

What About Baptism?

There are few topics that are as emotionally charged as is baptism. Many people have strong views concerning it, and animosity often develops when their viewpoints are not in agreement. The problem is that most people are led by church tradition and personal feelings rather than the infallible Word of God.

People are confused because they are unable to answer the following questions:

- 1) Is baptism necessary for salvation?
- 2) What is the difference between a REAL and a RITUAL baptism?
- 3) What is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?
- 4) What is the purpose of water baptism?
- 5) Are Church Age believers commanded to be baptized with water?
- 6) Is the proper mode of baptism sprinkling or immersion ?
- 7) Is infant baptism necessary?

1) IS WATER BAPTISM NECESSARY FOR SALVATION?

Acts 16:31 - Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. . .

When a person trusts in Christ's atoning work on the cross for the payment of his sins, he immediately receives the **GIFT** of eternal life. Many verses in the Bible speak of salvation as a gift and how man cannot pay for it with his good deeds: **John 3:14-18, 3:36, 6:28-29, 6:40-47, 11:25, 12:46, Acts 16:31, Rom. 3:20-28, Gal. 2:16, Eph. 2:8-9, Titus 3:5.**

However, some people believe that we must be baptized with water in order to be saved. To substantiate their belief, they refer to this verse:

Mark 16:16 - He who has believed and has been baptized will be saved; but he who has not believed will be condemned.

It should be noted that this verse does not appear in the earlier, more reliable manuscripts of the New Testament. Therefore, it is unwise to build a doctrinal ideology using this portion of scripture. But since some do so, let's look closely at what **Mark 16:16** actually says:

"He who does not believe will be condemned." Notice that it doesn't say, **"he who is not baptized will be condemned."** The reason is because condemnation comes from rejecting Jesus Christ, not from failing to be baptized with water. The apostle John made this point very clear.

John 3:18 - He that believes on Him is not condemned: but he that does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

The Bible gives an example of a man who trusted in Christ's payment for his sins on the cross alone, and nothing else. He was not baptized with water, yet he went straight to Paradise when he died. He was the thief on the cross beside Jesus, **Luke 23:39-43.**

Many people have gone to hell because they relied on their water baptism as part of their salvation. They were either taught or they thought that the gracious gift of God's Son was not sufficient enough to accept without adding this ritual to it. But, God clearly rejects any and all human effort.

Ephesians 2:8-9 - For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourself, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

The following passage sounds like the ritual of water baptism might be necessary for salvation, but it was contextually mistranslated. Therefore, it has caused a great deal of confusion:

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

Peter had just given the gospel to the people, and they asked him what they should do. He told them that the first thing to do was to repent. The Greek word for "**repent**" is METANOEO and it means to change one's mind about something. They had to change their mind, not about sins, but about Jesus Christ, before they could be saved. They were saved immediately when they believed in Him.

Then Peter said that they should be baptized, not "**for the remission of sins**" but, "**because of the remission of sins.**" The Greek word, EIS, in this case should be translated "**because,**" rather than "**for**", just as it was in Matt. 3:11 and 12:41. The moment they repented by believing in Jesus Christ, they received the Holy Spirit. Then they were ready to learn basic doctrines taught by the ritual of water baptism **because** their sins had been forgiven.

And then in **Acts 10: 43-48**, we find that Gentiles heard the gospel, believed it, received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and later, were baptized with water. Notice that they were saved, and they received the Holy Spirit before they were baptized with water.

So is water baptism necessary for salvation? ABSOLUTELY NOT! This is the most important question and answer by far. Salvation is based on faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, and nothing else.

2) **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A REAL AND A RITUAL BAPTISM?**

The word "baptize" is transliterated from the Greek word BAPTIZO (Greek - βαπτίζω). The Greek letters were transferred directly into corresponding English letters rather than translating the word into English.

This is one reason there is so much confusion about baptism. BAPTIZO describes the act of one thing being brought under the transforming influence of another thing so that the first one is changed. A physical illustration of this is the change that takes place when a nail is placed beside a magnet for a couple of days, and it, too, becomes magnetized.

A REAL baptism refers to a real change that takes place when a person is identified with someone or something so that he is literally transformed by that identification.

A RITUAL baptism is a ritual using water. The water symbolizes something that a person is identified with. The ritual may be meaningful and produce an emotional experience in a person, but no real transformation or change takes place.

The same word, BAPTIZO, is used for both real and ritual baptisms. The Bible mentions eight types of baptism; five are real and three are ritual.

REAL BAPTISMS

1. **Baptism of Fire** - Unbelievers at the Second Advent of Christ will literally be identified with fire when their physical bodies are consumed by it and their souls go to a compartment of hell called "Torments," *Matt.3:11, 13:25-30, Luke 3:16*.
2. **Baptism of Moses** - The Israelites were identified with Moses as he followed the cloud and went through the Red Sea. They were changed as people in that they became a nation and were given the Mosaic Law, *1 Cor.10:2*.
3. **Baptism of the Cup** [cross] - Christ was identified with our sins on the cross resulting in His death and resurrection, *Mt.20:22, Luke 12:50*.
4. **Baptism of the Holy Spirit** - At the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit permanently identifies the new believer with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. From that point on, the believer is a "new creature in Christ", united with Him forever, *Rom.6:3-4, 1 Cor.12:13, Gal. 3:27, Col.2:12*.

RITUAL BAPTISMS

1. **Baptism of Jesus** - The water represented the Father's will for Christ to go to the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. Christ voluntarily submitted Himself to the Father's plan, *Matt. 3:13-17*.
2. **Baptism of John** - The water represented the believer's identification with the kingdom of heaven that Christ was prepared to usher in. However, it was postponed because He was rejected by His own people, *Matt.3:1-11, John 1:25-33*.
3. **Baptism of Believers** - The water represented the identification of a believer with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, *Acts 9:18, 10:47-48*.

Some Christians feel compelled to follow Christ in His baptism but are unaware that they cannot do so. Why not? Because, when John the Baptist baptized Jesus, the water symbolized the will of the Father in identifying Christ with the sins of the world. It would be blasphemous for anyone to claim that he could follow Christ in that baptism. Only Christ was sinless, therefore only He was qualified to go to the cross and receive that special baptism, no one else. Many sincere Christians have been misled into thinking that they should follow Christ in His baptism, when in reality, that is impossible.

3) WHAT IS THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND WHAT IS IT NOT?

Believers today have much to say about water baptism but very little to say about the baptism of the Holy Spirit because they know little, if anything, about it.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit:

- Is the work of the Holy Spirit who permanently unites all believers to Jesus Christ.
- Is an irrevocable gift given at the moment of salvation to every believer.
- Is eternal and unchangeable in nature.
- Is why there is no condemnation to those who have accepted Jesus as Savior.
- Is only for Church Age believers.
- Is received in total, not incrementally.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is:

- Not a feeling or an emotional experience.
- Not a second blessing.

- Not related to speaking in tongues.
- Not limited to certain believers.
- Not related to human merit or ability.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit permanently identifies every believer with Jesus Christ the moment they believe in Him. From then on, they are “**in Christ**” and “**a new creature.**”

II Cor. 5:17 - Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things have passed away: behold, the new things have come.

Some of the old things that pass away are spiritual death, condemnation, and the absolute control of the Old Sin Nature over one’s life. Some of the new things that come are eternal life, imputed righteousness, and the indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit accomplishes all these things for every believer. No one can earn or deserve them because they are compliments of the grace of God.

I Cor. 12:13 - For by one Spirit [Holy Spirit] we [believers] were [at the moment of salvation] all baptized [baptism of the H.S.] into one body [the body of Christ – the Church] . . .

4) WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF WATER BAPTISM?

The purpose of water baptism was to teach new believers doctrines related to their salvation during the pre-canon period of the Church Age. The first century church did not have the completed canon of scripture to explain redemption, justification, sanctification, reconciliation, expiation, and propitiation.

Since writing materials were rare and most people were illiterate, they had to rely on the visual teaching aid of ritual baptism in order to learn these doctrines. The ritual was a visual representation of the invisible things that occurred the exact moment they were saved.

The Jews had always used ritual as the means of learning spiritual truth, so it was natural for them to learn from the baptism training aid. That is why the book of Acts, which covers the first century church, makes several references to water baptism. However, the later epistles of the New Testament seldom refer to it. When they do, it is usually with a negative connotation. One example written by the apostle Paul:

I Cor.1:17 - “Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...”

God would never have inspired Paul to write this verse if baptism was necessary for salvation. Discord was rampant among Corinthian believers who were boasting about who baptized them. Even then, the subject caused dissension among believers.

5) ARE CHURCH AGE BELIEVERS COMMANDED TO BE BAPTIZED?

Some Christians call Matt. 28:19, “The Great Commission,” thinking that it is a mandate for believers to be baptized and to baptize others.

Matt. 28:19 - Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

It must be noted that this command was given to Christ’s disciples before there were any New Testament scriptures to read. At that time, water baptism was routinely practiced.

But, this visual aid is no longer necessary today because we have the completed Word of God to take us far beyond this basic teaching method. Pastors can now teach doctrines in such detail that we are able to understand deeper things that we never would have through the observance of rituals.

It is as foolish today for pastors to baptize their flocks as it would be for college professors to set aside their math textbooks and teach advanced calculus using kindergarten building blocks.

Another misunderstood verse that causes some to think water baptism is necessary today:

John 3:5. . .***unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.***

Some are automatically tempted to conclude that “**water**” refers to water baptism. However, it has a double meaning that does not refer to baptism. So what is the water’s double meaning in the phrase “**born of water**” ?

- **THE WORD OF GOD**, and specifically the gospel as found in **Eph. 5:26**, “. . . ***having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.***” One is born of water by hearing the gospel and believing it.
- **WATER BREAKING** as part of the natural process of birth. Jesus used this illustration to explain spiritual birth to Nicodemus. One is born physically by water and then born again spiritually by the Spirit.

If water baptism were commanded, it would be easy to reach the false conclusion that it is necessary for salvation. The danger would lie in thinking that no one could go to heaven without obeying this command and relying on that for eternal life.

Water baptism tends to obscure the principle truth that faith in Christ is **ALL** that is necessary to be saved. Those who insist on being baptized with water ignore this inherent danger. Why insist on observing a ritual that is not necessary and could easily be mistaken as a requirement for salvation? It is similar to taking medicine you don’t really need that might have harmful side effects. Why do it?

Those who have been baptized are not to be judged or criticized, but neither are those who have not been baptized. This leads to the type of bickering and strife the apostle Paul had to deal with in Corinth.

6) IS SPRINKLING OR IMMERSION THE PROPER MODE OF BAPTISM?

Some Christians are ready to go to war and fight to the death to support their position on this issue. Arguments whether to sprinkle or to immerse are continually being made, but why? Baptism does not save you, it doesn’t forgive your sins, it doesn’t make you spiritual, nor does it guarantee that you’ll receive blessings. It did none of these things for first century church believers when it was needed, and it certainly does none of them for us now when it is not needed.

Some think that Ephesians 4:5 specifies the one correct way to administer water baptism.

Eph. 4:5 - ***There is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.***

The “**one baptism**” cannot mean that there is only one mode of baptism because it does not refer to the ritual of water baptism. It refers to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit which we now know occurs at the moment of salvation for every Church Age believer, I Cor. 12:13.

7) IS INFANT BAPTISM NECESSARY?

Knowing that water baptism was only for individuals who accepted Christ as their Savior, it is obvious that infants are too young to make such a decision for Christ. So baptizing them would be meaningless.

God is perfectly fair and does not hold infants accountable for something beyond their understanding. Therefore, He receives them into heaven when they die.

King David recognized this fact when his infant son by Bathsheba died. He said, ***“I shall go to him, but he will not return to me,” II Samuel 12:23.*** David would join his son in heaven someday, but his son would not return to earth to him.

The idea that an infant is eternally saved because he is sprinkled or dipped in water is unscriptural. The Christening of babies seems to be very important to people who have never stopped to ask them-selves, “Is this really necessary?”, or “What does the Word of God have to say about this?”

CONCLUSION:

Let us review a few facts that have been established:

- Water baptism does not save anyone.
- Water baptism is a ritual in which no real change takes place physically or spiritually.
- Water baptism was designed to be a training aid for the first century church until the New Testament was completed.
- Water baptism is not an ordinance that Christians in the post-canon period of the Church Age must observe.
- No one can follow Christ in His baptism because it was unique.
- Infant baptism is not scriptural.

With all of this in mind, why would a Christian emphatically insist that water baptism be practiced? These reasons come to mind:

- 1) A reluctance or fear to let go of long-held, cherished traditions.
- 2) A tendency to depend on emotional experiences rather than Biblical truth.
- 3) A feeling of pressure from family, friends, or pastor. Or it may be a sense of guilt that some acquire who have not been baptized.
- 4) A requirement for church membership and a sense of belonging that it produces.
- 5) A feeling of security from thinking that baptism helps to guarantee salvation.

We must not rely on any physical act such as water baptism to make us feel that our salvation is secure. Our salvation is secure because of what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, and nothing more.

Every time we see ***“baptized”*** or ***“baptism”*** in the Bible, we must not automatically think that they refer to water. Much confusion would be eliminated if people understood that these words often refer to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit rather than to the ritual of water baptism.

Believers should avoid getting caught up in the emotionalism associated with baptism. And, it will go a long way toward eliminating confusion and strife over this controversial issue if we read the scriptures with an open mind and rely on what they say rather than being led by personal feelings and tradition.