

BAPTISM

The Importance of Water Baptism

- How does Matthew 28:19 demonstrate the importance of baptism?

The scriptures indicate that this was faithfully observed in the early church:

Acts 2:41

Acts 8:12

Acts 8:35-38

Acts 9:18

Acts 10:47-48

Acts 16:30-34

Acts 18:8

Acts 19:4-5

- The normal biblical practice was for a person who accepted Christ to be baptized right away. What does Luke 23:39-43 tell us about those cases in which baptism is impossible?

The Mode of Baptism

When it comes to the mode of baptism, there is no consensus in the church. Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Methodists primarily use aspersion (sprinkling). Most Mennonites practice affusion (pouring). Eastern Orthodox, Assemblies of God, Baptists, Brethren, Evangelical Free, Bible Churches (IFCA), the Christian Church, the Churches of

Christ, and most independents practice immersion. Some of these churches insist that only one mode is biblical. Others say that it doesn't matter which mode you use. Which mode did the New Testament church use?

Greek Words for Baptism

The Greek words used to describe baptism in the New Testament are derived from the root word *bapto*, which primarily means to dip. Its secondary meaning is to dye. It appears 4 times in the NT: Luke 16:24; John 13:26 (twice); Revelation 19:13.

Bapto appears 18 times in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT). The Hebrew word translated *bapto* in the Septuagint is *tabal*, which means to dip or plunge. Concerning it, the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* states, "The verb conveys the immersion of one item into another." In 14 of its occurrences it is used to describe a literal act of dipping something into a liquid (Exodus 12:22; Leviticus 4:6 & 17; Leviticus 9:9; Leviticus 11:32; Leviticus 14:6, 16, 51; Numbers 19:18; Deuteronomy 33:24; Joshua 3:15; Ruth 2:14; 1 Samuel 14:27; 2 Kings 8:15). In addition to this, it is used metaphorically in 4 passages.

The Greek verb used to describe baptisms in the NT is *baptizo*, which means to dip, immerse, or submerge. In the Septuagint, it was used in 2 Kings 5:14.

In the NT it is used to describe baptisms performed by John the Baptist 26 times in the gospels and 3 times in Acts. It is used to describe baptisms performed by Jesus and His disciples during His earthly ministry 4 times, the Christian ordinance 24 times, baptism with the Spirit 10 times, of a Jewish ceremonial washing once, and metaphorically 4 times.

The Greek noun used to describe baptism in the NT is *baptisma*, which literally means immersion or submersion. It is not used in the Septuagint, but appears 26 times in the NT. It is used to refer to baptisms performed by John the Baptist 13 times and the Christian ordinance 3 times.

Had the writers wanted to indicate that the proper mode of baptism is sprinkling, they could have used *rhantizo*, which is used to refer to sprinkling in Hebrews 9:13, 19, 21; 10:22. If they wanted to indicate that it is pouring they could have used *katacheo* or *epicheo* (Matthew 26:7; Mark 14:3; Luke 10:34). Leviticus 4:6 and 14:16 are two examples of verses that refer to both dipping and sprinkling. In both cases the Septuagint used *bapto* for the dipping and *raino* for the sprinkling.

Baptism's Symbolism

Like the Lord's Supper, baptism symbolically proclaims the gospel. As the person is lowered under the water, it symbolically portrays Christ's death and burial. Then as the person is lifted back up out of the water, it portrays His resurrection. Neither of the other modes do this.

- According to Romans 6:3-4, what happened to us when we accepted Christ?
- Which baptismal modes portray this transformation?

There are also several verses that make more sense if they are talking about immersion:

Matthew 3:6

Mark 1:9 & 10

John 3:23

Church History

History also supports the conclusion that immersion was the original mode of baptism. The reference to water baptism by the early church fathers is in the *Shepherd of Hermas* (100 AD), which refers to immersion. Justin Martyr (115 AD) and *The Letter of Barnabas* (written around 130 AD) also refer to immersion. *The Didache* (150 AD) makes the 1st reference to pouring, but also implies that it was only used when immersion was impossible. (It is significant that by this time baptismal regeneration had also appeared. This naturally led to the need to find a way of baptizing people when immersion was impossible.) Sprinkling didn't appear until much later. The Roman Catholic Church did not officially recognize any mode other than immersion until 1311. The Eastern Orthodox Church, which had split from them in 1054, almost 300 years before that, still practices immersion.

Arguments Against Immersion

- Referring to Acts 2:41, it is argued that there wasn't anywhere in Jerusalem where 3,000 people could have been immersed in one day. What is wrong with this argument?
- Another argument is that Acts 9:18 seems to indicate that Paul was immediately baptized on the spot in Judas' house when he accepted the Lord. What is wrong with this argument?

- A similar argument is used concerning the baptisms in Acts 10:47-48. Does this passage state that they were immediately baptized right there in their home?
- A final objection is based on Acts 16:33. Would the jailer have dared to leave the jail and the prisoners so that he could be immersed?

The Subjects of Baptism

Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Presbyterians all believe in baptizing the infant children of believing parents. On the other hand, The Assemblies of God, Baptists, Brethren, Mennonites, Evangelical Free, Bible Churches (IFCA), the Christian Church, the Churches of Christ, and most independents believe that only those who have repented and placed their faith in Christ should be baptized.

- According to Acts 2:38, what did they have to do before they could be baptized?
- Who did they baptize in Acts 2:41?
- What had the people done in Acts 8:12, just before they were baptized?
- In Acts 10:47-48, Peter ordered that the Gentiles in Cornelius' house be baptized. What evidence did Peter use to justify this? Compare this to Romans 8:9 and Ephesians 1:13. What does this imply about those they baptized that day?
- What happened first in Acts 16:14-15 before Lydia was baptized?
- What does Acts 16:31-34 say that the jailer and his family had done before they were baptized?
- What does Acts 18:8 tell us about those who were baptized in Corinth?

Nowhere, does the Bible explicitly state that infants were baptized.

- Sometimes Matthew 19:13-15 is used to defend infant baptism. Does this passage say anything about baptism? What did Jesus do to the little children?

Support for this is also found in the passages that describe whole households as being baptized. They argue that some of those households probably included infants.

- In Acts 16:14-15, what does it say anything about the ages of those in her household that were baptized?
- Compare this to John 4:53. What possible implications could this verse have for Acts 16:14-15?
- Who was baptized in Acts 16:33? What does v. 34 say about his family?
- What does Acts 18:8 tell us about Crispus' entire household? What possibility does this bring up concerning the household of Lydia, which was baptized?
- What does Paul say about the household of Stephanas in 1 Corinthians 1:16? Compare this to 1 Corinthians 16:15. What does this verse tell us about that household?

The only household in the NT that was baptized in which we don't have a clear statement concerning their all having first accepted Christ is Lydia's (Acts 16:14-15). Since the rest of the scriptures only describe believers as being baptized, we can safely assume that this was what happened here too.

Another argument used to defend infant baptisms is based on the practice of circumcising male babies when they were 8 days old. In the OT, circumcision was the outward physical sign that a person had entered into the covenant community. Colossians 2:11-12 alludes to a relationship between circumcision and baptism. Baptism is to the new covenant what circumcision was to the old. Therefore, baptism should also be administered to the infants of believing parents.

- What is wrong with this argument?

Infant baptism began at the end of the 2nd century as a direct result of the acceptance of baptismal regeneration. If baptism itself saves, even when not accompanied by salvation, it only makes sense to baptize infants in order to make sure that they will go to heaven.

The biblical position is commonly referred to as “believer’s baptism,” not “adult baptism.” Age is not the issue; salvation is. Only those who have accepted Christ can be baptized. A child can legitimately be baptized as soon as he/she can understand the gospel and has accepted Christ.

The Purpose of Baptism

The Lutherans, the Christian Church, and the Churches of Christ all reject the belief that baptism has the power to save, even when not accompanied by faith. However, they believe that faith and baptism are both necessary for salvation. There are several passages that seem to support this.

- According to Mark 16:16, who will be saved? What does it say about those who don’t believe? Does it say anything about those who aren’t baptized?

The normal practice in the early church was for a person to be baptized immediately after he accepted Christ. It was totally unthinkable for a new convert to refuse baptism. Therefore, salvation and baptism were closely connected in their minds. This verse is simply referring to the normal experience of a Christian in the early church. It says nothing about those rare cases in which baptism isn’t possible. In those cases, the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43) sets the precedent. On the other hand, there might be reason to question the genuineness of a person who claims to have accepted Christ but refuses to be baptized.

It should also be noted that none of the earliest Greek manuscripts of Mark contain 16:9-20. It is now almost universally believed that the book of Mark originally ended with 16:8 and the rest was added later.

- What did Peter command the crowd that gathered on the day of Pentecost to do in Acts 2:38? What did he say that this would result in?

Some understand this verse as saying that a person must repent and be baptized before he can be forgiven or receive the Holy Spirit. It is easy to see why.

The Greek word translated “for” in this verse can mean “for the purpose of” or “because of.” In order to determine which is correct we need to compare this verse to others in the NT.

- Compare it to Acts 3:19. According to this verse, what do we have to do in order to have our sins forgiven?

- According to Ephesians 1:13, when do we receive the Holy Spirit?
- Compare this to Acts 10:44-48. When did they receive the Holy Spirit? Was it before or after they were baptized?
- Based on these passages, which meaning of the word translated “for” in Acts 2:38 is correct?
- How could I Peter 3:20-21 be used to prove that baptism is necessary for salvation?

Noah’s ark is often closely associated with salvation in the OT. Since baptism is closely related to salvation in the NT (it always immediately follows it), Peter compares it to the floodwaters. Just as Noah passed through the floodwaters when God saved him, we pass through the baptismal waters when God saves us. There is actually a double figure here. The flood symbolizes baptism, and baptism symbolizes salvation. The flood delivered Noah from a world that was deeply corrupted by sinful humanity. After the flood he entered a new world. In the same way, baptism is a symbol, of our having been united with Christ in His death and resurrection, so that we could be delivered from our old life of sin and live a new life in Him (Romans 6:3-4). It isn’t really the baptism that delivers us. It is Christ’s resurrection (1 Peter 3:21b).

Baptism serves several purposes:

1. It symbolically proclaims the gospel.
2. It symbolically describes the transformation that took place in the believer the moment Christ is accepted.
3. It is an act of obedience to Christ.
4. It is a public confession of the fact that Christ has saved someone and they intend to follow him

Warren Wiersbe writes, “Many people today do not take baptism seriously, but it was a serious matter in the early church. Baptism meant a clean break with the past.”

Taking this public stand for Christ often resulted in the baptized person being disowned by family and friends. Sometimes it cost him his job, and sometimes it even cost him his life.

This was also true at the time of the radical reformation. At that time, in Europe, both Catholics and Protestants practiced infant baptism. Church and state were one. When an infant was baptized it made him both a member of the church and a citizen of the country. Those who began to insist on believer’s baptism were called Anabaptists (re-baptizers) because they said that infant baptisms were unscriptural and that those who accepted Christ needed to be re-baptized biblically. As a result, authorities regarded them as being guilty of treason and heresy. Both

Catholics and Protestants ruthlessly hunted them down, torturing them and putting them to death.

Even today, it is still that way in many cultures. When an Orthodox Jew accepts Christ, the family holds a funeral on the day of baptism. After that, they refuse to acknowledge the person's existence.

In many Muslim countries, if a young man accepts Christ and is baptized, when his family finds out they will disown him and his father will often even try to kill him. He is a marked man. He cannot return home. It becomes very difficult to find work. In many Muslim countries it is a capital offence to convert from Islam to Christianity.

Even in Hindu and Buddhist countries baptism often results in ostracism and persecution.