

BAPTISM



1. Baptism under the Old Covenant

The Jews practised baptism by immersion. When a Gentile left behind his pagan beliefs and placed his faith in the living God, he could only become a worshipping member of the Jewish community by being baptised.

- The baptism had to take place in the presence of three witnesses;
- The individual had to declare his faith in the living God of Israel;
- After this, immersion took place;
- Then, his past was considered to be forgotten, while his present and future life were to be marked by a new relationship with God and His people;
- Unlike Christian baptism, this convert always baptised himself.

2. Baptism under the New Covenant

- Christian baptism is always carried out by another.
- Even Jesus submitted Himself to be baptised by another, John the Baptist (Matt 3:13). **He is our example!**
- Baptism was important to the Lord Jesus Christ in His ministry on Earth, and in His instruction to His church in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19,20).

a. So, let's do some Bible study:

In the Greek, various words are used that relate to water and its use:

- brecw (brecho) to make moist
- agiazw (hagiazō) to make holy, consecrate
- louw (louo) to bathe the person
- niptw (nipto) to cleanse, wash (e.g. hands and feet)
- rantizw (rhantizo) to sprinkle
- caqarizw (chatharizo) to make clean

But, the Bible only ever uses 'baptizw' in relation to New Testament baptism. This word means to 'fully immerse in', 'submerge', 'surround completely by [the liquid]'.

The word is not a special 'church' word. It is a common word used by those in the dyeing industry to describe the dyeing of a garment. In this industry, it was [still is] necessary to immerse the entire garment if it was to be completely, and evenly, dyed.

In summary, it is clear that there are enough words to describe 'other' ceremonies concerning water. So, the Biblical way of baptism is not 'sprinkling' - or anything else. Only

the word ‘baptizw’ is used to described our Lord’s command to His disciples - you and me!

b. Some example Scriptures:

Acts 8:38 Philip lead the Ethiopian *"into the water"*, which implies more than paddling. Then, he was brought *"out of the water"* after his baptism.

John the Baptist baptised in a part of the Jordan where there was *"much water"* (Jn 3:23). *"Much water"* is certainly not necessary if John had only ‘sprinkled’ the repentant people.

In Rom 6:3-10, baptism is likened to burial, which couldn’t be an illustration, if only sprinkling had been performed.

c. The Baptism of Babies, and Confirmation:

Many churches have a tradition of ‘baptising’ babies, and then ‘confirming’ them at the age of say 13 years.

There are no Scriptures, though, that refer to baptising babies. Indeed, the Word of God is completely clear that a person must first repent, and only then be baptised in water (Mk 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:36,37).

To willingly confess to sin is not possible from the lips of a baby!

This practise was the point of controversy from 306 to around 381 AD. There was great debate and much argument between the church leaders of those days, e.g. Tertullian opposed it: Irenaeus and Cyprian accepted it. Indeed, within the first five centuries there seems to have been no firm commitment to infant ‘christening’.

With heresies increasing in the Roman church from the 3rd to 5th centuries, infant ‘baptism’ (christening) and ‘confirmation’ slowly replaced believer’s baptism. And that is how it remained, until well after the start of the Reformation.

d. Bible Statements:

Baptism is commanded for all Believers

- o Matt 28:19 ... all new disciples were commanded, by the Lord Jesus Christ, to be baptised following their conversion.
- o Mk 16:16
- o Jn 3:5
- o Acts 2:38
- o Acts 10:48
- o Acts 22:16

There are no conditions, just a simple command!

The meaning of Baptism

- o Rom 6:3

- o Col 2:12
- o 1 Cor 12:13
- o Gal 3:27 ... ‘clothing’ is in the sense of a servant putting on his lord’s colours, i.e. garments with his mark or crest.
- o 1 Pet 3:21

The Timing of Baptism

- o The question, concerning baptism, of whether a new convert should ‘think it over’, ‘pray about it’ etc. is pure nonsense. We do not pray about something that God has already answered in His Word. Baptism is a command from the Lord Jesus, Himself (Matt 28:19,20). We cannot disobey Him, since it is by our obedience to Him, and to His commands, that we prove our love (Jn 14:15,21 - read especially vv 23,24).
- o Acts 8:36-38; 10:47,48; 16:33; 22:16 all show that it was done immediately following conversion.
- o Christ, Himself, is our example. In Jn 3:13-15, His baptism in water was followed by His baptism in the Holy Spirit.

e. Summary of Biblical Baptism:

- o Baptism speaks of, and seals, union with Christ and with His Church (1 Cor 12:13). By means of God’s grace, through repentance and faith, a person is brought **into** Christ. This speaks of our standing before God, by being ‘in Christ’. Furthermore, it totally removes division and barriers (no Jew, No Gentile ... no Black/White). We are declaring that we depend only on the one Holy spirit.
- o It speaks of the forgiveness of sins; our acceptance and understanding of the complete cleansing from sin, which has been accomplished by the sovereign work of Christ. God offers this to me through the one and only sacrifice of Jesus Christ at Calvary.
- o The act of baptism points us to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus received this gift before He started His ministry; indeed, it was before His 40 days of temptation (Matt 3:13-17; 4:1-11). Only then did He begin His ministry.
- o Finally, a sign signifies the gift, and seals or pledges it. Baptism is the seal of the New Covenant.

In the Communion, we see Jesus creating His covenant. Now, baptism is our response, our sealing of the covenant that was possible because of Christ’s death on the Cross. Remember, a covenant was entered into by two parties; both parties had to seal (agree) the covenant.

So, we show our obedience to this covenant, by following His command to be baptised (Matt 28:19,20). By this act, we signify acceptance of our individual responsibility to this covenant, in front of witnesses from His and our family - the Church.

Baptism is not just ‘the Command’, but also ‘the Example’ of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Acts 22:16 "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on His name."

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