

## Understanding Baptism

Intro: “Coming out of the closet”

Baptism is the Christian’s “coming out” celebration, when their faith “goes public.”

According to the teaching and practice of the New Testament, immersion-baptism is only for those who have believed the gospel and become disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The **ABCD’s** of the nature of salvation:

### 1. There is something to **ACKNOWLEDGE**

- The Bible clearly teaches that we are all flawed, sinful, and in desperate need of a Savior.<sup>1</sup>
  - **Mark 1:4** – “John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”
  - **Matthew 3:6** – “and they were baptized by [John], confessing their sins.”<sup>2</sup>

### 2. There is something to **BELIEVE**

- That Jesus Christ is the very Savior we’ve admitted we need.<sup>3</sup>
  - **Acts 16:31-34** (NIV) – “They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole household.”

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<sup>1</sup> For e.g., Romans 3:23; 6:23

<sup>2</sup> See especially the context of verses 1-12.

<sup>3</sup> For e.g., Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5

- **Galatians 3:26-27** – “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

### 3. There is something to **CONSIDER**

- There is a cost in following Jesus: we must say no to our old way of life and yes to Him as Lord, whatever the cost.<sup>4</sup>
- Those who **trust** in Jesus as their **Savior** must also follow Him as their **Lord**.<sup>5</sup>
  - **Romans 6:3-4** – “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”
  - **Ephesians 4:3** – “There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”<sup>6</sup>

### 4. There is something to **DO**

- Conversion requires more than simply acknowledging these truths intellectually; we must personally turn to Jesus in repentance and faith.<sup>7</sup>
  - The NT clearly teaches that one’s personal commitment to Jesus is then be publicly demonstrated in baptism.

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<sup>4</sup> For e.g., Mark 8:34

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Luke 6:46

<sup>6</sup> I believe the order is important. The inspired apostle starts with the Lordship of Christ, which requires our faith in Jesus as Lord, which is then demonstrated publicly in baptism. Ironically, the understanding of baptism has brought much division in the church, when Paul uses it as a primary motivation to bring about unity in the church!!

<sup>7</sup> In Romans 1:5 and 16:26, Paul calls this “the obedience that comes from faith” (NIV).

- According to **Matthew 28:19** the first demonstration of one's allegiance and obedience to Jesus is in the matter of being baptized.
- **Acts 2:38** – “And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.’”

### What baptism IS and ISN'T:

#### 1. What it ISN'T:

**A. Saving** – baptism is not the washing away of one's sins by water.<sup>8</sup>

- **1 Peter 3:20** – “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience.”

The NT clearly teaches that one is saved by faith *alone* in Christ *alone*, and not by works (including things like baptism).

- **Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:21-25**, etc.

Thus, in baptism, the cleansing and removal of one's sins is being pictured,<sup>9</sup> not performed.

#### **B. Insignificant**

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<sup>8</sup> For example, the pernicious doctrine of baptismal regeneration, as advocated by the Roman Catholics, as well as many Lutherans and Church of Christ, teaches that sinners are converted/regenerated *by* baptism.

<sup>9</sup> ESV = “corresponds to” (Greek = *antitypos*). This is not unusual in the Bible. For example, in the OT, the sacrifices of bulls and goats did not themselves atone for sin; but they *did* picture how God Himself would deal with and cover sin through the substitutionary death of an innocent victim (Heb. 10:4).

In an overreaction to those who make baptism *all*-important, many contemporary Christians have swung the pendulum to the opposite side, and have made baptism *unimportant*.

- In the NT, believers are assumed to be baptized. As NT scholar Thomas Schreiner says, “an unbaptized Christian is an anomaly.”
  - **1 Corinthians 12:13** – “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”<sup>10</sup>

## 2. What it IS:

### A. A Public Picture of Salvation (Rom. 6:1ff.)

#### i. Of salvation purchased by the *Savior*

- When one is baptised, they are visibly declaring that Jesus died for *their* sins, and that Jesus was buried and raised for *them*,<sup>11</sup> and that have called upon His name as Lord and Savior.
  - **Acts 22:16** – “And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”

#### ii. Of salvation possessed by the *sinner*

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<sup>10</sup> Commentators differ as to whether Paul is talking about Spirit-baptism here, or water-baptism. I believe, with Schreiner and Moo that Paul is referring to both. That is, they are inseparable for the apostle Paul!! Cf. Gal. 3:26-27; Rom. 6:3; Col. 2:11-12; Eph. 4:3.

<sup>11</sup> This is the importance of Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River by the John the Baptizer (see **Matthew 3:13-17**). Here, Jesus is not only seen as the embodiment as the true Son and the true Israel, He is also identifying with His people and their sins by an act of “corporate solidarity” (known in Reformed Baptist circles as “Federal Headship”). Ultimately, Jesus as the true King of “Israel” will identify with His sinful people as He is “immersed” on the cross (cf. **Mark 10:39**).

- This is possible only through the believer’s glorious “union with Christ”<sup>12</sup>

- **Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:11-14**

## B. A Public Covenantal Ceremony

Concerning baptism, the apostle Peter says that it is “the pledge of a good conscience to God” (**1Peter 3:21**, NET, NIV, CSB).<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, certain passages in the New Testament are most likely what scholars call “public baptismal oaths/formulas.”

- E.g., **Romans 10:9-13; Titus 3:4-7**

Tim Chester writes:

A covenant is a bit like a contract. Promises are made and commitments are given. But a covenant is more than a contract or a particular type of contract. Covenants create or change the relationship of those involved. Marriage is a contract that creates a new type of relationship between a man and a woman. Covenants, we could say, are relational contracts. Baptism declares and affirms the covenant that God makes with Christians...Baptism is the act by which the covenant is affirmed, and Communion is the act by which the covenant is *reaffirmed*. So baptism and communion do not create a relationship with God, but they do

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<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the unbelieving children of believers ought not to be ‘baptised’. The old covenant was entered by an outward circumcision “made in the flesh by hand” (compare Eph. 2:11 with Col. 2:11, 13) and could include unbelievers (i.e., a “mixed” covenant community). The new covenant is entered by an inward and spiritual circumcision of the heart (i.e., regeneration; cf. Rom. 2:25-29; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4), and thus is only for believers. The covenantal sign of the new covenant/new creation is immersion (Col. 2:11-12). For the eschatological overtones of the Holy Spirit, waters of judgment, and new creation, see G.K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 802-816. Unfortunately, Beale, as a paedobaptist assumes the “mixed community” transfers from the old covenant to the new, despite what Jeremiah 31:31-33 (quoted in its entirety in Hebrews 8:8-12), where only those with circumcised hearts are accounted as true Israelites (the very thing Paul argues for in, for e.g., Romans 2 and Galatians 3).

<sup>13</sup> ESV, LSB = “an appeal”; NLT = “a response”; KJV = “an answer” (Greek = ἐπερώτημα)

change its nature. They make it a covenantal relationship. Asking why we should get baptized is like asking a couple why they want a wedding.<sup>14</sup>

Or, in the terse words of Jamieson, “No oath, no covenant.”<sup>15</sup>

### C. The pre-requisite to Church Membership and the Lord’s Table

Simply put, covenant benefits are only for covenant members.<sup>16</sup>

Concerning the Lord’s Supper, Bobby Jamieson writes,

While baptism joins one to the many, the Lord’s Supper binds many into one (1 Cor. 10:17). While baptism is the initiating oath-sign of the new covenant, the Lord’s Supper is the renewing oath-sign of the new covenant. Which means the former must come before the latter.”<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, regarding church membership, he says,

As drastic as it may sound, speaking of church membership is like speaking of marriage without vows: such a thing does not actually exist.<sup>18</sup>

#### WHY we do it:

##### 1. Because **Jesus** commands it

- **Matthew 28:19** – Jesus has charged his church with the responsibility of baptizing those who become His disciples, and therefore it is incumbent upon all who believe to be baptized.

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<sup>14</sup> Tim Chester, *Truth We Can Touch: How Baptism and Communion Shape Our Lives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 129.

<sup>15</sup> Jamieson, *Going Public*, 63. For his excellent development of “covenant” in the Bible, see 55-80.

<sup>16</sup> For example, see Hebrews 13:4.

<sup>17</sup> Bobby Jamieson, *Going Public*, 20.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

- **John 14:15** – “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”<sup>19</sup>
  - Thus, to be baptized as a believer is not merely an *option*, but an *obligation*.
    - Since Jesus Christ is my Lord, I **must** obey Him; since Jesus Christ is my Savior, I **want to** obey Him.

## 2. Because the **Church** practiced it.

- “Believers baptism” is the undeniable pattern in the book of Acts.
  - **2:37-41** – the pattern and paradigm established in Jerusalem
  - **8:12** – the conversion of the Samaritans
  - **8:36** – the Ethiopian Eunuch
  - **9:18** – the conversion of Saul (even forgoes eating)
  - **10:47** – the conversion of Cornelius the Gentile and his family<sup>20</sup>
  - **16:15** – the conversion of Lydia and her household
  - **16:33** – the conversion of the Philippian jailor and his family
  - **18:33** – the Corinthian revival
  - **19:5** – the baptism of John’s disciples in Ephesus

The pattern is easy to see: they heard the Good News; they believed the Good News; they confessed the Good News *through* publicly being immersed.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See also 14:21, 23; 15:10; 1 John 5:3; 2 John 6.

<sup>20</sup> Though many paedobaptists wrongly use this text to prove that baptizing unbelieving infants was practiced in Acts, 11:14 decisively destroys their argument (“[Peter] will declare a message to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.”) Thus, those who were baptized were first saved by believing Peter’s gospel message. This is exactly what the apostle Paul tells the jailor: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and all your household (16:31).” This is precisely what Luke says in 16:34: “And the [jailor] rejoiced greatly that he had come to believe in God, together with his entire household” (NET; cf. NLT, HSCB, NASB, NIV, NAB, NJB, KJV, NKJV, etc.).

<sup>21</sup> For a convincing defense of this pattern (as well as the role and manifestation of the Holy Spirit in conversion), see Robert Stein’s excellent treatment of baptism in Luke-Acts in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner & Shawn D. Wright (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006), 35-66. Jamison concisely summarizes Stein as follows: In the New Testament, conversion involves five integrally related components or aspects, all of which took place at the same time, usually on the same day: repentance, faith,

## How We Do It: Immersion into the Triune Name of God

### 1. Immersion.

This is perhaps the easiest aspect to defend as “Baptists.” This is because the Greek word means “to plunge, dip, submerge, immerse.”

- Nowhere, in either testaments, does the word ever mean “to pour” or “to sprinkle.” There are other Greek words for those.

Moreover, the theological picture of going down into the waters – a symbol of judgment in the Bible – and rising again to newness of life is best pictured in immersing the believer in water.<sup>22</sup>

### 2. Into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

This is also in simple obedience to Jesus’ words in **Matthew 28:19**.

- This is not in contradiction to what we see in the book of Acts, where believers were immersed into the name of Jesus.<sup>23</sup>
  - To make an unnecessary distinction between the two simply reveals a low Christology and understanding of the Trinity. The apostles, who received the command of Jesus in Matthew 28 were not in error or

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confession, giving of the Holy Spirit, and public baptism by representatives of the Christian community. In his *Going Public*, 38.

<sup>22</sup> Most clearly in the great Flood account in **Genesis 6-8**, the very thing the apostle Peter picks up in his discussion of what baptism signifies, namely a passing through judgment (**1 Peter 3:20**), accomplished by Jesus, the righteous One who died for the unrighteous, to bring them “through” judgment and “to” God (**3:18**). The OT also picks up on the waters of chaos and judgment overcome by Yahweh in the great exodus of Israel out of Egypt. For more on this, see Chester, *Truth We Can Touch*, 24-28.

<sup>23</sup> This is something that heretics like Oneness Pentecostals make a big deal about. Many charismatics and NAR advocates also seem to look down on the baptismal formula of Matthew 28, as if Acts is somehow more “Spirit-inspired” than Matthew!!



confusion or compromise when they baptized believers in Jesus' name in obedience to His command.<sup>24</sup>

This was also the practice of the early church, and so we see ourselves in good company.

Conclusion:

1. Have *you* been converted?
2. Have *you* been baptised?

As one popular preacher has noted, “a non-baptized Christian is a walking contradiction.” That is, there are no secret Christians” (cf. Matt. 10:32-33).

As Jamieson notes, “to turn to Jesus in faith and baptism is to identify yourself with Him and His followers and to distance yourself from those who reject Him.”<sup>25</sup>

- **Psalm 107:1** (NLT) – “Has the LORD redeemed you? Then speak out!

Soli Deo Gloria!!

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<sup>24</sup> See for example, Alan J. Thompson, *Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, vol. 27 in NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 137-141.

<sup>25</sup> Jamieson, *Going Public*, 35, 37.