ignore it or deny it. We must understand it and practice it biblically.

VII. The authority for baptism

- A. Who has the authority to conduct baptisms?
 1. Some would say that any believer can baptize any other believer who needs to be baptized. I know of at least one man who was baptized by a fellow believer. Cf. Duck Dynasty guy.
 2. But the proper authority for baptism resides in the local church; baptism is an ordinance of the local church. Properly done, baptism should be done under the authority of a local church.

³ J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology, Second Part: A Treatise on Church Order*, 72.

3. Baptism should be done when the church is gathered. The church authorizes the baptism, and the church should see the baptism happen. Sometimes people want a private baptism. That is not proper, and we would not do that.
- B. Usually, pastors do the baptizing, although anyone the church appoints could do so. However, what is most important is that the one being baptized is a real Christian. The validity of the baptism rests much more on the character and profession of the candidate than on the person doing the baptism.
- C. Still, all things being equal, baptism is best performed by a person authorized by the church in the context of the assembled church.

VIII. Misunderstandings of baptism

Let's finish by looking at several common errors or unbiblical ways of understanding baptism.

- A. It's an error to believe that baptism *produces* faith or conversion. Our Lutheran friends would say that baptism, along with the Word of God, is the means by which a person is brought to faith. Some believe that baptism produces faith or it grants spiritual life. I do not believe that that is true. Baptism is a *result*, not a *cause*. It's a symbol, not a supply. We rely totally on Christ for salvation, not on baptism. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ, not by religious rituals. Baptism is important and necessary, but it cannot save.

Quote: The faith which we profess in baptism is faith in Christ; and the ceremony significantly represents the great work of Christ, on which our faith relies for salvation.⁴

Baptism is an important symbol of salvation, but baptism, in and of itself, cannot save. Christ saves through the Gospel, not through baptism.

⁴ J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology, Second Part: A Treatise on Church Order*, 38.

- B. It's an error to believe that baptism is necessary for salvation.
1. Some people refer to baptism as a "sacrament." That word suggests a channel of saving grace, a ritual that conveys saving grace. You receive salvation through the sacrament. We don't believe that. We generally call baptism an ordinance of the church, not a sacrament.
 2. We do not believe in baptismal regeneration. Baptism is certainly an important thing, but our salvation does not depend on whether or not we've been baptized.
 3. Salvation and baptism are two different things. Baptism is for those who are already saved. The correct order is salvation, then baptism, then church membership.
 4. Conversion and baptism are sometimes very closely associated because the mark/sign of Christianity is water baptism. Baptism symbolizes the saving truth of the Gospel, so we should not wonder that at times baptism is closely associated with salvation. Still, they are two different things.

1 Corinthians 1:17 *For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, ...*

Baptism is obviously something different from and subordinate to the Gospel. The Gospel is not baptism; baptism must not take the place of saving faith.

- C. It's an error to believe that baptism is the continuation of the OT ritual of circumcision. In the OT, male babies went through this ritual, and so in the NT, babies should also go through this ritual.

If there were even a hint in the NT that baptism replaces circumcision, I'd be happy to consider that view. But that view is not taught in the NT; there is no evidence to suggest that baptism is the continuation of circumcision.

Further, baptism amounts to a public profession of faith in Christ. Infants are not capable of making a profession of faith, and are thus not proper candidates for baptism.

- D. It's an error to believe that, since all Christians are baptized by the Spirit at conversion, water baptism is no longer necessary. I.e., Spirit baptism takes the place of water baptism.

Both Jesus and Paul indicate quite clearly that water baptism continues throughout the church age. Believers are baptized by the Spirit into the body, but that does not mean that water baptism is now obsolete. Both Spirit baptism and water baptism are operating in the church age.

You can't excuse neglect of water baptism by appealing to the fact that all believers are baptized by the Spirit. Both are true.

No doubt, there is much more to say about baptism. We could go through all the arguments for our views and against what we see as error. But I think I've outlined the basic biblical teaching on the subject.

Jesus commissioned his followers to go into all the world, preach the Gospel, make disciples, baptize them, and organize them into churches. That's what we are trying to do. We want to follow that NT pattern to the best of our ability. And it's our great privilege to baptize several today.

What about you? If you are not a Christian, you can become one by repentance and faith. Even if you have been baptized, that doesn't mean that you are saved. Faith in Christ saves, not baptism.

If you are already a Christian but not baptized, you should submit to baptism. Christ commanded it, and if you are a follower of Christ, you should be happy to follow his command in this regard.

If you are baptized but not a church member, you should become a member. I'd be happy to talk to anyone interested in joining our church.

We should rejoice in the opportunity to baptize believers, and it's our privilege to do so today.