

Believer's Baptism

Believer's baptism is one of two church ordinances. An ordinance is something that Jesus ordered that the church should do. The two ordinances that are very clearly taught by Jesus and observed by the New Testament church are 1) Believer's Baptism and 2) the Lord's Supper (Communion).

An ordinance is not the same thing as a 'sacrament'. A sacrament incorporates the idea of 'conveying grace' to the participant, while an ordinance is purely symbolic. An ordinance has no inherent ability to change those observing it. Ordinances symbolise the change that Christ has already made in the participants and remind them and others of that change.

The first ordinance of believer's baptism is a ceremony whereby an individual publicly expresses faith in Christ and identifies with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ through being fully immersed in water.

The second ordinance, the Lord's Supper or Communion, reminds the church of the death of Christ and symbolically shows their faith in Christ, His body and blood. The Lord's Supper is also an expression of the church's unity with one another.

In this study, we are going to look at:

- 1) the command to be baptised
- 2) biblical examples of believer's baptism
- 3) the biblical elements of believer's baptism

KEY VERSE: Matthew 28:19 *'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:'*

BOOKS TO MEMORISE: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, **Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus**

CHAPTERS TO READ THIS WEEK: Genesis 44-50

1. THE COMMAND TO BE BAPTISED

Matthew 28:18-20

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Matthew 28:18-20 provide what is commonly known as the 'Great Commission'. They were spoken by the Lord just before His ascension. They provide the last command and instructions of what Jesus' disciples (the church) are to be doing before He returns.

After Jesus rose from the dead (v.6), He told His disciples to go into Galilee where He will meet with them (v.7,10). There, in the appointed mountain in Galilee, Jesus establishes His superior credentials - He is the One who has all power and authority in heaven and earth (v.18).

Then Jesus tells them what He wants them to do. They are to go and teach all nations the things that He has taught them (v.19). Part of this teaching and obeying the command of Jesus includes baptising those they teach in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (v.20).

Baptism at this stage was a common way for people to “convert” to Judaism and to show close identification with a message.

For those wanting to become Jews, they were baptised to identify with the Jewish religion.

For those wanting to identify with John the Baptist’s message of repentance, they were baptised to show they were genuinely repenting.

Those Jesus talks about in Matthew 28:19-20 are identifying fully with the message and the person of Jesus Christ and with the Father and the Spirit.

The word “baptise” here means “to wash, to plunge, or to dip.”

Jesus commands that all those who listen to the teaching of His followers as they proclaim the message of Christ, His coming, His death, and resurrection are to be completely immersed into water.

By doing this, they are showing total identification with the person of Christ and with the salvation provided to us through Father, Son, and Spirit.

They are also showing by this act of obedience that they are going to continue to follow and obey all of Jesus’ teachings.

Baptism then is...

an act of love and obedience to the Lord Jesus

a way to publicly express to others our faith in and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ

a way to identify with Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection

a way to show that we have believed on the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit

2. BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF BELIEVER’S BAPTISM

Unfortunately, religious groups and Christian churches disagree about baptism. Usually, confusion about baptism stems more from religious tradition or man’s opinion than from the Bible being unclear on this important topic.

As we saw in Matthew 28, the gospel records (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) give us some detail about baptism. But, as we read the historical accounts of the early church (primarily in the book of Acts), we see how the Apostles of Christ and the early church understood and practiced baptism.

These examples instruct us in who to baptise, how to baptise, and when to baptise.

Acts 2:41-47

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. 42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. 44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. 46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Peter has just preached a great sermon about who Jesus Christ is and what He has done (v.37). The people are convicted of their sin and ask what they should do (v.38). Peter tells them to repent and be baptised every one in the name of Jesus Christ because ('for' =because of) they have had their sins forgiven ('remitted').

Then those who gladly received the word were baptised and that same day they were added unto them (v.41)

1 - Baptism is for those who hear, receive and believe the word of the gospel - believers!

2 - Baptism follows faith in Jesus and expresses that faith publicly.

3 - Baptism comes quite soon after faith and leads to a whole new way of living and a whole new commitment to Christ and the church (see v.41-47).

v.41 They were added to them.

v.42 They continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer.

v.44-45 They share what they had with one another.

v.46 They met together daily.

v.47 More and more people got saved and were added to the church.

Acts 8:12-13

12 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. 13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

Philip the Evangelist went to Samaria and preached Christ unto them (v.5). The Samaritans as a group listened to him (v.6). Those who believed what he preached about Jesus were baptised, both men and women (v.12). A former sorcerer believed and was baptised as well (v.13), but he turned out to not be genuine (v.21-25).

4 - Baptism is for believers.

5 - Not everyone who claims to be a believer and gets baptised is genuine.

Acts 8:35-39

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. 36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37 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. 38 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. 39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

After his time in Samaria, Philip was sent by God to a man from Ethiopia (v.26). This man was headed back to Africa after visiting Jerusalem (v.26). He had a copy of the book of Isaiah, likely purchased while he was in Jerusalem (v.27-28). When Philip arrived, the man was reading Isaiah ('Esaias') but could not understand what he was reading (v.30-34).

Philip proceeded to tell him that the One Isaiah was writing about in Isaiah 53 was Jesus. No doubt, Philip explained that Jesus was the promised Messiah who came to deliver them through His death on the cross (v.35).

As they went on their way and approached a body of water, the Ethiopian asked about baptism (v.36). Philip told him that he could be baptised if he believed. The man responded by saying, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God!' (v.37)

He commanded the chariot to stand still. Both of them went down into the water, and Philip baptised him (v.38) They came up out of the water. The Spirit caught away Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch went on his way rejoicing (v.39).

6 - Faith and understanding come before baptism.

7 - Baptism is to be *in water* not just *with water*.

8 - Great joy comes from believing on Jesus and obeying the Lord's command to be baptised.

Acts 9:17-18

17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. 18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

While on his way to Damascus, Jesus appeared to Saul and showed him that he was on the wrong path (v.3). Saul humbled himself before the Lord (v.4-6). He was blinded from the experience (v.8-9) until Ananias came and told him God's purpose for his life. After Ananias spoke to him and laid his hands on him, things like scales fell from his eyes and he received his sight (v.17-18).

Saul receiving his physical sight is a picture of him receiving spiritual understanding and salvation. Following this, he arose and was baptised (v.18). From that moment on, Saul would identify with Jesus Christ. A little while later, he began to preach that Christ is the Son of God (v.20).

9 - Coming to believe on Jesus Christ is a life-changing experience.

10 - Baptism takes place after salvation and is the first step of many steps the believer should take in their obedience to and service for the Lord.

Acts 10:47-48

47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

In Acts 10, we are introduced to a man named Cornelius. He was seeking God the best he knew how (v.1-2). Through a series of events, Peter came to tell him about Jesus (v.34-43). When Cornelius and those that were with him heard the message about Jesus, they believed and the Holy Ghost came on them (v.44-46).

It was obvious to Peter and the other Jewish Christians with him that they were truly saved and given the gift of the Holy Ghost, so they were baptised with water in the name of the Lord (v.47-48).

11 - Their salvation was genuine as evidenced by the Holy Spirit coming on them.

12 - The first step after believing was to be baptised in water.

Acts 16:30-33

30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. 32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

Paul and Silas were in prison for preaching the gospel. At midnight, God sent an earthquake that shook the prison and freed the prisoners (v.25-26). The jailor, who was personally responsible for every prison, took his sword to kill himself (v.27). Paul cried out, telling him not to harm himself for all the prisoners were still there (v.28).

Impressed by the message and joy of the prisoners and by the traumatic events of the night, the jailor fell down before them and asked what he could do to be saved (v.29-30). Paul and Silas told him, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house' (v.31).

They also taught him and everyone in his house the Word of the Lord (v.32). Then they took them and baptised them all right away (v.33).

13 - Salvation comes only through faith. Baptism is not part of salvation.

14 - Baptism is a public demonstration of faith in Christ.

3. BIBLICAL ELEMENTS OF BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

Here are some essential elements of believer's baptism based on what the Bible teaches:

a. For genuine believers

In every one of these situations and events in the book of Acts, the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ - who He was and what He did - was clearly explained.

In every one of these passages, the people who heard the message were called upon to believe first.

In no account, do we find a person being baptised who rejected the gospel message or who did not have genuine faith in Christ.

This would exclude children and those too young to believe, even if they have Christian parents. Everyone must believe on Christ. No one can believe for another.

b. After salvation

This might seem logical, but it is very important to understand that faith and baptism, though closely related, are two separate things.

Faith in Christ is a decision of the will to believe on Christ after hearing the truth of the word. Baptism is something a person should do *after* salvation.

Baptism is a visible picture of what has happened in a person's heart. Like a wedding band symbolises marriage, baptism is a beautiful symbol of a person's salvation, but it is still only a symbolic.

c. In the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

The name in which we are baptised is the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost - all three persons of the one God.

To be baptised in His name is to accept His total being - to accept that there is one God who sent His Son into the world and gave the Holy Spirit.

Those who are baptised in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost identify fully with the eternal, triune, and saving God.

d. By immersion

The examples of baptism in the Bible teach us that baptism is to be by immersion.

That's why John 3:23 says John the Baptist baptised where there was 'much water' and in the Jordan River (Mark 1:9).

Only immersion in the water adequately pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

Romans 6:3-4

³ 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.

e. No merit for salvation

Baptism is closely associated with salvation, but its role is only that of a symbol to represent the real thing. It adds nothing to our salvation.

Salvation is not of works.

Ephesians 2:8–9

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

The main work Paul focused on was not baptising but preaching the gospel, because only the gospel can save.

1 Corinthians 1:14–18

¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; ¹⁵ Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. ¹⁶ And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. ¹⁷ For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. ¹⁸ For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

QUESTIONS

Have you believed on Jesus Christ? Have you trusted in Him completely to save you? Or are you relying upon something else - your works, your baptism, or some other good deed? Only Christ can save.

If you have believed fully on Christ, then have you obeyed Him and publicly declared your faith in Him through baptism?

Have you been baptised Scripturally? As a believer? After salvation? In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? By immersion? With no merit for salvation? If not, then you need to be baptised scripturally.

If you have been baptised Scripturally, then remember what baptism means:

You have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ!

You are called out of the world and called to follow Him!

You belong to Him!

You are new in Christ!

You have a new loyalty, a new purpose, a new identity, and a new calling!