

WATER BAPTISM

Why Should A Believer Be Baptized?

1. Christ commanded it and made it a part of His great commission (Matt. 28:19)
2. The early church practiced it. In every recorded instance in Acts immediately upon receiving Christ as Savior, the believers were baptized: Acts 2:41; 8:12-13, 38; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5.
3. Paul was baptized: Acts 9:18
He baptized others (1 Cor. 1:15; Acts 16:31-33
In one case he administered rebaptism Acts 19:1-7
4. The New Testament uses baptism for picturing important truth: Romans 6:1-4; 1 Peter 3; Galatians 3:26-27.
5. It is a means of identification with Christ, His message, and other believers.

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WATER BAPTISM

Modes and Subjects

The Issue:

Two major questions accompany a discussion of water baptism among Bible believers. The first has to do with the **mode** of baptism, or how a subject is to be baptized. The second has to do with the **subjects** of baptism, or whom it is who ought to be baptized.

The Options:

As an introduction to the discussion to follow, the reader should understand that among Protestant believers there are three major methods of baptizing individuals, and two major distinctions regarding whom is to be baptized. Those who would baptize infants would also baptize adult converts, but the inverse is not true. Those who believe in believer baptism will not baptize infants. Thus, the discussion will follow the following outline.

Mode:

1. Sprinkling
2. Pouring
3. Immersion

Subjects

1. Infants
2. Believers

The MODE of Baptism

For the sake of discussion, the following “arguments” will portray the reasoning used to support either sprinkling or pouring as nonimmersionist positions, and immersion as the alternate position.

Nonimmersionist Arguments:

1. The Greek work *baptizo*, has a secondary meaning which means to bring under the influence of, and of course pouring or sprinkling better pictures coming under than does immersion.
2. Indeed, if baptism illustrates the Spirit’s coming upon a person, then pouring or sprinkling better picture this.
3. Immersion would have been highly probable, if not impossible, it is argued, in instances like those recorded in Acts 2:41; 8:38; 10:47; and 16:33.
4. In Hebrews 10:9 the word baptism is used to include all sorts of OT rituals, even those which involved sprinkling. Thus, the word does not always mean immerse exclusively.
5. The Greek language has an unmistakably clear word that means dip. Why isn’t that used if that is the correct mode of baptism?

Immersion Arguments

1. Immerse is the primary meaning of the Greek word *baptizo*,
2. The normal understanding of the prepositions “into” and “out of” (the water) would indicate that immersion was practiced.
3. The baptism practiced on a proselyte to Judaism was a total immersion (though self-performed), and this would indicate that Christian baptism followed the same customary mode (though performed by another).
4. Immersion best pictures the significance of baptism which is death to the old life and resurrection to the new life (cf. Romans 6:1-4).
5. Immersion was the universal practice of the early church. Every instance in the NT either demands or permits it.
6. The Greek language has words for pour and sprinkle, but these are never used of baptism.

SUBJECTS of Baptism

Among believers, there exist two camps of thought regarding whom it is appropriate to baptize. The following arguments are set forth by each group.

Arguments for infant Baptism

1. The analogy between circumcision as the initiatory rite of the Old Covenant and baptism as the initiatory rite into the New supports infant baptism.
2. Baptisms of entire households would certainly have included infants, it is argued.
3. The NT seems to make promises to households where there is at least one believing parent (1 Cor. 7:14); therefore, to baptize the infants in such households is quite proper.

Arguments Against Infant Baptism and for (Exclusively) Believer's Baptism

1. Only natural birth was necessary to become a member of Israel; but since the new birth is required to be a member of God's family today, only those who consciously exercise faith should be baptized.
2. Household baptisms in the NT do not specify the presence of infants.
3. There is no decisive evidence for the practice of infant baptism either by the Jews or Christians in apostolic times. If baptism is the sign of association with Christ, then the sign should only be used by those who have so associated. Since the only way to associate with Christ is through personal faith in Him, then baptism can only be properly exercised by those who have believed. It is clear, for instance, that all in the household of the Philippian jailer were of sufficient age to hear and understand the Word of the Lord which Paul preached to them (Acts 16:32). Thus, those who believed and were baptized had reached an age of being able to understand intelligently. This may have included children, but not infants.

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WATER BAPTISM

Is It Necessary for Salvation?

There are many who believe in salvation by works, and not by faith alone in Christ alone. Some of those believe that “The act of water baptism is a condition to be met in order to be saved. It is an act of obedience for those who are lost.”

The Bible Teaches Salvation by *Faith Alone*.

Well over 150 times the Bible makes salvation conditioned solely on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone as personal Savior. Here are just a very few examples of these: John 1:12; 3:15-18, 36; 5:24; 6:35, 47; Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Tim. 1:12. These statements not only teach that water baptism is not “a condition to be met in order to be saved” or “an act of obedience for those who are lost,” but eliminate every other human effort or attempt to merit favor with God.

A basic and well understood rule for interpreting scripture is to seek to explain difficult passages in harmony with clear ones. In other words, if a passage has two or more possible interpretations, and only one of those fits well with other scriptures, the bible student is bound to select the interpretation which is in harmony with the rest of biblical revelation. Thus, though a passage may have two possible interpretations in isolation from other passages, but when placed along side of clear, unambiguous passages, only one interpretation exists.

Those who argue that baptism is a necessary condition for salvation apparently do not agree with this interpretational method, and instead build their view of the condition of salvation on a few difficult “problem passages” and then ignore or twist the clear ones. There are seven passages which are most often cited by those arguing for “baptismal regeneration.” These passages are said to support this view that “the act of water baptism is a condition to be met in order to be saved.”

Within a limited space, the following brief comments are only introductory. The reader is encouraged to examine each passage in the Bible itself in fuller detail. Additionally, our [outlines of the scriptures](#) would be another place to check.

Mark 15:15-16

This passage is not in the oldest Greek manuscripts, and therefore may have been added. Assuming, however, that it is authentically a part of God’s Word, it should be noted that the last phrase of verse 16 states, “he that believeth not shall be damned.” Not being baptized is not what damns someone, but not trusting Christ does.

Acts 2:38

The Greek word for “*for*” found in the phrase translated “be baptized *for* the remission of sins” has two different primary meanings: “purpose” and “result.” As in English, I may say I am going to the store *for* a loaf of bread, expressing purpose. Or, I may say I am going to jail *for* stealing that bread, an expression of result. Similarly, the passage under consideration may also be legitimately translated “be baptized *because of* the remission of sins.” This harmonizes the verse with the many verses which make faith the only condition of salvation.

Acts 22:16

This verse contains two Greek imperatives (commands) translated “arise” and “wash” and two Greek aorist participles translated “baptized” and “calling.” Grammatically, the participles may be understood as expressing action taking place at the same time as the action of the main verb. Therefore, a legitimate rendering of the passage would also be, “arise, having been baptized,” and “wash away your sins, having called on the name of the Lord.” Accepting this rendering removes all conflict and harmonizes this passage with clear ones.

John 3:1,5

Baptism is not mentioned here. The water in verse 5 refers to the water associated with physical birth.

1 Corinthians 12:13

Here we are told that “by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.” The “body” here is not any local church, but The Church, which is Christ’s body (Eph. 1:22-23). There is no reference to water baptism in this passage. Rather, the reference is to the baptism of the Spirit. No man baptizing someone else can be called the Spirit.

1 Peter 3:21

Here Peter tells us that baptism is prefigured by the deliverance of Noah’s family by water (cf. 3:20). Saving by baptism, therefore, is symbolic here, not actual. Peter quickly adds two statements lest he be misunderstood. Salvation in this passage is not based upon water baptism, but upon “the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” It is not based upon “the putting away of the filth of the flesh.”

Romans 6:1-8

The baptism mentioned here is the same as that in 1 Corinthians 12:13. It is not water baptism, but Spirit baptism. Since it is not called water baptism here, the burden of proof lies with those who would try to so identify it.

Salvation is a work of God on behalf of helpless sinners. By grace alone man is saved through faith. Salvation is not of works, including the work of water baptism, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

This view of salvation by faith alone in the person and work of Christ alone is in harmony with the historic orthodox Christian faith. On this doctrine of salvation through faith alone we concur with the great Bible-preaching evangelists of the past and present. Ours is a doctrine drawn from the whole of the scripture, not just a few scattered verses.

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