

What is baptism? Is baptism essential to be saved?

Bible study on baptism.

Most religious denominations teach that a person must believe, repent, and confess Jesus to be the Son of God in order to be saved. But they do not teach that someone must be baptized before he is saved. The Bible clearly teaches that a person is not saved until after he is baptized into Christ. In addition to the inspired writings in the Bible, it is interesting to read the uninspired writings of Christians from the second and third centuries since they taught that one was not saved until after being baptized. In fact, the doctrine of salvation without baptism into Christ began with the Gnostics.

Baptism

Baptism defined: Today, some people teach pouring and sprinkling as a type of baptism, but their teachings contradict the Bible. Some teach that baptism is not necessary while others teach and practice a baptism into something other than Christ. The English word baptism is a transliteration of the Greek word *baptisma* and is defined as immerse - not sprinkle or pour. Vines Expository Dictionary defines baptism as "consisting of the processes of immersion, submersion and emergence." Therefore, in order for one to be baptized in water, it is necessary to be submerged under the water and then to emerge from the water. Immersion cannot be obtained through sprinkling or pouring. Furthermore, history bares out that immersion in water was exclusively practiced by First Century Christians. Erroneous doctrines of sprinkling and pouring did not come into existence for many years after the apostolic age.

History of baptism: There are many sources of information in which we may gain an understanding of the history of baptism. The best source is the early Christian writings. Another source is The World Book Encyclopedia which states that "early Christians practiced immersion (submerging a person in water) as the method of baptism." Also, one may examine Johnson's Universal Cyclopedia, Edinburg Encyclopedia, and The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia.

The only baptism practiced by early Christians was immersion in water for the remission of sins. Affusion was not practiced until A.D. 251 when it was ministered to Novation in place of immersion because he was sick. After that time, sprinkling and pouring were erroneously practiced by some people and called "sick" or "clinical" baptism because it was only ministered to those who were sick. In A.D. 1331, at the Council of Ravenna, sprinkling was recognized as a substitute for immersion by the Catholic Church. Today, many religious denominations practice sprinkling and pouring as a substitute for immersion.

The Bible and history reveal that, during the First Century, godly men (including the apostles guided by the Holy Spirit) exclusively practiced immersion (baptism) in water for the remission of sins. But, over time, men began to stray from the truth and teach a baptism of sprinkling and

pouring which are a heretical substitute for Bible baptism. The word baptism is specific in the act that is commanded - immersion in water. Among religious leaders, there is not a dispute regarding the practice of baptism in the First Century. But, the dispute is whether God recognizes baptisms which He has not ordained (e.g., sprinkling, pouring, infant baptism, etc.). Each of us must decide whether we will practice the doctrines of men or the doctrine of Christ (cf. Col. 2:18-23). If we choose the doctrine of Christ, we must be baptized (immersed) in water for the remission of our sins. If we choose the doctrines of men, we will be eternally lost.

Must we be baptized into Christ to be saved? There are many false baptisms today. There is only one baptism that is pleasing and acceptable to God (Eph. 4:5). Many churches practice baptism as the means to join the church or as an outward rite attempting to show that a person has been saved. In the Bible, baptism was for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) and thus was said to wash away sins (Acts 22:16) and to now save us (1 Pet. 3:21).

For example, Baptist churches practice baptism as an act of obedience wherein one confesses Christ. They teach that baptism should be observed but that it is not essential for salvation. The Hiscox Guide for Baptist Churches says regarding the obligation of baptism:

- All men are under obligation to repent of sin, and to accept Christ as their only means of salvation. And all believers in Christ are bound by the most sacred considerations to obey their Lord's command, and confess him before men in baptism. No one who trusts him for salvation can willingly disregard his command, nor neglect the public profession of faith which this ordinance affords.
- It is not a question as to whether he can be saved without baptism, but whether he can be a true disciple, and refuse or neglect thus to obey and confess his Savior. . . . Baptism may not be essential to salvation, but it is essential to obedience (Edward T. Hiscox, *The Hiscox Guide for Baptist Churches*, Valley Forge, PA.: The Judson Press, 1964, Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 64- 15797, pg. 86-87).

Then regards the efficacy of baptism Hiscox says:

- Baptism, therefore, is an act of obedience, and as such brings the candidate into a more intimate and exclusive fellowship with his Lord; but it possesses no power in itself to remit sin, to change the heart, or to sanctify the spirit (Hiscox, *op. cit.*, pg. 88).

So, we can either believe the doctrines of men or the Bible. The Bible says that we are baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) and that in baptism our sins are washed away (Acts 22:16); hence, we retain our sins until we are baptized. And the Bible says that baptism is an antitype which now saves us (1 Pet. 3:21). Which do you believe - the doctrines of men or the Bible?

If you have been baptized or are considering being baptized, you must carefully investigate the baptism which is being administered. I know of some people who have thought that they had been baptized with one baptism and later found out that it was a completely different baptism than they had believed. If you have been baptized, have you compared your baptism to New Testament baptism?

In the New Testament, whether an individual had never been baptized, had been baptized with a Jewish baptism, or had been baptized with the baptism of John, it was imperative to be baptized into Christ to be saved. Therefore, individuals who had previously been baptized, perhaps as a

proselyte or with the baptism of John, were baptized again, but with a different baptism - the baptism of Jesus Christ.

During Paul's second visit to Ephesus, he met some people who were trying to follow Jesus. But because of their ignorance, they had not been baptized in the name of Jesus. They had only been baptized with the baptism of John. Paul taught them the baptism of Jesus and upon hearing these things the people were baptized again. This time, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:1-5).

For us living today, it is important to understand that the Bible teaches that anyone who may have been baptized, but not baptized into Jesus, needs to be properly baptized with the baptism of Jesus Christ to receive forgiveness of his sins and stand in the saving grace of God.

All spiritual blessings are in Christ:

Only individuals baptized into Christ may receive spiritual blessings. Notice the following Scriptures and the blessings that are in Christ:

Spiritual blessings in Christ:

Rom. 6:23	"eternal life in Christ"
Rom. 8:39	"love of God which is in Christ"
1 Cor. 1:2	"sanctified in Christ"
Rom. 3:24	"redemption that is in Christ"
Rom. 6:11	"alive to God in Christ"
1 Cor. 4:10	"you are wise in Christ"
1 Cor. 15:19	"we have hope in Christ"
2 Cor. 2:14	"triumph in Christ"
Gal. 3:28	"you are all one in Christ"
Rom. 8:1	"no condemnation to those who are in Christ"
Eph. 1:3	"who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"
Philem. 1:6	"every good thing which is in you in Christ"
2 Tim. 1:9	"grace which was given to us in Christ"
2 Tim. 2:1	"be strong in the grace that is in Christ"
2 Tim. 2:10	"the salvation which is in Christ Jesus"

Someone who has been baptized with a baptism other than the one baptism (Eph. 4:5) that we learn about in the Bible has not been baptized into Christ and cannot be blessed with every spiritual blessing. Only the people who are in Christ are sanctified and redeemed; therefore, only people in Christ have eternal life.

Baptism is a death, burial, and resurrection: One who is baptized into Christ is translated into the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13; 2:11-13). In this translation, one dies, is buried, and resurrects with Christ. Please read Romans 6:1-14 and notice:

- Rom. 6:3 baptism into Christ is baptism into His **death**
- Rom. 6:4 **buried** with Him through baptism into death to walk in newness of life
- Rom. 6:5 united together in the likeness of His **death** and **resurrection**
- Rom. 6:6 the old man is **crucified** with Christ
- Rom. 6:7 those who have **died** with Christ in baptism are freed from sin
- Rom. 6:8 those having **died** with Christ believe that they will live with Him
- Rom. 6:11 likewise, reckon yourself to be **dead** indeed to sin, but **alive** to God in Christ Jesus

Although understanding God's working in baptism (in its greatest detail) is not necessary to be saved, it is interesting to learn of the many spiritual blessings one receives in Christ (Eph. 1:3). We are buried with Christ in baptism, becoming dead in our trespasses and made alive together with Him (Col. 2:11-13).

Who May Be Baptized? What is the process of conversion to Christ?

These questions have been answered by men in what may seem to be a wise fashion (such as in the case of infant baptism and salvation by faith alone). But if we do not appeal to the Scriptures, our answer will not be pleasing to God. For example, there is one religious group that has a vote about whether they think one may be baptized. Such things as taking votes appear nowhere in the New Testament.

In order for us to appeal to the Bible, we need to review the eight accounts of conversion in the book of Acts. You may desire to read these accounts to refresh your memory. The people who could become Christians as recorded in the book of Acts may become Christians today.

Accounts of conversion in Acts

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| Acts 2:1-47 | thousands converted on the day of Pentecost |
| Acts 8:4-13 | Philip preached and converted many in Samaria |
| Acts 8:26-40 | the Ethiopian eunuch was converted and rejoiced |
| Acts 9:10-19; Acts 22:6-16 | Paul was converted |
| Acts 10:34-48 | Cornelius and many others were converted |
| Acts 16:11-15 | Lydia and her household were converted |
| Acts 16:16-34 | the Philippian jailer and his family were converted |
| Acts 18:1-8 | many of the Corinthians were converted |

Acts 19:3-5

Ephesians

After review of the eight accounts of conversion in Acts, notice that the Bible says:

1. that in all eight of the conversion accounts the people heard (were taught) the word of God before being baptized
2. that in six of the conversion accounts the people believed (had faith) before being baptized
3. that in one of the conversion accounts the people repented before being baptized
4. that in one of the conversion accounts a person confessed Jesus to be the Son of God before being baptized
5. that in all eight accounts the people were baptized

We also know from other Bible passages that hearing the gospel, faith, repentance, confession of Jesus, and baptism are necessary to be saved. But, it is interesting to me that the two things which are specifically recorded in all eight conversion accounts are hearing the word and baptism.

Why do you think this is the case? First, let me suggest that the conversion process does not begin until one hears (is taught) the word of God (cf. Rom. 10:17). Subsequently, one will either believe with an obedient heart, or disbelieve. Those who believe will repent of past sins in obedience to God, will confess Jesus to be the Son of God, and will be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. Secondly, let me suggest that the conversion process is complete with baptism. Baptism is recorded in each account to show the completion of the people's conversion to Christ.

For example, notice the Ethiopian eunuch. The conversion process began when Philip began to preach from Isaiah. But, when did he rejoice - after Philip began to preach, after believing in Jesus, or after confessing Jesus? He rejoiced after being baptized since he had nothing in which to rejoice until after being baptized (Acts 8:25-29).

So, we must either stand by the Bible or the doctrines of men. The Bible teaches that one who has heard the word, believes, repents, and confesses Jesus to be the Son of God may be baptized into Christ and is therefore saved. If we make other provisions such as voting or salvation by faith alone, are we not attempting to make ourselves into gods?

Some people teach a heretical doctrine of salvation before baptism:

There are some people teaching that an individual is saved before baptism and others teaching that an individual is saved without baptism. I urge you to be mindful of the following passages:

- Mark 16:16 "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."
- 1 Pet. 3:21 "There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism ..."

- Acts 22:16 "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."
- Rom. 6:3 "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"
- Eph. 1:3 "... who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ ..."
- 2 Tim. 2:1 "... be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."
- 2 Tim. 2:10 "... that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus ..."
- Col. 2:11-13 "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the circumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,"
- Eph. 2:5 "... even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

The preceding nine Scriptures teach four undeniable truths regarding salvation. Although some people have attempted to skew the simple truth of the gospel by going beyond God's written word or by taking away from God's word, we must take to heart these four Bible teachings and examine our lives. Carefully note:

1. **Those who are baptized will be saved.** Those who are not baptized will not be saved (Mark 16:16). Those who only believe as the demons (James 2:19), without obedience to God, will be condemned.
2. **Baptism now saves us (1 Pet. 3:21).** Our sins are washed away in baptism (Acts 22:16).
3. **It is necessary to be in Christ to be saved.** We enter into Christ by being baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3). No other baptism than "baptism into Christ" will satisfy God's command. Only in Christ may we receive every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3). And, only in Christ may we contact the grace of God (2 Tim. 2:1). Therefore without baptism into Christ, we do not receive spiritual blessings nor do we contact God's grace (cf. Eph. 1:3; 2:8).

4. **The grace of God is salvation (Eph. 2:8).** Specifically, the grace of God is salvation by being made alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:5). In baptism, we are buried and raised with Christ (Col. 2:11) henceforth being made alive (Col. 2:13). Therefore, without baptism into Christ, we do not contact the grace of God to be made alive with Christ. If you have been baptized into something or someone other than Christ, you have not been made alive with Christ; therefore, you have not contacted the grace of God.

What does the Bible teach in respect to infant baptism?

Review (above) the accounts of conversion in Acts. The final paragraph of that section concludes that we must either stand by the Bible or the doctrines of men. The Bible teaches that one who has heard the word, believes, repents, and confesses Jesus to be the Son of God may be baptized into Christ and is therefore saved. If we make other provisions such as voting or salvation by faith alone, are we not attempting to make ourselves into gods?

An infant cannot hear (understand in order to obey) the word of God, cannot believe in God, cannot repent of sin (he has no sin), and cannot confess Jesus to be the Son of God. Therefore, an infant cannot be baptized with the baptism of Christ.

But an infant can be baptized with a baptism of men. Baptism of infants is not from God and means nothing in respect to salvation.

The apostle Paul informs us of the difference in just getting wet (like in a bath tub) and being baptized with the baptism of Christ. He said: "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the circumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col. 2:11-13). The difference in baptism and just getting wet is faith in the working of God. An infant does not have faith in the working of God when he is baptized; therefore, he has only gotten wet.

Furthermore, the Bible does not say anything about infant baptism. Therefore, by the exclusion of infant baptism in the Holy Scriptures, we too must exclude infant baptism to be pleasing to God. Infants began to be baptized because of a false doctrine professing that infants were born in sin (doctrine of original sin), but the Bible teaches that they are safe (Matt. 19:14; 18:3). Infants were never commanded to be baptized nor were parents commanded to baptize infants. But the Bible says that "both men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12) - not infants.

Although loving parents may desire their infant children to be baptized in attempts of securing their salvation, we must not go beyond God's word (1 Cor. 4:6). God has instructed parents to bring their children "up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4) which includes preparing them to obey the gospel at such time as they may do so of their own volition. If you were baptized with a baptism of men, as is the case with infant baptism, you must be baptized with the baptism of Christ to receive God's blessing of eternal life.

Peter warns of the false prophets that would enter the church saying: "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed" (2 Pet. 2:1-2). Furthermore, Paul warns Timothy of the approaching apostasy and says: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created ..." (1 Tim. 4:1-3). So, it is of no surprise that false doctrines have entered the world inclusive of baptizing infants.

We must conclude that one does not enter into Christ through infant baptism, and that infant baptism is contrary to the word of God. Infant baptism is a false doctrine of men and not of God.

Questions:

Have you been baptized with the baptism of Christ? Have you been buried and raised with Christ in baptism? Have you been baptized into Christ wherein you receive every spiritual blessing?

If not, why not obey Jesus Christ today?