

## **BAPTISM ///**

There are two important and distinctive Baptist beliefs concerning baptism. Baptists practice “believer’s baptism”, which means that baptism follows a profession of personal faith. Baptists also practice baptism by “immersion”, which means that the one being baptized is completely immersed in the water.

### **WHAT IS THE MEANING OF BAPTISM? ///**

#### a. Identification with Christ

Baptism centers on the idea of identifying with Christ (Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12). In the book of Acts it is explicitly clear that Christians are baptized (on, in, into) “the name of Jesus”, indicating a transference of ownership.

#### b. Incorporation into His church

Being identified with Christ means being identified with his body- the church. This is described in Acts 2:41, where those who were baptized were added to the church. Throughout church history baptism has been referenced as “the initiatory rite” into the local church.

Baptism is a symbol of Christ’s death and resurrection and the work of the Spirit to unite believers to Christ. When a believer is baptized we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ symbolically.

### **WHY BAPTISM BY IMMERSION? ///**

#### a. The Biblical Language

The Greek word *baptizo* (verb) and *baptisma* (noun) are generally understood as meaning “to plunge, dip, immerse” or literally “surround” something in water. This is the commonly recognized and standard meaning of the term in ancient Greek literature both inside and outside of the Bible. While the case for immersion should not be based on linguistic data alone, “to immerse” is the most straightforward meaning of the Greek verb meaning “to baptize.”

#### b. The New Testament Description

Baptism by immersion seems consistent with biblical passages such as;

- a. Mark 1:5- Where John was baptizing people in the River Jordan.
- b. Mark 1:10- Jesus is described as “coming up out of the water” in his baptism.
- c. John 3:23- Argues that John baptized “where there was much water.”
- d. Acts 8:36-39- When Phillip baptizes the Ethiopian they go “down into” and “come up out of the water.”

#### c. A Powerful Symbol

Immersion symbolically fits with the truth that is being witnessed to (Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12). Baptism by immersion dramatically displays the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ like no other mode of baptism. The powerful symbolism of immersion representing the gospel is striking, and not unimportant. Immersion suitably proclaims the content of the gospel message. (*Baptism in the*

*New Testament, G.R. Beasley-Murray)*

For clarity it must be added that water baptism does not create the reality of saving grace or faith in the person being baptized. Rather it testifies to the presence of such grace and faith in the baptism candidate. Baptism is a public profession of God's saving work in the life of the believer.

### **IS BAPTISM NECESSARY FOR SALVATION? ///**

The mere "mechanical" act of baptism does not save. In the book of Acts Cornelius and his friends are described as receiving the Spirit before baptism (Acts 10:44-48), pointing to the reality that they were saved before baptism (1 Peter 3:21).

Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 1:14-17 that baptism must be understood in light of the gospel. It logically follows that if someone understands that God instructs believers to be baptized and they refuse to do it, there is obvious disobedience.

It is important to note that- while faith is possible without baptism (salvation does not depend on one's being baptized), baptism is a natural complement and the completion of faith. In other words, baptism is not necessary for salvation, but is the initial seal of obedience. It logically follows that belief, and the ability to personally respond in obedience, necessitate that the subject must be of responsible age.

### **WHO ARE THE PROPER SUBJECTS OF BAPTISM? ///**

In practicing "believer's baptism", baptism directly follows repentance of sin and profession of faith in Jesus Christ. This brings up another significant argument in favor of believer's baptism- there is a lack of any conclusive evidence that infants, or those not of responsible age, were actually baptized in New Testament times.

Most scholars would agree that infant baptism was not a common practice until the 4th or 5th centuries. Most likely, the baptism of infants had something to do with a pastoral and parental concern for babies dying in infancy and the acceptance of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire.

The New Testament evidence for believer's baptism is strong;

- a. In the New Testament those who evangelize are only commanded to baptize those who repent and believe. (Matthew 28:18-20; John 4:1-2)
- b. The only clearly recorded subjects of baptism in the book of Acts are individuals who have repented and believed. (Acts 2:37-41; 8:12-13, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16)
- c. Paul's letters demonstrate the twin assumptions that those who have believed have been baptized, and those who have been baptized believe. (Romans 6:1-5; Galatians 3:26-27; Colossians 2:11-12).

### **WHAT IF SOMEONE WAS SPRINKLED, DO THEY NEED TO BE BAPTIZED? ///**

Most would argue that the sprinkling experience was very significant in one's journey of faith. But Baptist congregations practice baptism by immersion for the reasons stated above. Therefore, in most Baptist churches, anyone who desires to join that local body of believers must act in accordance with

their beliefs regarding baptism and the Bible.

If someone was sprinkled as an infant it was a decision their parents made regarding their covenant with God to raise them in a family of faith. Simply stated, sprinkling is a totally different thing when compared to a believer being baptized by immersion.

### **SHOULD SOMEONE WHO WAS PREVIOUSLY BAPTIZED BE RE-BAPTIZED? ///**

Some Christians ask to be re-baptized after they experience a deep renewal of their faith, perhaps in conjunction with a “re-dedication” of their lives. However, the Bible is clear that there is no need to be baptized again. There is only one baptism meant to symbolize God’s work in ones conversion. (Ephesians 4:5; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-28)

Furthermore, some people look back on their baptism in the past and wonder if they were truly saved and thus want to be re-baptized. However, we must be cautious here because every Christian grows in their understanding of grace over time, and so we should not quickly jump to the conclusion that we were not a believer until now. It is possible and even common for a person to become a Christian and then turn away for a time before the loving discipline of the Father brings them back into a life of repentance and faith. Thus, if a person has been baptized after a profession of faith as someone who was capable of making an adult decision, they should not be re-baptized at a later time.

Nevertheless, many have been through something called “baptism” that has no connection with a true profession of gospel faith in Jesus Christ. In these cases, they were not baptized in the biblical sense. Baptism should only follow the reality of gospel faith in Jesus Christ. (Acts 19:1-5)