

Understanding Baptism

There are only two ordinances in the Christian Church - Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Both are instituted in the Gospels, celebrated in the Acts, and explained in the epistles. Since they are instituted in Gospels, and that by our Lord Himself, we may conclude that they are a part of the message to us. Since they are celebrated in the Acts, we conclude that they belong to the practice of Christ's church. Since they are explained in the epistles, we conclude that they are designed to be continued until Christ comes.

Why Baptize?

We baptize because...

- The Lord's Command - "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19, 20)
- The Practice of the Early Church - We read, in Acts 2:41, concerning the converts on the Day of Pentecost: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized." In Acts 8:26-39 we read of Philip's preaching to the eunuch from Isaiah 33, as they went on their way, the eunuch inquired if he might be baptized (v. 38). Further examples of apostolic practice may be found in Acts 10:44-48, 16:31-33 and 18:8.

Who Should Be Baptized?

In the Scriptures we find examples of disciples (or followers) of Christ, believers, and those who had received the Holy Spirit being baptized:

- Disciples (followers of Christ) - The church is commanded to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit..." (Matthew 28:18).
- Believers - "They that gladly received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41). The eunuch confessed his faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and then Philip baptized him (Acts 8:30-38; cf. Acts 16:33-34).
- Those Who Have Received The Holy Spirit - Peter was privileged to preach the gospel to the Gentiles for the first time in history at Cornelius' home. While Peter was still preaching, "the Holy Spirit fell on all them that heard the word." Peter then inquired, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?" Then he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:44-48).

Therefore, we conclude that those who have personally confessed Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord (i.e. Christians) should be baptized.

What Does Baptism Mean?

Baptism is a declaration of the believer's identification with Jesus Christ:

- Identification with Christ in His death – "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:3)
- Identification with Christ in His burial – "We have been buried with Him through baptism into death" (Romans 6:4a)

- Identification with Christ in His resurrection – “As Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4b)

Baptism then is a declaration of the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. The apostle could say "I am crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). Christ's death is a death for the believer. The believer's identification with Christ in His death is symbolized by his going under the water "buried with Him by baptism into death." But the apostle also speaks of our being "risen with Christ" (Col. 3:1). Our identification with Him in resurrection life is symbolized by our coming up out of the water "that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Thus, baptism is an acknowledgement that the old man and his ways are dead "our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed" and a profession that henceforth we are living a new life "that henceforth we should not serve sin/ but that we "should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:6).

How Shall We Baptize?

We believe that a person should be baptized by being fully immersed in water:

- The word *baptism* was transliterated from the word *baptizo* meaning to “make fully whelmed; to dip or to sink”.
- Baptism took place where there was *much water* – John 3:23
- When baptized, believers went *down into the water* (Acts 8:38) and *came up from the water* (Matthew 3:16).

Therefore, baptism by immersion is the biblical pattern for the church. The symbol of baptism by immersion fits with the meaning of baptism in that it pictures a believer's identification with Christ's death, burial and resurrection. When the believer goes into the water, death is pictured; when he goes under the water, burial is pictured; when he comes out of the water, resurrection is pictured. All this symbolism is lost when sprinkling is practiced – the very meaning of the ordinance is lost.

What Does This All Mean for You?

This means that if you are a genuine believer who has never been baptized, then you must be obedient to Christ's command and be baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If you are a believer who was baptized as an infant, then you must be baptized as a believer in Jesus Christ. If you are someone who was baptized as at a point when you don't believe you had truly repented from your sins and trusted in Christ alone for salvation, then you too need to be baptized. Baptism is for believers. Believers who truly love, serve, and trust in Jesus Christ must be obedient to the command to be baptized. Obedience in the matter of baptism is “the answer of a good conscience toward God” (1Peter 3:21). May God give you a good conscience toward Him as you obey the ordinance of baptism.