

Water Baptism

Types of Baptism

In Heb. 6:2 it refers to “the doctrine of baptisms”, which implies that “baptism” can include more than just the water baptism of a new believer. The types of baptism we see in the NT include a baptism of repentance (by John the Baptist and Jesus’ disciples early on), Jesus’ own baptism, a “baptism of suffering”, the baptism with fire and the Holy Ghost, and the water baptism that signals a new believer’s confession of faith. This lesson will concentrate on the water baptism of new believers.

Commanded by Christ, Preached by Peter

Mt. 28:19-20 - “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...”

Mk. 16:15-16 – “... Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature, He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Ac. 2:38-39 - “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins ...”

What is it, and How was It Done?

The base Greek word is βαπτίζω (baptidzo), which means to immerse or submerge, ordinarily in water. There is another usage in classical and NT Greek, as an overwhelming of calamity. This was used by Jesus in referring to a “baptism of suffering”, where he would be “immersed” in the pain and agony of crucifixion, and that this would also describe the sufferings of his disciples as martyrs. Another case where the immersion is not physical water is in the references to Jesus baptizing with fire and the Holy Spirit.

But the topic for this lesson is in the practice of water baptism. That it is to be an immersion, as opposed to sprinkling, or dipping, can be seen in the meaning of the word itself, but also in several descriptions in the NT. First, the baptisms required a significant amount of water. John did it in the Jordan River. If all that was necessary was sprinkling, he could have done it anywhere, out of a container of water. In Jn. 3:23 it says that John “was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there”.

Another instance that implies total immersion, as opposed to sprinkling or dipping, is in Ac. 8:38, where the Ethiopian eunuch wants to be baptized by Philip. They happened by some water, “and he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water ...”.

Historically, the reason the church went from immersion to sprinkling or dipping was probably related to the change from baptism of believers upon a voluntary confession of faith, to a “baptism” of infants, which could not be voluntary but on the part of the parents, and would be risky or traumatic by immersion. (Plus, the priest doesn’t have to get wet.) The reason for infant baptism is a perversion of the concept of baptism from a rite performed after a believing confession, to a practice that itself saves (called “baptismal regeneration”).

Biblical Examples of Water Baptism

Let us look through the book of Acts to see the many accounts of water baptism.

Ac. 2:38-41 on the day of Pentecost “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins ... Then they that gladly received his word were baptized ...”

Ac. 8:12-13 at Samaria “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized ...”

Ac. 8:35-39 Ethiopian eunuch “... the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. ... and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water ...”

Ac. 9:18 – Saul was baptized by Ananias

Ac. 10:47-48 – Cornelius' household, after receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord."

Ac. 16:14-15 – Lydia, "whose heart the Lord opened, ... And when she was baptized, and her household, ..."

Ac. 16:30-34 – Philippian jailer and household "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. ... And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway."

Ac. 18:8 – "... and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized."

Ac. 19:4-5 – "Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Ac. 22:16 – (Ananias to Saul) "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord"

The Meaning or Significance of Baptism

- **Repentance**

Repentance was the main message of John the Baptist and Jesus' disciples, and it was a repentance that was meant to prepare people to receive the gospel of the kingdom. It is interesting that those who were baptized by John were the ones who later received Christ.

Lk. 7:29-30 – "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John, But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him."

That is, the people who rejected John and their need of repentance, were not able to receive the message of Christ. Even today, some people try to convert people to Christ without first showing them a need of repentance. If you don't truly repent, you CAN'T be saved – in fact, we should ask why a person would need to be saved if there is nothing to be saved from (the consequences of sin).

Ac. 2:38-41 "Repent, and be baptized ... for the remission of sins ... "

- **As a confession of faith as a new believer**

In every instance through the book of Acts, baptism was something that occurred immediately AFTER a voluntary confession of faith or a willing acceptance of the gospel. It was never done to an infant, and it was never forced upon someone to coerce them into becoming a Christian (as in later church history).

It was a public confession, a "stake in the ground", saying "I have heard and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ, I have received that message, and am making a public confession that from this point on, I am identifying myself with Christ and his church."

- **Being baptized into the body (the church)**

1 Cor. 12:13 – "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles ..."

Your baptism has not only identified you as belonging to Christ, but that you are aligning and allying yourself with other believers (in the whole earth, but more specifically those in your immediate locale). Jesus didn't save you to be a loner or tramp, but to be a living and functioning part of a local church.

- **Putting on Christ**

Gal. 3:27 – "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

Many passages combine the putting on of Christ with the putting off of the flesh and the sins and corruptions of our life before conversion. What this verse shows is that in baptism we are choosing to put off the old sins of the flesh and to put on the new life in Christ.

- **Death and resurrection**

Rom. 6:3-6 – “Know ye not, that so many of us as were **baptized into Jesus Christ** were **baptized into his death**? Therefore we are **buried with him** by baptism into death: 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. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”

Col. 2:12-13 – “**Buried with him in baptism**, wherein ye are also risen with him through the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.”

So the main symbolism of water baptism is in our identifying both with the death and with the resurrection of Christ. There are two applications and one continuing lesson:

1. As he went down into the grave and was then raised from death, so will we. We are loosed from the pains of death as eternal separation from God. We eventually die, but will ultimately be raised in glorious bodies and will be “like him, for we shall see him as he is”.
2. But more significantly for the way we live our lives right now, baptism shows how the old man, the life we used to lead, and the sins of the flesh, have been put to death and buried (symbolized by the going down into the water), and we have been created a new man in Christ, with the old sins washed away (symbolized by coming back up out of the water).
3. The lesson is that we must from then on count ourselves dead to that old life, and to yield our members as instruments of righteousness to the glory of God.

Rom. 6:11-16 – “Likewise reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?”

- **Should it be done “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”, or in the name of the Lord Jesus?**

A simple reading of the “Great Commission” in Mt. 28:19-20 explains why almost all baptisms today seem to be done with the formula, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit”. Still, I believe it is more proper to baptize in Jesus’ name for these reasons:

1. The disciples who heard Jesus give the “Great Commission” apparently did not take it as a verbatim formula, because the Bible never gives that as an example in an actual baptism.
2. Many of the examples in the book of Acts specifically say that they baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ”, “in the name of the Lord Jesus”, or “in the name of the Lord”. The other examples don’t say how it was done, merely that they were baptized.
3. The symbolism of death, burial, and resurrection speaks obviously of Jesus, not the Father or the Holy Spirit. It says we are “baptized into Jesus Christ”, “baptized into his death”, “buried with him by baptism into death”, and by being baptized we are “putting on Christ”.
4. “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” are not names but titles. I believe that it means we are to baptize as the representatives of God in the earth. The same is true of baptizing in Jesus’ name.
5. Col. 3:17 – “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”