

# Baptism

## Introduction

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Baptism. It is a foreign word to most. It is an ancient strange practice to most the rest. So, why do we do it? "Is this church a cult?" you might be thinking. That just seems strange." Well, it is actually very profound and important.

## Five Important Questions About Baptism

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- 1) What is the meaning of baptism?
- 2) Who should be baptized?
- 3) What is the proper way to baptize?
- 4) When is the proper time for baptism?
- 5) Who has the authority to baptize?

## What Is The Meaning Of Baptism?

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In Scripture we see that believes are called to be baptized (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16) but what does baptism mean? First, let's consider the etymology, i.e. where the word came from and what it means. The English word "baptize" comes from the Greek word *baptizo* (βαπτίζω). Many believe that this word is correctly translated as "immerse" or "dip." That is, in part, why we at Grace Crossing practice baptismal dunks.\* Also, submersion under water and raising out of it best pictures what baptism represents.

So then what does baptism represent? For this, we need to look at Romans 6:3-8:

"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.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him" (see also Gal. 3:27; Col 2:12).

Thus we see that baptism is a proclamation of the believers union with Christ in His death and resurrection. When the believer goes under the water it shows that in Christ they have died to sin and when they raise out of the water it shows they have been resurrected to new a new pure (Acts 22:16; 1

Cor. 6:11) life in Christ. Baptism is an outer sign of an inner reality. Some symbols of baptism are: (1) Death with Christ, death to sin, (2) union with Christ, (3) identification with the body of Christ, the church, (4) proclamation of the work of the Trinity ("In the Name of..." cf. Matt. 28:19), (5) purification, the washing away of sins, (6) looks forward to the resurrection, new creation, and (7) going through the waters of judgment and being raised to new life justified.

## Who Should Be Baptized?

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Like many areas of baptism, there has not been uniform understanding here. However, I believe biblically and historically a clear case can be made for believer's baptism. We see no scriptural support leading us to believe that non-believers were baptized but we have clear scriptural support to baptize believers. Peter preaches in Acts chapter two and says, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit... So [then] those who received his word were baptized" (38, 41 see also 8:12-13).

Does baptism save you? No. Well then, is it necessary for salvation? Yes and no. † No it is not necessary because it is the work of Christ on the cross that saves us and nothing we do (Titus 3:5). However, yes, it is necessary in a sense; because a good tree bears good fruit and baptism is a command of God and so those that are saved should want to be baptized if they are physically able. Notice I said "physically able," the thief on the cross was not baptized because he was not physically able but Jesus said "today you will be with me in Paradise." We are not saved by baptism and you can still go to Paradise without being baptized but it is very important, it is commanded by our Lord (i.e. Master) Jesus.

Who should be baptized? Only those that have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation should be baptized (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12-13; 36-38; Eph. 4:5).

## What Is The Proper Way To Baptize?

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We have seen the answer to the question above but "*baptizo*" first off means "immerse" but perhaps most importantly it is emersion that best pictures the reality of what has happened to us through Jesus Christ (see Rom. 6:4-6) (Also see: "in" (ἐν, ἐς) the "water," "Jordan," etc. Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5, 9; John 1:33 see also Acts 8:36. Notice further that in Matthew 3:16 it says, "He went up from the water." Some churches practice sprinkling however sprinkling only gets part of the rite right).

## When Is The Proper Time For Baptism?

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All over the New Testament, we see that baptism from all we can tell happened right away for the new convert. Of course this practice is not mandated by Scripture yet it seems that there may be a precedence set for it. Yet there are a few things that could account for the difference we see in the early church's practice and our own.

Only converts should be baptized so we want to be sure that they are converts, of course we truly cannot know completely. In the early church, to be baptized had more significance in some senses because it was a public identification with Jesus Christ. Yet, Jesus, just years earlier, was crucified. And it was likely that if you publically identified yourself as His follower that you too would be crucified. Knowing that

would deter most false converts. Thus, the early church was able to practice baptism much sooner because to be baptized was a much bigger sign of genuine conversion than it is today.

## Who Has The Authority To Baptize?

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The church. The church, we see in Matthew 18, is given the “keys of the Kingdom” and baptism symbolizes entrance into the Kingdom. Plus, when someone is baptized part of what it is representing is being joined, connected with, Christ and the body of Christ. Therefore it would be a shame and not the design if the church, the body of Christ, were not there to celebrate. Further, to whom would the baptism declare if no one else was present? When John the baptizer baptized there were other people present this is the rule, though there are exceptions (Acts 8:35-38) in extreme cases. Notice, we understand that it is to the church that Jesus gave the Great Commission to, “Go therefore and make disciples baptizing them.” It is the church that is to baptize, not isolated members of the church. Baptism is to be done with the whole body. Within the church I believe that any upstanding member who the church deems appropriate can carry out the baptism.

## Suggested Resources

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- For a helpful video on this subject see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAipq3PMQIE>
- For the CMA’s helpful article on their stance see: <http://www.cmalliance.org/about/beliefs/perspectives/baptism>