

## **Doctrine of Baptism**

1. Baptism is a ritual practiced in the New Testament church that is still used in various forms by different denominations and branches of the Christian church.
2. Baptism involves the application of water to the body of a person. It is frequently thought of as an act by which the believer enters the fellowship of the church.
3. Widely differing interpretations of the act exist among Christian groups. They have different views on the nature of baptism, who should be baptized, and the appropriate method by which baptism should be administered.

## **The Nature of Baptism**

4. Three major positions on the nature of baptism exist among Christian groups.

### **There is the sacramental view**

5. According to this belief, baptism is a means by which God conveys grace.
6. By undergoing this rite, the person baptized receives REMISSION of sins, and is regenerated or given a new nature and an awakened or strengthened faith.
7. Both Roman Catholics and Lutherans have this view of the nature of baptism.
8. The traditional Roman Catholic belief emphasizes the rite itself-- that the power to convey grace is contained within the sacrament of baptism. It is not the water but the sacrament as established by God and administered by the church that produces this change.
9. The Lutherans, on the other hand, concentrate on the faith that is present in the person being baptized.
10. They also emphasize the value of the preaching of the word. Preaching awakens faith in a believer by entering the ear to strike the heart. Baptism enters the eye to reach and move the heart.
11. One Scripture especially important to the advocates of the sacramental view of baptism is (John 3:5): *"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* They also believe that the act of baptism itself produces a change in the life of the believer

### **There is the covenantal view**

12. Other Christian groups think of baptism not as a means by which salvation is brought about, but as a sign and seal of the COVENANT.
13. The covenant is God's pledge to save man. Because of what He has done and what He has promised, God forgives and regenerates.

14. On the one hand, baptism is a sign of the covenant.
15. On the other, it is the means by which people enter into that covenant.
16. The benefits of God's covenant are granted to all adults who receive baptism and to all infants who, upon reaching maturity, remain faithful to the vows made on their behalf at baptism.
17. The covenant, rather than the sacrament or another person's faith, is seen as the means of salvation; and baptism is a vital part of this covenant relationship.
18. In the covenantal view, baptism serves the same purpose for New Testament believers that circumcision did for Old Testament believers.
19. For the Jews, circumcision was the external and visible sign that they were within the covenant that God had established with Abraham. Converts to Judaism (or proselytes) also had to undergo this rite. But now under the new covenant, baptism instead of circumcision is required.
20. Circumcision refers to a cutting away of sin and a change of heart.
  - *Deuteronomy 10:16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.*
  - *Ezek 44:7 In that ye have brought into my sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, even my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant because of all your abominations.*
  - *Ezekiel 44:9 Thus saith the Lord GOD; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel.*
21. Similarly, baptism also depicts a washing away of sin
  - *Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*
  - *Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;*
22. Baptism depicts a spiritual renewal.

- *Romans 6:4 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.*
- *Colossians 2:11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: 12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.*

23. The washing of sin and spiritual renewal are clearly linked.

- *Colossians 2:11 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.*

24. There is the symbolical view— This view stresses the symbolic nature of baptism by emphasizing that baptism does not cause an inward change or alter a person's relationship to God in any way.

25. Baptism is a token, or an outward indication, of the inner change that has already occurred in the believer's life.

26. It serves as a public identification of the person with Jesus Christ, and thus also as a public testimony of the change that has occurred. It is an act of initiation. It is baptism into the name of Jesus.

27. According to the symbolic view, baptism is not so much an initiation into the Christian life as into the Christian church.

28. A distinction is drawn between the invisible or universal church, which consists of all believers in Christ, and the visible or local church, a gathering of believers in a specific place.

29. This position explains that the church practices baptism and the believer submits to it because Jesus commanded that this be done and He gave us the example by being baptized Himself.

30. Thus, baptism is an act of obedience, commitment, and proclamation.

31. According to this understanding of baptism, no spiritual benefit occurs because of baptism. Rather than producing REGENERATION of faith, baptism always comes after faith and the salvation that faith produces.

32. The only spiritual value of baptism is that it establishes membership in the church and exposes the believer to the values of this type of fellowship.

### **The Subjects of Baptism**

33. Another issue over which Christian groups disagree is the question of who should be baptized. Question:

*“Should only those who have come to a personal, conscious decision of faith be baptized?”*

*Or,*

*“Should children be included in this rite?”*

*“If children are proper subjects, should all children, or only the children of believing parents, be baptized?”*

### **Infant baptism**

34. Groups that practice baptism of infants baptize not only infants but also adults who have come to faith in Christ.

- **First Argument.** One of the arguments proposed in favor of baptizing infants is that entire households were baptized in New Testament times

*Acts 16:15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.*

*Acts 16:33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.*

Certainly such households or families must have included children. Consequently, groups who hold this position believe this practice should be extended to the present day.

- **Second Argument.** A second argument cited is Jesus' treatment of children. Jesus commanded the disciples to bring the children to Him. When they did so, He blessed them (Mark 10:13-16). Because of this example from Jesus, it would seem inconsistent to deny baptism to children today.
- **Third Argument.** A third argument put forth by covenant theologians is that children were participants in the Old Testament covenant: *“And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you”* (Gen. 17:7).

They were present when the covenant was renewed.

*Deuteronomy 29:10 Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, 1 Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: 12 That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day: 13 That he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.*

*Joshua 8:35 There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them.*

They had a standing in the congregation of Israel and were present in their religious assemblies

*Joel 2:16 Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.*

The promises of God were given to the children as well as adults (Is. 54:13; Jer. 31:34).

**Circumcision was administered to infants in The Old Testament.** Since baptism has now replaced circumcision, it is natural that it should be administered to children, according to those who practice infant baptism.

Those who believe in baptismal regeneration (Catholics especially) argue that baptism of infants is necessary. In traditional

Roman Catholic teaching, unbaptized infants who die cannot enter heaven in this state, but are instead consigned to a state of limbo.

If this fate is to be avoided, they must be baptized in order to remove the guilt of their sins and receive new life.

Although Lutherans also believe in baptismal regeneration, they are not as certain that God's grace is communicated through this sacrament.

They believe that God may have some method, perhaps not yet revealed to us, of producing faith in the unbaptized.

But this, if it is true, would apply only to children of believers. Lutherans are careful to affirm that this whole area of belief is a mystery, known only to God.

- **Fourth Argument.** A final argument presented in support of infant baptism is the historical evidence. Infant baptism has been practiced in the church from early times, certainly as early as the second century, according to those groups that baptize infants.

An issue which divides those groups that practice infant baptism is the question of which infants should be baptized.

In general, the covenant theologians (Presbyterians, Lutherans, and the various Reformed groups) insist that only the children of believing parents (hence, members of the covenant) should be included.

Roman Catholics, however, tend to baptize even infants and children whose parents have not made such a commitment.

These different positions on this question show how these groups feel about the role of personal faith in one's salvation.

For Roman Catholics, this question presents no real difficulty, since they believe the sacrament of baptism has power in itself to bring about salvation.

The only faith necessary is that someone has enough faith to bring and present the child. Faith is also necessary for the person administering baptism. He must believe that the sacrament has saving power.

Lutherans, however, with their strong emphasis on faith as the means of salvation, face a more difficult problem. It is obvious that an infant does not have faith.

One way of handling this problem is to resort to the concept of unconscious faith. Reasoning power and self-consciousness, they point out, must not be thought of as faith. Luther observed that a person does not cease to have faith when he is asleep or when he is preoccupied or working strenuously.

Thus Lutherans believe the Bible teaches the implicit faith of infants

*Matthew 18:6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*

*Luke 1:15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.*

*1 John 2:13 I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.*

If Jesus could speak of "*these little ones who believe in Me,*" (Matt. 18:6), and if John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb, then little children can have implicit faith.

Lutherans also believe that the faith necessary for the salvation of children can be communicated through their parents.

35. **For the covenant theologians**, the problem of the faith of children is not a difficult issue. It is a potential faith. So also is the salvation. God promises to give the benefits signified in baptism to all adults who receive it by faith.
36. This same promise is extended to all infants who, when they grow to maturity, remain faithful to the vows that were made on their behalf at the time of their baptism.
37. In this view, baptism's saving work depends on the faith that will be, rather than upon the faith that is.
38. **Believer's baptism.** Those who hold to this view believe that baptism should be restricted to those who actually exercise faith. This approach excludes infants, who could not possibly have such faith.
39. The proper candidates for baptism are those who already have experienced the new birth on the basis of their personal faith and who give evidence of this salvation in their lives.
40. Both positive and negative arguments are advanced in support of this view.
  - **The positive approach** argues from evidence in the New Testament. In every instance of New Testament baptism in which the specific identity of the persons was known, the persons being baptized were adults.

Further, the condition required for baptism was personal, conscious faith. Without this, adherents of believer's baptism point out, baptism was not administered. This is especially evident in the Book of Acts

*Acts 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. 39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. 40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. 41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*

*Acts 8:12 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.*

*Acts 10:47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?*

*Acts 18:8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.*

*Acts 19:4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

*Matthew 3:2-6 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. 3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, 6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.*

*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:*

In the New Testament church repentance and faith came first, followed by baptism.

- **The negative arguments** given to support believer's baptism are generally responses to the arguments for infant baptism.

One of these revolves around the household baptism issue. Paul spoke the word to the Philippian jailer and all the people in his house. And the jailer "*rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household*" (Acts 16:34). Crispus, the synagogue ruler, also "*believed on the Lord with all his household*" (Acts 18:8).

Those who hold to believer's baptism only point out that these passages do not state specifically that infants were included among those baptized.

All the people in these households could have been adults.

The other argument concerns Jesus' blessing of the children. The believer's baptism position on this incident from Jesus' life is that baptism is not mentioned or even implied.

These children illustrate simplicity and trust, like that which all believers should display. Jesus blessed the children, these groups agree, but this was not baptism.

Many believer's baptism groups do practice a ritual known as child dedication, which is more nearly a dedication of the parents than of the child.

41. **The Form of Baptism.** The final major issue is the method or form of baptism—whether by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling. On this issue, Christian groups organize into two major camps—those which insist upon the exclusive use of immersion, and those which permit and practice other forms.

- **The immersionist position**—This group insists that immersion is the only valid form of baptism. One of their strongest arguments revolves around the Greek word for baptism in the New Testament.

Its predominant meaning is "*to immerse*" or "*to dip*," implying that the candidate was plunged beneath the water. But there are also other arguments that strongly suggest that immersion was the form of baptism used in the early church.

- ❖ **The Didache**, a manual of Christian instruction written in A. D. 110-120, stated that immersion should be used generally and that other forms of baptism should be used only when immersion was not possible.
- ❖ **In addition, the circumstances** involved in some of the biblical descriptions of baptism imply immersion. Thus, John the Baptist was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, "*because there was much water there*" (John 3:23).
- ❖ **Jesus apparently went down into the water** to be baptized by John (Matt. 3:16). The Ethiopian said, "*See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?*" (Acts 8:36).
- ❖ The symbolism involved in baptism also seems to argue that immersion was the biblical mode, according to those groups that practice immersion exclusively. (Romans 6:4-6) identifies baptism with the believer's death (and burial) to sin and resurrection to new life, as well as the death and resurrection of Christ. Only immersion adequately depicts this meaning, according to the immersionist position.

**Romans 6:4-6** *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. 5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: 6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*

### **Special Note.**

Water supply. The water supply of Palestine is abundant, except in the desert regions, which include only a small part of its area. The Jordan runs into the Dead Sea, which has no outlet and which maintains its level solely by evaporation, being consequently very salty; the surface is nearly 1,300 ft. below the Mediterranean, whereas the Sea of Galilee (680 ft. below sea-level) is sweet and full of fish. The Jordan is fed, not only by the snows of Hermon, but by many affluent streams from both sides.

There are several streams also in Sharon, including the Crocodile River under Carmel. In the mountains, where the hard dolomite limestone is on the surface, perennial springs are numerous. In the lower hills, where this limestone is covered by a softer chalky stone, the supply depends on wells and cisterns. In the Beersheba plains the water, running under the surface, is reached by scooping shallow pits-especially those near Gerar, to be noticed later (*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*)

- **The pluralistic position**—Holders of this view believe that immersion, pouring, and sprinkling are all appropriate forms of baptism.

They point out that the Greek word for baptism in the New Testament is sometimes ambiguous in its usage.

While its most common meaning in classical Greek was to dip, to plunge, or to immerse, it also carried other meanings as well. Thus, the question cannot be resolved upon linguistic grounds.

These groups also argue from inference that immersion must not have been the exclusive method used in New Testament times.

For example, could John have been physically capable of immersing all the persons who came to him for baptism?

Did the Philippian jailer leave his jail to be baptized? If not, how would he have been immersed?

Was enough water for immersion brought to Cornelius' house? Or, did the apostle Paul leave the place where Ananias found him in order to be immersed?

Those groups that use sprinkling or pouring also point out that immersion may not be the best form for showing what baptism really means. They see the major meaning of baptism as purification.

They point out that the various cleansing ceremonies in the Old Testament were performed by a variety of means-- immersion, pouring, and sprinkling (Mark 7:4; Heb. 9:10).

Others note the close association between baptism and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which was from above. Thus, in their view, true baptism requires the symbolism of pouring rather than immersion.

