

What is Baptism?

Many preachers and teachers over the years have taught varying opinions regarding the nature of baptism, its significance, and the method by which it is accomplished.

As Christians, it is our duty not to change or creatively interpret the scriptures (Galatians 1:8-9; Revelation 22:18-19; Proverbs 30:6), but to carefully examine them and find out their meaning as did those in Berea which resulted in their believing the gospel of Christ (Acts 17:11-12).

The Holy Spirit revealed multiple baptisms in the Word of God (Hebrews 6:2). Such as the baptism of John (Mark 1:4); the baptism of fire (Matthew 3:11-12); the baptism of suffering (Matthew 20:22-23); the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5; Acts 10:47); baptized into Moses (1 Corinthians 10:2); the baptism for the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29), and the baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:5).

The Holy Spirit revealed through Paul there is now **only one baptism** which we need to abide by (**Ephesians 4:5**). That one baptism is in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; Acts 19:5; Matthew 28:19). This has not stopped ambitious (and likely well-meaning) teachers from teaching varying ideas about baptism. This leads to confusion among sincere truth-seekers about the nature of baptism.

1. Does sprinkling of water count as baptism?
2. What about child / infant baptism?
3. Who can/ should be baptized?
4. Conclusion: What is the purpose of baptism?

Question 1: Does sprinkling of water count as baptism?

To begin answering the question of baptism, let us first examine the Greek work for Baptism as it appears in scripture.

Matthew 3:16, Mark 16:16, and Acts 8:13 uses the following Greek word for "Baptized":

βαπτισθεῖς (Baptisthesis)

These all come from the root word: βαπτίζω (Baptizo)

Vines defines baptisma (NT:908), "baptism," consisting of the processes of immersion, submersion and emergence (from bapto, "to dip"), is used of John's "baptism," and of Christian "baptism," and baptizo (NT:907), "to baptize," primarily a frequentative form of bapto, "to dip," (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

The translators chose to transliterate the varying words of baptism instead of translating them. It is not known why they chose to transliterate instead of translating baptize.

This Greek word means to "submerge" or "immerse".

To properly understand this word in context, we can simply plug the word “submerge” or “immerse” into a verse that references baptism to answer the first question.

Lets take Acts chapter 8 as an example.

In this example, Philip came upon the Ethiopian eunuch, who was reading the book of Isaiah. The verse in Isaiah was describing Jesus, and his sacrifice. Philip explained the verse to the eunuch and taught him all about Jesus. This teaching likely contained the command of Jesus that they be baptized (Jesus’s last commandment before ascending into heaven: Matt 28:16-20).

We know this, because at the end of the teaching, the eunuch pointed to a body of water and asked Philip “What prevents me from being baptized?”

To quote the scripture, the New King James version says:

*36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being **baptized**?”*

37 Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.”

And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

*38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he **baptized** him. 39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.”*

Given the definition of the Greek word used, when we plug in our understanding of the word “baptize” (submerge) – the verse becomes even clearer in defining the act of baptism.

*36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being **submerged**?”*

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Here we can see plenty of context clues that explain that baptism happens when an individual, after having heard the gospel, goes down into the water and is *submerged*. This automatically disqualifies “sprinkling” or “pouring” as adhering to the scriptural pattern of baptism. This

becomes especially clear when we consider that the Greek words for “sprinkling” or “pouring” were commonly used in ancient times. Those other words *could* have been used if this was the Spirit’s intention. Those words were purposely not selected, and the word which means “immerse” or “submerge” was selected to convey the action of baptism.

To help further strengthen this conclusion, The Spirit reveals in Romans 6:4 that baptism is a **burial**. When something is buried it is completely hidden. There is nothing exposed. If there was anything visible or showing it would be reported as being **partially buried**.

The Greek words for sprinkle or sprinkling are *rhantizo* (NT:4472), "to sprinkle" (a later form of *rhaino*), and *rhantismos* (NT:4473), "sprinkling," akin to *rhaino*, is used of the "sprinkling" of the blood of Christ, in Hebrews 12:24 and 1 Peter 1:2, an allusion to the use of the blood of sacrifices, appointed for Israel, typical of the sacrifice of Christ. (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

Question 2: What about child / infant baptism?

This question often follows the discussion of baptism by immersion – this is likely because it is a common practice by varying religious groups to “sprinkle” or “pour” water over an infant’s head as a “baptism”.

Many are taught that if this “sprinkling” occurred when they were children, then they have in fact been baptized. There are some who teach that infant baptism is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace” conferred by God upon the infant, making the child a member of “Christ’s holy Church” (Eleanor McKenzie, Anglican Views on Baptism).

Plainly put, this position is not supported by scripture. Infant baptism is a concept invented by the authority of man (Matthew 21:25). The only place one can read about infant baptism is in the writings of man, not the word of God. Depending on the sources, infant baptism is not mentioned until some time in the second or third century. So where did it come from?

To investigate the origins of infant baptism for the forgiveness of sin, one must examine the origins of sin.

At what point has a person committed a sin for which they must be forgiven? The bible is clear about when sin is committed (Read James 1:13-15; 1 John 3:4; Mark 7:20-23). These verses tell us that sin happens when a person is led away by their own evil desire and is enticed to act upon those desires which violates the commands and morals of God.

This points out some concise criteria for sin:

- Understanding of good and evil as ordained by God.
- Presence of an evil desire

- A willing choice to commit the evil act

What understanding of evil does the child have? What evil desire do they possess? What evil act have they engaged in? It is the position of the Holy Bible that children do not and cannot have evil in their hearts, due to their innocence and ignorance of sinful thought. Jesus even said that those in the Kingdom of Heaven are like children in *innocence* (Matt 19:14).

Those that teach infant baptism claim that the child bears “original sin” from Adam. If sin carries down through generations (and has been doing so since Adam at the beginning), then how great of sin is upon children. We know from scripture how God sees sin:

- It creates a barrier between God and the sinner (Isaiah 59:2)
- It creates a “stain” on one’s soul (Jeremiah 2:22)
- It makes one a member of the “Perverse Generation” (Acts 2:38-40)

If sins from Adam and every generation through the ages are heaped upon the latest generation of children – and if God has spoken his view of sin honestly, then why would Jesus say that children are innocent? Why would he instruct his followers to become like the children?

The fact is plain: children do not bear the sins of those who came before them. Each person bears the guilt of their own sin and must be forgiven. (Ezekiel 18)

Galatians 5:19-21 makes this point – it explains that “sinners” are the people who **DO** the sinful things described. Sin is an action. Children have not engaged in sinful action.

Question 3: Who can/ should be baptized?

If children are not to be baptized, then who should be? This is an important question with an important answer.

The answer is that every single person who has reached the age of accountability (meaning they have the understanding of good and evil, and have chosen to do evil at some point).

That means everyone (Romans 3:23).

There has only been one sinless individual, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:15).

Continuing to examine who are proper subjects of baptism, we have these passages which teach us that:

1. The person must believe in Jesus (Mark 16:16; Romans 1:6; Acts 8:36-37)
2. The person must have repented of sins (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38).

If these two requirements can be, and are met, the person is a proper subject to be baptized (and in fact MUST be baptized for the forgiveness of sins).

Conclusion: What is the purpose of baptism?

Baptism is an act of obedience commanded by God (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).

This act of obedience is not for the purpose of “getting wet” or “taking a bath” as some suggest – it offers the individual a good conscience before God (1 Peter 3:21).

Baptism is what allows us to be covered by the blood of Christ and added to His body, His church. (Romans 6:1-14).

As the passage in Romans shows, baptism is the beginning of one’s walk with Christ. After baptism, one must continue in obedience. This is the entrance to the narrow way, the path to Salvation. We are to “ask, seek, and knock” until we find that narrow way (Matthew 7:7-14).

Now that you have found it, if you want to be baptized and begin your walk with Christ, you must act immediately! Reach out to us using our Contact page, or simply attend one of our weekly meetings and make your intention to follow Christ known. We will help to get you baptized, and we will welcome you as a new brother / sister in Christ!