

On Baptism

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Appendix 3: Baptism

All church traditions have existing teachings on baptism, but rarely have believers thought critically about just what baptism is and who should get baptized, when or how. Some say only believers can be baptized after they start believing. Others say baptism confers grace or salvation or even removes "sin nature." Still others will baptize infants not to remove their inherited sin guilt, but to allow an infant to be a member of the Church, or to be accepted into a Covenant relationship with God and is a sign of "election." This belief usually implies that baptized infants are on the road to faith, and later they will publicly "confirm" their infant baptism or at least the wishes of their parents when they were baptized as infants. The problem of course is many who are baptized as infants will not confirm their baptism, leading to the untenable ideas that baptism didn't "work" and election "failed." Is the "work" of baptism really needed to get a child into the New Covenant?

Baptism by immersion typically means being dunked in water, either one time while someone says "in the name of Jesus" or "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit," or perhaps three times, while someone says, "in the name of the "Father" (dunk), "The Son" (dunk), "and the Holy Spirit" (dunk). Baptism by sprinkling or pouring is just that: the work of baptism through sprinkling or pouring water on the candidate, usually with certain words spoken at the same time. While believers tend to simply adopt whatever their denomination declares, usually based on centuries of traditions, they paradoxically declare that their view of baptism comes only from the scriptures. Some of these views have led to brutal wars and the most horrendous executions imaginable.

Perhaps we should think differently about baptism. Perhaps it's time to adopt a Kingdom of God mindset. My intention is explaining to the new believer or to the believer putting on a Kingdom of God mindset just what baptism is and is not. As always, please review what follows with grace and love. If you haven't read the Identity chapter that deals with the idea of "sin nature", please do so before continuing.

Jesus' Baptism

I grew up in a tradition that held baptism somehow washed away Adam's guilt. This teaching derived because Jesus inherited Adam's sin nature and sin guilt, and needed to be baptized to wash away his sins. After all, Peter said, "be baptized in the

name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins" and Ananias told Paul, "rise and be baptized and wash away your sins..."

John the Baptist offered the baptism of repentance, so did Jesus need to repent and have his sins washed away? No, he did not. The Identity chapter dealt a death blow to this Plato-inspired idea brought to the Bible. Let's start thinking about baptism as the biblical writers did. The work of baptism, even John's baptism, does not wash away sins or clean us from a sin nature. John's baptism was a public declaration of a heart posture of the baptismal candidate, having turned away from his previous me-centered life and towards a God-centered life. John was sowing the seeds of repentance for the onslaught of Jesus' Kingdom message.

So just why was Jesus baptized? When he came to John the Baptist to be baptized, his cousin protested that Jesus should be baptizing John. Not so, said Jesus. "It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."¹ As usual, the answer to this puzzling question is right in the text: "to fulfill all righteousness." By now, you should recognize that this is an identity statement. Jesus was declaring his identity as the true Israel of God.

Israel means, "He will rule as God." The nation of Israel served as a "copy and shadow" of Jesus, who will rule as God. Notice the nearby chart that explores how Matthew in particular, but other authors as well, clearly attempt to link Jesus as the true Israel. The chart lists just 12 points, but New Testament is full of these connections.

Jesus is the True Israel

Nation of Israel	Person of Israel (Jesus)
A man named Jacob had a son named Joseph Gen. 32:27-38	A man named Jacob had a son named Joseph Matt. 1:16
Joseph has a dream that leads him to Egypt Gen 37: 6, 28	Joseph has a dream that leads him to Egypt. Matt. 1:20
The nation of Israel grows in bondage to Egypt Gen. 37:28	Jesus grows up in bondage to the Law. Matt. 2:15
Israel is baptized in the water and the cloud descends (Holy Spirit) 1 Cor. 10:1-2	Jesus is baptized in water and the Holy Spirit descends Matt. 3:13-15
Israel wanders for 40 years in the wilderness and receives the Book of the Law Exod. 16:35	Jesus wanders for 40 days in the wilderness, defeating the Devil by quoting the Book of the Law Matt. 4:1-10
Israel receives the Law on a Mountain Ex. 24	Jesus interprets the Law on a Mountain Matt. 5-7
Israel invades the Promised Land to set up a Kingdom Joshua and thereafter	Jesus invades the Promised Land to set up a Kingdom Matt. 8 and thereafter
Israel was the vine planted by God. Ps. 80:8	Jesus is the true vine planted by God John 15:1
Israel was the offspring of Abraham Isa. 41:8	Jesus was the true offspring of Abraham Gal. 3:16
Israel was God's Son. Hos. 11:1	Jesus was God's Son. Matt. 3:17
"This is the blood of the covenant that Yahweh has made with you." Exod. 24:8	"This is the blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin." Matt. 26:28

In addition, it's important to understand something about Jewish culture in that time period. A Jewish male child became an apprentice to his father's business at about the age of 12. Over the next eighteen years, he learned the father's trade until he came of age. Then, at 30 years old, and he was publicly declared the father's son and received his full inheritance of everything the father owned, including the family's ancestry and heritage.

All of this context explains why Jesus declared he had to fulfill all righteousness to step into his Father's inheritance. As Israel was baptized before heading into the wilderness, so he needed to be baptized. This action declared publicly that he was

the Righteousness of God, God's own Son and was receiving the Father's inheritance. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove, pointing to the sacrificial nature of Jesus' mission. As doves were offered as a blood sacrifice in the Old Testament, so God announced that Jesus was going to be the ultimate sacrifice as and for Israel, to fulfill all righteousness.

Make Disciples of Nations and Baptize Them

Jesus was not just baptized in water. He was also baptized in fire on the Cross and by the Holy Spirit through the Resurrection.² As he prepared to ascend to heaven, he told his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The book of Acts records new converts were baptized in the name of Jesus. We'll consider what this actually means throughout this appendix.

Baptism and Circumcision

Paul directly connects baptism to circumcision. What we can say about the meaning of one should be consistent with what we can say about the other.

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the

circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.³

Baptism is in the New Covenant what circumcision was in the Old Covenant. Circumcision did not erase the "sin nature", had nothing to do with the forgiveness of sin, or guaranteed someone's eventual faith. The Old Testament is filled with those who were circumcised falling into apostasy. Moreover, it had nothing to do with their loyalty to Yahweh. When Abraham entered a covenant with God, Abraham circumcised his servants as well. His servants did not worship Yahweh, nor were they even included in the Covenant: only Abraham and his offspring were. Moreover, women were not circumcised, but women were in the covenant. Since circumcision has nothing to do with faith, forgiveness of sin, or being part of the covenant community, we may conclude that water baptism has nothing to do with having faith in Jesus, receiving the forgiveness of sin, or being in the New Covenant.

The history of Israel demonstrates that the act of circumcision was unrelated to being justified to God. Paul explicitly says so in Romans 4, because Abraham was justified by faith before being circumcised. Moreover, women could be justified by faith, but were not circumcised (while other ancient cultures contemporary to ancient Israel did practice female circumcision). The rite itself has no relation to salvation: Egyptians were also circumcised. The act had nothing

to do with salvation, election or propensity to follow Yahweh. Faith and loyalty to God is what mattered, not the act of circumcision.

The point of circumcision was that it was a visible sign that perpetually reminded the Hebrews that their race, their very lives, and the lives of their children began as a supernatural act of God on behalf of Abraham and Sarah. Circumcision was a constant reminder of God's grace to Abraham and Sarah and that God has chosen the Hebrews because of his love. In addition, circumcision also granted males the right to be included in the community of God's people and access to the "oracles of God."⁴ Women were members of the community by being married to a circumcised man or being born to Israelite parents. Only the Hebrews had access to the Yahweh, God Most High. Only they understood the relations between Yahweh and the other supernatural beings. Their access to this truth, their "election", did not guarantee that they would follow this truth, and indeed most of Israel rejected it.

Similarly, baptizing an infant is a public declaration that the child will be raised in a church where the child can hear the gospel. Whether or not the child will ultimately choose to follow Jesus is not determined by baptism, although membership and participating in a church fosters obedience and faith.

The New Testament does not record any instances of infant baptism. In some cases, once the head of the household found faith, the entire household was baptized, but the text does not explicitly mention infant baptism. However, the text never

forbids it. As long as we recognize that water baptism is the New Covenant version of circumcision, we can recognize that baptism confers onto baptismal candidates access to the body of believers where they can hear the gospel.

Many churches get around the theological baggage attached to infant baptism by performing a ritual of "Infant Dedication." In this ritual, parents publicly confess their intention to raise the infant in the church community, with its consequence of having access to the Gospel, in hopes that someday the child will make his or her own faith decision to follow Jesus. This dedication is later "confirmed" when the child grows up and actually makes the faith declaration, publicly announced through baptism. Thus, continued membership in the family of God should foster and sustain faith.

Baptism Remits Sin? Acts 2:38

Peter and about more than a hundred other disciples were gathered in their traditional spot in the Temple about ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven. They were reflecting on the risen savior and waiting for power, as the Lord commanded them to do. It was the Day of Pentecost, a festival that brought Jews from every nation on earth to the Temple. The atmosphere was electric with the topic of conversation, in a cornucopia of languages from across the Empire, being the recent events regarding Jesus. And then, the Holy Spirit fell, filling the entire house, and those not filled heard in their own languages

the mighty works of God. When they demanded an answer to this marvel, Peter stood up and told them the truth about Jesus. The audience became convicted and basically asked "what next?" Peter replied "Repent and be baptized each one you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Is Peter really instructing his audience to get water baptized so that their sins could be forgiven? Of course not! The focus is repentance, changing your heart towards faith in Jesus, which confers forgiveness through grace. The translation is better rendered, "because of the forgiveness of sin." This changed, repentant heart that received forgiveness is demonstrated by being baptized.⁵

Baptism Washes Your Sins Away? Acts 22:16

Paul gives his testimony in Acts 22, and includes this statement by Ananias, "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name." Is Ananias ignorant that baptism is the New Covenant version of circumcision? Does he really think baptism washes away your sins?

Not at all. We have the rest of the New Testament to understand that grace washes sins away, not baptism. The issue here is related to a point of Greek grammar lost in the English translation. It's likely that Ananias wanted to hear Paul confess Christ as he was being baptized because of the remission of

sins. The voice of the verbs in this text indicate these verbs are being enacted by Paul, based on his will to believe, calling on the name of the Lord.⁶

Baptism Saves You? 2 Peter 3:14-22

One of the most common arguments that the work of baptism confers salvation on someone comes from this passage, where we find another example of a foreshadowing, or a type, of Jesus.

But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which

corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him

This passage is trying to encourage us to endure suffering for the sake of righteousness. To illustrate his point, Peter links baptism to the events surrounding the Watchers, the giants, and the flood as depicted in what we might call a best seller in his day: 1 Enoch.

In 1 Enoch, the Watchers (the sons of God of Genesis 6) descended to earth, corrupted human flesh by the cohabitation with human women, who produced giants. These giants began consuming all flesh, even drink human blood, and so God sent the flood to destroy the corruption while preserving Noah. God locked up the Watchers in Tartarus, which is basically the really bad part of the underworld. The Watchers asked Enoch to intercede for them before God. Enoch made their case to allow them freedom, and God denied the request. Enoch then descended to Tartarus to tell them the bad news. But really the bad news was good news for us, because these Watchers were really bad news.

Peter uses this story as a "theological analogy between the events of Genesis 6 and the gospel and resurrection."⁷ He saw Enoch as a type foreshadowing Jesus, who, just like Enoch, proclaimed to the spirits in prison the gospel that, although

the Domain of Darkness had conspired against the Lord, God was still triumphant! Jesus then left hell and eventually ascended to sit at the right hand of God in heaven, above all the spiritual powers, including all the Watchers, both good and evil. Peter says baptism is "an appeal to God for a good consciousness through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The word translated "appeal" is best understood as "pledge." Moreover, "conscience" doesn't reflect the inner voice of right or wrong, but, consistent with its use in other Greek literature, a loyalty oath.⁸

Thus, baptism does not produce salvation, but rather reflects the salvation that already occurred as a public "pledge of loyalty to the risen Savior." Water baptism is a public declaration on who is on the Lord's side in the Kingdom Conflict. Every new baptism reminds the spiritual forces in the Domain of Darkness that they lost and to those loyal to the Kingdom of God that they won.

To dunk or to sprinkle?

Pre-modern nations with Christian leaders, full of grace and love for those who disagree with them, literally fought wars over the issue of immersion or pouring water as the means to a baptism, in addition to related doctrinal issues. Churches have split over the words that are supposed to be uttered during the act of dunking or sprinkling. Entire denominations are founded

on the mode of baptism. Well, let's release actual grace to this topic and think carefully.

First of all, the word "baptize" or "baptism" are English-cized versions of a Greek words like baptizo, baptismos, themselves based on bapt.

Baptizo means "to make overwhelmed."⁹

Baptisma means "washing."

Bapt has three definitions.

1. To cover wholly with a fluid
2. To moisten
3. To stain (as with dye), such that the cloth being stained with a dye is forever changed.

Let's do our best to interpret words based on the context of the authors, not based on our theological traditions. In The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that the New Testament authors most frequently quoted from), words based on bapt are found in such diverse places as someone washing and Naaman dipping his body in the river to clean himself from his skin disease. In some cases, the word means getting wet and other times it means to immerse or submerge. In the New Testament, a Pharisee noticed Jesus did not wash (baptizo) before eating. The thought conveyed is washing his hands, not immersing or even dipping his body. When you baptizo before eating a meal or after using the restroom, do you dip your hands in water or do you allow a fountain of water to wash over it? The Hebrews had a similar practice.

The go-to passage for dunking is Romans 6:3-6

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 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.

The thought behind this passage is basically the same as behind the passage from Colossians above. The English translations left the Greek word in there, instead of translating it as "immerse." The dunkers presume "baptized" is the motion of being immersed in water. But the assumption isn't warranted by either the passage from Romans or Colossians. In fact, I wonder if either passage is actually about water baptism at all.

Paul is talking about being united with Christ in his death by faith. Some suggest Paul is metaphorically drawing on the Old Testament ideas of ritual washing to illustrate how we are united with Christ in his death and then the resurrection cleansed from sin. But there's no hint of the idea of being washed of our sins. There's no hint of water at all. Paul talks about how we are in Christ through faith, and thus since we are fully immersed in Jesus, we died with Jesus on the Cross and

were resurrected with Jesus by God. That process resulted in our nature being changed, no longer are we born of earth, we are born from heaven.

The definition should be determined by the context. Look again at the third definition. What is the result of faith in Jesus? Simply put, our death, burial and resurrection. The old us is gone and the new us is here. For instance, what is the result of dipping a cloth in a blood-staining dye? The result is a new cloth stained by blood, forever changed. Being baptized into Christ by faith is being unified by Christ in faith. As when people are water baptized, they are united into a body of believers, so it is when we have faith in Jesus, we are stained with the blood, forever changed, forever united with Jesus.

My point is this: don't fret the mode of being water baptized. Just go with the flow (pun intended) of whatever body of believers you want to join. The water part isn't the point of being baptized into Christ's death. Being united in Christ and forever marked by his blood is.

Baptizing in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

The Lord's command in the Great Commission was to make disciples of the nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This has led to a debate about what words should be spoken during the immersing or

pouring. I know people who were baptized with the words "in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit", and then joined another church only to be told it didn't "count." They had to get re-baptized with the words "in the name of Jesus" spoken over them, as if the words had magic in them.

Let's step back a bit. Think back to the chapter on the King when we looked at the Name of Yahweh in the Old Testament. What did the Name signify? It meant the personal presence of Yahweh. Jesus flat out declares he manifested the Name because he was literally the personal presence of Yahweh. After Jesus released the Holy Spirit to dwell in believers, we are host the personal presence of Jesus within our bodies. We are covered wholly by God, stained as with a dye, forever changed. We host the presence of God. Getting baptized in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit means being immersed in his presence, becoming living temples of God.

Do not fret over the words spoken when you are water baptized. Get water baptized as a public declaration to the forces in the Domain of Darkness that they lost another one, reminding them of their utter doom. Celebrate! And step into the understanding that because of your faith in the risen savior and the knowledge of what he accomplished on the Cross, the presence of God is baptizing you: you've been baptized by the blood of the lamb, forever stained, forever changed. Amen and amen!

Endnotes

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1. Matt. 3:15
 2. See Campbell, "The Baptism of Jesus."
 3. Col. 2:11-12
 4. Rom. 3:2
 5. See Luke 11:32, where Luke uses "repented" similarly, conveying that idea that repent leads to different actions.
 6. Michael Heiser discusses the Greek grammar issues in his podcast located here: <http://www.nakedbiblepodcast.com/naked-bible-009-baptism-problem-passages-acts-2216/>.
 7. Michael Heiser, Unseen Realm, 338.
 8. Ibid.
 9. This and subsequent definitions are from James Strong, The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words, 592