

What the Bible Says about Baptism

Baptism remains one of the most needlessly controversial subjects of Christian theology. For those who accept the Bible as the sole authority of both faith AND practice, the ordinance of Baptism is clearly defined and explained in the New Testament. Baptism only becomes confusing when the traditions of men and denominational loyalty blur the authority of the written Word of God.

- I. The Mandate of Baptism
 - A. Baptism is important! The Bible commands that all Christians should be baptized (Mt. 28:19, 20). Though baptism is not a part of the saving Gospel, Christians should not minimize its importance.
 - B. The New Testament church viewed water baptism as the next step after a genuine salvation experience. Converts were typically baptized “on the spot,” in order to immediately fulfill Christ’s command (Acts 2:38-41).
 - C. Philip baptized his Samaritan converts immediately upon their profession (Acts 8:12). Similarly, Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch upon his profession of faith (Acts 8:35-38).
 - D. Following his miraculous conversion on the Damascus road, Saul of Tarsus (later Paul) was baptized (Acts 9:18).
 - E. Although very few professedly Christian groups deny the importance of baptism during this age, several are of note:
 1. Bullingerism—Dr. E.W. Bullinger (1837-1913) was a scholarly Church of England minister who denied the ordinance of water baptism. Essentially, he believed that the church age began in Acts 28, thus relegating water baptism to an earlier “transitional” period.
 2. Grace Church movement—Dr. Stam was an ultra-dispensational teacher who followed the doctrines of Bullinger.
- II. The Mode of Baptism
 - A. Who should be baptized?
 1. Only true believers are to receive the ordinance of baptism.
 - a. Disciples are to be baptized (Mt. 28:19).
 - b. In Mark 16:16, belief precedes baptism.
 - c. Acts 2:38, 39 indicate that repentance must precede baptism.
 - d. In Acts 8:37, Philip declares personal belief to be the only prerequisite to baptism.
 2. Since the New Testament knows only of believers being baptized, the baptizing of any too young to make a sound profession of faith is superfluous and unscriptural.
 - B. How should baptism be administered?
 1. The English word *baptize* is NOT a translation of the Greek *baptizo*. Rather, it is a transliteration, the creation of an English word based upon the sound of the original language word.

2. *Baptizo* defined means simply to “dip, plunge, or immerse.” Hence, baptism is the act of dipping or immersing something.
3. Many foreign language versions translate *baptize* with words meaning to dip or immerse. For example, Luther’s German translation employs the word *taufen* which means to dip. Belgian, Danish, Swedish, and Dutch versions follow a similar pattern.
4. In their writings, both Luther and Calvin admitted that New Testament baptism involved complete immersion.

III. The Message of Baptism

- A. The basic meaning/message of baptism is that of identification. Converts are baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”
- B. Romans 6:1-10 and Colossians 2:12 teach that baptism identifies the convert with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.
- C. Baptism also pictures a washing from sin and beginning of a new life (Acts 22:16, Heb. 10:22).
- D. In baptism, a believer vividly portrays his belief in the Gospel—the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ—and the inner cleansing wrought by faith.

IV. The Misunderstanding of Baptism

- A. Is water baptism essential to salvation? Is water baptism part of the Gospel?
 1. While an important act of obedience, water baptism is NOT part of the saving Gospel. In I Corinthians 1:17 Paul forever drew a dichotomy between water baptism and the Gospel.
 2. In answer to the simple question, “What must I do to be saved,” Paul declared, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).
- B. What about infant baptism?
 1. There is absolutely no command, suggestion, or example of an infant undergoing baptism in the New Testament.
 2. Historically, infant baptism gained precedence as Augustinian theology permeated the increasingly apostate church of the early centuries of the Christian Era.
 3. Infant baptism finds its theological basis in Covenant Theology, a method of interpretation that confuses Old Testament Israel with the New Testament church. This method of interpretation leans heavily on an allegorical view of Scripture as opposed to a literal, historical view.
 4. Most Protestant groups practice infant baptism because most come from a Reformed or Covenant tradition. Baptists are NOT Protestants, and Baptist groups have consistently interpreted the Bible from a literalist hermeneutic.