

**Bible Believers' Baptism
Matthew 3:13-17**

Big Idea – Bible baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 3:13 Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John.

14 But John tried to talk him out of it. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?"

15 But Jesus said, "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires." So John agreed to baptize him.

16 After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him.

17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."

"The six-year-old grandson of Ruth Kirby told his mother that he had been baptized. Well, Mom knew he hadn't been formally baptized, so she probed further into the issue. She asked him to explain what he meant by 'baptized.' Little Blake then enlightened his mom, 'Last night in the bathtub I put my face under the water and thought about Jesus'."(1)

Like little Blake, people often have strange ideas about baptism. For some people baptism is believed to be what saves you, and for others baptism is something that a person cannot go through until they come to the point that they have become perfect just like Christ.

What does the Bible teach about water baptism?

Is it necessary for salvation? This is called baptismal regeneration.

Who's it for? Babies only? Adults only? Anyone?

Is it optional?

How important is it?

What does it mean?

Is any mode of baptism, whether sprinkling, pouring or full immersion, acceptable?

answer each of these questions today from our only authority—the Bible. Notice with me briefly six truths about baptism, each beginning with an "I" to remember more easily.

1. Baptism is Insufficient

What I mean is that water baptism is insufficient to save you from sin. Baptism does not impart to you any grace, merit, or goodness before a holy God. It does not take away original sin.

Ephesians 2:8 "...you have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God.

9 It was not the result of your own good works, so you cannot brag about it."

Jesus was the perfect Son of God who never sinned, so He certainly did not need salvation from sin, but in our text we see that He came to John to be baptized.

The Bible is very clear that the only way to be saved is by believing in Jesus for our salvation, not by anything WE do, even if it's religious in nature. There are only three verses in the Bible that SEEM to imply that baptism is necessary for salvation, but a closer examination of the context and the original language clears up every one of them, as any good commentary will do.

On the other hand, there are scores, if not hundreds, of Bible verses that teach in unequivocal terms that salvation is obtained by faith in Jesus for your salvation.

John 3:16 – "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

John 3:18 – "He who believeth on him is not condemned: but he who believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

John 3:36 – "He who believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he who believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him."

Acts 16:31 – "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house."

Romans 3:28 – "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

Romans 5:1 – "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Galatians 2:16 – "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

Galatians 3:26 – "For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

The dying thief on the cross simply BELIEVED in Jesus, but obviously was not be baptized—yet Jesus assured him that "Today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43).

And what do you do with John 4:2, where John tells us that "...Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples." or 1 Corinthians 1:17, where Paul says, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel..." – If baptism were a condition of salvation, is it even remotely conceivable that Jesus and Paul would have delegated this soul-saving responsibility to others?—I think not.

Obviously, as important as baptism is, it is INSUFFICIENT to save.

2. Baptism is Illustrative

Romans 6:3-4, Paul says, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 4 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.”

In biblical times symbols were very important. Christ instituted two symbolic ordinances for the church to follow, and both of them are extremely visually rich symbols expressing the core truths of the Gospel.

1. One was communion, or the Lord’s Supper.

We’re all familiar with the fact that the bread is symbolic of Jesus’ body that was given for us, and the juice symbolizes the blood Jesus shed for our sins. That’s a powerful visual picture isn’t it?

2. Here in Romans 6, Paul teaches that baptism pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, which Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:1-7 is what the Gospel is.

Now there’s only one mode of baptism that can symbolize death, burial and resurrection, and that’s immersion. It’s very clear, isn’t it? (DEMONSTRATE WITH ARM MOTIONS: ARM UP (VERTICAL) = DEATH / ARM HORIZONTAL = BURIAL / ARM BACK UP VERTICALLY = RESURRECTION.) Tell me how you get death, burial and resurrection out of sprinkling or pouring.

There are other reasons why we believe that only immersion is biblical water baptism:

1. First, the Greek word for baptize is baptizō βαπτίζω which literally means “to dip, submerge, plunge.” It was the word used by cloth sellers for dyeing cloth and fabrics. They would COMPLETELY SUBMERGE the fabric into the dye. The command to be baptized was literally a command to be SUBMERGED.

2. Another line of evidence is that in many instances of baptism in the Gospels and Acts, we’re told that they went “DOWN INTO” the water to be baptized or that they “CAME UP OUT OF” the water after baptism.

--We see that in our text, Matthew 3, in verse 16: “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water...”

--In the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:38, Luke says, “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.”

Question: Why go “down into” the water and have to “come out of” the water just to be sprinkled or poured on? Wouldn't it must make more sense for the baptizer to get a bowl and enough water from the river rather than having to go down into the water and get your clothes soaking wet just to be sprinkled or poured on?

3. Other evidence is the incontrovertible fact that the early church only practiced immersion, a fact admitted even by the Roman Catholic Church, Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin and many prominent Anglican scholars—sprinklers one and all. So it is not surprising that all the oldest churches in Middle East, Turkey, Greece and Italy to this day have old baptismal pools instead of small fonts.

Baptism by immersion ILLUSTRATES something—the death, burial and resurrection of our Savior for our sins.

3. Baptism is Identification

Historically baptism was how a person publicly IDENTIFIED himself with Christ and the core teachings of the Gospel. Dr. M.R. DeHaan put it this way:

In the early days of the church..., baptism was a declaration that the believer was definitely identifying himself with that group of people who were called Christians and were despised and hated. To be a Christian meant something. To identify yourself with those who were called Christians meant persecution, maybe death; it meant being ostracized from your family, shunned by friends. And the one act which was the final declaration of this identification was BAPTISM.

As long as a man gathered with Christians, he was tolerated, but when once he submitted to baptism, he declared to all the world, I BELONG TO THIS DESPISED GROUP, and immediately he was persecuted, hated, and despised. In baptism, therefore, the believer entered into the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. A person might be a believer and keep it strictly a secret and thus avoid unpleasantness and suffering, but once he submitted to public baptism he had burned his bridges behind him. . .” (Pamphlet, Water Baptism, p. 27).

When you're baptized, you're publically confessing your allegiance to Christ. Jesus said, “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32)

By identifying with Christ and the message of His death, burial and resurrection, you're publicly taking your stand for Christ.

As a wedding ring identifies a married person, baptism identifies a Christ follower. The person being baptized is saying the same thing: He's saying, "I belong to Christ, and I'm not ashamed to let everyone know it."

4. Baptism is Intentional

There is no instance ANYWHERE in the Bible of baby baptism. Babies don't have a choice. Every instance is a person being baptized AFTER his salvation—choosing intentionally to obey Christ's command of his own free will to be baptized.

The BEST proof text defenders for infant baptism have is the story of the Philippian jailor in Acts 16. Let me show you why this passage teaches no such thing at all.

In this passage, the Philippian jailor asked Paul and Barnabas in verse 30, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul didn't miss a beat and his answer was simple in verse 31: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

Paul didn't mean that if this jailor trusted in Christ, his whole household would be saved by proxy, but that if he and those in his household would be saved, they must believe on [that is, "rely on" or "trust in"] the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then verse 32 says, "And they spoke unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." Why would this be emphasized? To show that the household heard the Gospel so they could believe.

Verse 33 continues: "And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway." Could "all his" mean that infants not old enough yet to believe on their own were baptized too?

Nope—Luke lays the matter to rest once and for all in verse 34 where he says: "And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." Did you get that?—He and all his house BELIEVED! Lest you're unsure that's what Luke meant, the esteemed Greek scholar, A.T. Robertson, says this after discussing the Greek construction of this verse, "The whole household (family, warden, slaves) heard the word of the Lord, believed in the Lord Jesus,...and were baptized, and rejoiced."

Baptism is for believers, and since he and everyone in his house BELIEVED, they were acceptable candidates for baptism. There's not even a HINT any babies were baptized here, and or anywhere else in the New Testament because baptism is INTENTIONAL, for those who have believed only.

5. Baptism is Imitation

Jesus was baptized. He explained the reason in verse 15 – “...to fulfill all righteousness.” By being baptized, we’re doing something righteous because God has commanded it. Jesus wanted to set an example for us because He always did what was righteous.

1 Peter 2:21 21 This is what you were called to do, because Christ...gave you an example to follow. So you should do as he did.

6. Baptism is Important

Jesus commanded all believers to be baptized

Matthew 28:19 So go and make followers of all people in the world. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In verse 13 of our text we read something significant, where Matthew says, “Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.” Mark’s Gospel tells us that the city in Galilee Jesus came from was Nazareth. A quick look at a map shows that Jesus walked 60 miles ON FOOT to be baptized. It must have been very important to Him, and it should be for us.

Being baptized is important because we’re **COMMANDED** to be baptized. **JESUS** commanded us to be baptized once we have believed. Well, do you need any other reason than that? It’s a serious thing to disobey the Lord’s commands.

Apostles did it

Acts 2:41 “Then those people who received the Word were baptized. About three thousand people were added to the number of believers that day.”

Every believer in Jesus Christ should do it soon after salvation

In our modernized, “comfort zone Christianity,” believers tend to take God’s commandments far too lightly, and that’s increasingly true of believers baptism. But where Christianity shines brightest and strongest, the opposite is true. As Chuck Colson points out in his book, *The Body: Being Light In Darkness*: “Most Westerners take baptism for granted, but for many in the world the act requires immense courage. In countries like Nepal it once meant imprisonment. For Soviet or Chinese or Eastern bloc believers, it was like signing their own death warrant.” (*The Body: Being Light In Darkness* by Charles Colson and Ellen Santilli Vaughn, 1992, Word Publishing, page 137.)

Folks, obeying the Lord in believer's baptism is IMPORTANT! Search the book of Acts—the history book of the first century church—and you'll find one consistent pattern—believers uniformly followed the Lord in believer's baptism. It was so important in the early church, that even those who had already been baptized under John the Baptist's baptism were re-baptized in Jesus' name to publicly declare their allegiance to Jesus Christ and their faith in His death, burial and resurrection.

It was so important in the book of Acts that believers didn't go through discipleship classes before submitting to baptism, or wait to make sure they were ready. Every instance of baptism in Acts was IMMEDIATELY after they believed in Christ for salvation.

If you've placed your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation and have the assurance that you are saved, you don't need to understand fully its meaning, or wait till you feel worthy, or feel you have to prepare in some way. If you have an obedient heart to your Lord, you will obey His command and follow His example and be baptized without delay.

SALVATION IS BY GRACE...OBTAINED THROUGH FAITH ALONE

John 1:12-13 – “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them who believe on his name: 13 Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

John 3:15 – “That whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

John 3:18 – “He who believeth on him is not condemned: but he who believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

John 3:36 – “He who believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he who believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him.”

John 5:24 – “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He who hears my word, and believes on him who sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”

John 6:35 – “And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he who comes to me shall never hunger; and he who believes on me shall never thirst.”

John 6:40 – “And this is the will of him who sent me, that every one who sees the Son, and believes on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

John 6:47 – “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He who believes on me has everlasting life.”

John 20:31 – “But these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through his name.”

Acts 13:39 – “And by him all who believe are justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

Acts 16:31 – “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house.”

Romans 3:24-25 – “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 25 Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.”

Romans 3:28 – “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”

Romans 4:5 – “But to him who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”

Romans 5:1 – “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Galatians 2:16 – “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

Galatians 3:11 – “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.”

Galatians 3:26 – “For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”

Ephesians 2:8 – “For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

SPRINKLERS WHO ADMITTED THAT BAPTIZO MEANS “TO DIP, SUBMERGE, PLUNGE” AND THAT THE EARLY CHURCH PRACTICED IMMERSION

Martin Luther (Founder of the Lutheran Church):

“Baptism [Die Taufe] is baptismos in Greek, and mersio in Latin, and means to plunge something completely into the water, so that the water covers it.”

John Calvin (Founder of Presbyterianism):

“It is evident that the term baptise (sic) means to immerse, and that this was the form used by the primitive Church” [Calvin, John. Calvin’s Institutes.]

1992 Catechism of the Catholic Church:

“1214 This sacrament is called Baptism, after the central rite by which it is carried out: to baptize (Greek baptizein) means to ‘plunge’ or ‘immerse’; the ‘plunge’ into the water symbolizes the catechumen’s burial into Christ’s Death, from which he rises up by resurrection with him, as ‘a new creature.’”

W.J. Conybeare and J.S. Howson (Anglican scholars) in a note on Romans 6:

“This passage cannot be understood unless it be borne in mind that the primitive baptism was by immersion”

“It is needless to add that baptism was . . . administered by immersion, the convert being plunged beneath the surface of the water...It must be a subject of regret that the general discontinuance of this original form of baptism has occurred...and has rendered obscure to popular apprehension some very important passages of Scripture.”

B. F. Westcott (One of the 19th Century's greatest Greek scholars, and a prominent Anglican):
"The few drops of holy water with which the unconscious infant is sprinkled bear little resemblance to the stream into which in the first age the full-grown convert descended that he might rise from beneath its waters to a new life."