

WATER BAPTISM

Key question

What is the Scripture's teaching on water baptism?

Key text

Romans 6:4

“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

Key Definition

Water Baptism

Water baptism is the initiatory rite of the Christian church whereby an individual gives formal confession of their faith in Christ and is symbolically identified with His death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sin.

A. The meaning of baptism

1. Common Meaning – “to dip,” “to immerse,” “to overcome”.
2. Spiritual Meaning – “to be identified with the one in whose name you are baptized”.
 - a. Spirit Baptism – Identification with Christ at salvation.
 - b. Water Baptism – Physical picture of Spiritual Baptism.
3. To believers outside our culture and in the 1st century spirit baptism and water baptism are associated with each other.
4. To believers within our culture spirit baptism is separated in time from water baptism.

B. Six kinds of Baptism are mentioned in the Bible.

JOHN'S BAPTISM (Jn.1:25-33) in water of the Jews as a sign of repentance in preparation for the Christ. This is NOT Christian baptism, as we practice it today.

JESUS' BAPTISM (Matt.3:13-17) came in the context of John's baptism but was unique “fulfilling all righteousness” and anointing Jesus for ministry.

BAPTISM INTO MOSES (I Cor.10:1-2) was the same as saying “identified with Moses” through the Exodus.

BAPTISM WITH FIRE (Matt.3:9-12, Lk.3:16-17) is a reference to experiencing God's judgment.

BAPTISM WITH THE SPIRIT (Matt.3:11) is by Jesus, of all regenerate believers into the “body of Christ”. This is not a water baptism but is the spiritual basis of the church’s baptism with water.

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM (Matt.28:18-20) is a water baptism, by the church, of those who are united with Christ through faith. It is the subject of this paper.

John’s Baptism Jn. 1:25-33	Spirit Baptism Matt. 3:11	Believer’s Baptism Matt. 28:18-20
by John	by Jesus	by disciples
with water	with Spirit	with water
of Jews	of all	of all
sign of repentance	regeneration	sign
temporary	continuous	continuous

C. Five views

	Meaning	Mode	Recipients
Catholic	A means of imparting the new birth– eternal life. SACRAMENT	Sprinkling	Anyone associated with the Roman Catholic Church
Lutheran	A means of imparting the new birth when mixed with faith SACRAMENT	Sprinkling	Infants of believing parents and adults upon confession of faith.
Presbyterian	A sign and seal of the covenant promises SACRAMENT	Sprinkling	Infants of believing parents and adults upon confession of faith.
Baptist	A sign of faith and repentance. ORDINANCE	Immersion	Adults and children upon confession of faith.
Church of Christ	A sign of faith and necessary act of repentance. ORDINANCE	Immersion	Adults and children upon confession of faith.

View	Reformed Sign and seal of the covenant	Baptist Token of salvation
Statement of View/Meaning of Baptism	The sacraments are outward signs and seals of an inward reality. “Baptism is the act of faith by which we are brought into the covenant and hence experience its benefits.” Baptism is the initiation into the covenant and a sign of salvation.	It is simply a testimony—the first profession of faith that the believer makes. The rite shows the community that the individual is now identified with Christ. It is a symbol of an inward reality and is not sacrament. There is no objective effect upon the person.
Subject	Infants and adults	Believing adults and believing children
Mode	Sprinkling or pouring	Immersion

<p>Support</p>	<p>Baptism continues the covenant made with Abraham and his seed (Gen. 17:7). Baptism replaces circumcision (Acts 2:39; Rom. 4:13-18; Gal. 3:13-18; Heb. 6:13-18; Col. 2:11-12).</p> <p>Whole families included in baptism just as in the Old Testament families were included in the covenant (Acts 16:15, 33; 18:19).</p>	<p>In New Testament, saving faith is always a prerequisite to salvation.</p> <p>New Testament examples show adult believers being baptized.</p> <p>Baptism by immersion best pictures the death of Christ and his resurrection.</p> <p>Many New Testament texts discuss salvation by faith apart from baptism (Luke 23:43; Acts 16:30-31; Eph. 2:8-9).</p>
<p>Objections</p>	<p>Church and Israel are not the same entity.</p> <p>Circumcision marked entrance into theocracy which included both believers and unbelievers.</p> <p>Circumcision was for males only; baptism is for all believers.</p> <p>New Testament believers were all adults. No clear example of infant baptism in New Testament.</p>	<p>New Testament has examples of household baptism, which probably included children (Acts 16:29-34).</p> <p>Early church apparently baptized unbelieving infants of believing parents.</p> <p>Many New Testament verses closely link baptism and salvation.</p>

View	Roman Catholic Means of saving grace	Lutheran Imparting saving grace on the one exercising true faith
<p>Statement of View/Meaning of Baptism</p>	<p>“By either awakening or strengthening faith, baptism effects the washing of regeneration.” For Catholics this occurs with baptism. Faith does not have to be present. The work is solely God’s work in the person. Eradicates both original sin and venial sins. Infuses sanctifying grace.</p>	<p>In order for baptism to be effectual, saving faith must be exercised prior to the baptism. Without saving grace baptism is ineffectual.</p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p>Infants and adults</p>	<p>Adults and children</p>
<p>Mode</p>	<p>Sprinkling</p>	<p>Sprinkling or immersion</p>
<p>Support</p>	<p>Acts 22:16 and Titus 3:5 link salvation and baptism together.</p> <p>Acts 2:38 links repentance and baptism for salvation.</p> <p>Other scriptural support: John 3:5; Romans 6:3; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 John 3:9; 5:8</p> <p>Church father support: Barnabas letter, Pastor Hermas, St. Justin, Tertullian, Cyprian. Council of Trent supported view.</p>	<p>Acts 2:41; 8:36-38; 10:47-48; 16:15, 31-34; 18:8; Romans 6:1-11</p>
<p>Objections</p>	<p>Ephesians 2:8-9 says salvation is by grace through faith.</p> <p>New Testament emphasis is on faith apart from works.</p> <p>Baptism linked closely to conversion in New Testament, but never a requirement for conversion.</p> <p>New Testament believers were all adults. No clear example of infant baptism in New Testament.</p>	<p>This position differs from the Catholic view only with respect to faith. The Catholic view does not require saving faith on the part of one being baptized. The baptism is effectual in and of itself. In Mark 16:16 unbelief not baptism condemns.</p> <p>The use of baptism as a means of securing grace is not clearly taught by Christ or Paul. This suggests that it is not essential. The many people Jesus dealt with were not confronted with baptismal needs, but only with the need for faith.</p> <p>To incorporate baptism with faith for salvation violates Ephesians 2:8-9. The problem of works exists.</p>

D. **Three modes of water baptism in the Christian tradition.**

1. Immersion – the best mode
 - a. The normal meaning of the word is immersion.
 - b. Proselyte baptism was by immersion.
 - c. The practice of the 1st century was immersion – Mark 1 9:10.
 - d. This is the best picture of identification with Christ – Romans 6:4.
2. Pouring – An acceptable mode where immersion is impossible. Was used in early 2nd century.
3. Sprinkling – Acceptable on very rare occasions. Became acceptable in 13th century.

E. **Water baptism and salvation**

1. Water baptism is equated with regeneration (salvation) in both high church circles where it is identified with circumcision of the Old Covenant and in low church circles by the Churches of Christ sect.
2. **Defining the issue**
 - a. The issue IS NOT the necessity of water baptism in one's recognition as a Christian. Water baptism is not to be viewed as an optional event in becoming a Christian. In the N.T., if a person was not water baptized, they were probably not recognized as Christians. This is not to say however that, in God's eyes, they were outside the kingdom of God. Water baptism is the mark of initiation into the Christian church.
 - b. The real questions ARE:
 1. What is the relationship between WATER BAPTISM and THE TIME OF REGENERATION? Is water baptism a means of grace whereby God bestows forgiveness, spiritual life, and union with Christ? Is saving faith incomplete until water baptism is properly administered?
 2. Must a person be WATER BAPTIZED "FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS" (with a view to that act of baptism being the point at which the sins are removed)?
3. **Understanding the Church of Christ sect.**
 - a. The CHURCH OF CHRIST is a nondenominational (really an anti-denominational) fellowship of some 12,000 autonomous congregations (2,000,000 people) which trace their origin to the "RESTORATION MOVEMENT" (recovery of N.T. Christianity) of the mid 1800s in the Southeastern U.S. The ministries of THOMAS & ALEXANDER CAMPBELL, JAMES O'KELLY, ABNER JONES, ELIAS SMITH, & BARTON STONE were influential in formulating a pattern of doctrine and practice that was characterized by:
 1. A plea for unity on the basis of faith in Christ over anti sectarian doctrines.
 2. A conservative, Arminian, baptistic theology with only the Bible as its creed.
 3. A commitment to restore the contemporary church to its N.T. foundation by trying to replicate the practices, standards & teachings of the 1st century church.
 - b. NOTE THE FOLLOWING SLOGANS OF THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT:
 1. "No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no name but the Divine".
 2. "We are not the only Christians, but we are Christians only".
 3. "In matters of doctrine unity, in matters of opinion liberty, in all things love."

- c. In time, certain distinctives became major points of division between the Churches of Christ and other groups, (thus eroding the initial commitment to avoid sectarian beliefs). As with most anti-denominational groups there is a tendency to become (in an informal sense) even MORE sectarian than other formal denominations. Among these distinctives are:
1. Arminian views of the security of the believer. A believer can lose his salvation through disobedience.
 2. The refusal to join any inter-congregational organization. This would include para-church missionary organizations.
 3. The proscription of any musical instruments in worship. All singing is to be without instruments.
 4. An avoidance of all “sectarian” (non-biblical) terminology. Theological or denominational terms like “Baptist” or “Arminian” are to be avoided.
 5. A DISTINCTIVE VIEW OF WATER BAPTISM AS THE POINT OF REGENERATION. This is the issue in this paper.

6. Texts in question

MATT. 28:19 “Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

It is suggested by some that this text teaches us that water baptism IS THE ISSUE in making disciples. In this passage, the initiation into the process of discipleship is our union with Christ. Water baptism (the symbol of that union) is an appropriate and common metaphor in this context (note Col.2:11-12 where baptism is likened to circumcision). The focal issue in this passage is the NAME into which a person was baptized not baptism as the MEANS of salvation.

MK. 16:16 “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”

This text is understood by some to teach that faith PLUS baptism is necessary for salvation. I would respond by saying that baptism is here a description of the kind of faith (or the extent of the faith) that saves - it is an open faith (not a private faith).

The real issue however is faith, as the last clause indicates. This would mean that if a person professed faith and was UNWILLING to be baptized he or she would be indicating that their faith was not saving faith but something short of it.

JOHN 3:5 “Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.’”

Does the “water” in this text refer to Christian baptism? The water here, more likely refers to the baptizing ministry of John the Baptist (not a Christian baptism - see above) which marked those who were penitent and looking for the Christ. The Jews who participated in John's baptism and were recipients of the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost would make up the early church (enter the kingdom). It is also possible that John is thinking of Ezek.36:25-27 where “cleansing” & “renewal” are linked. “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.”

ACTS 2:38 “And Peter said to them, ‘Repent (plural), {and let each of you be baptized (singular) in the name of Jesus Christ} for the forgiveness of your (plural) sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

This is one of the primary proof texts, where the Church of Christ would insist that the forgiveness of sins is directly tied to baptism. It should be noted however that the clause “and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” can be understood as parenthetical because of the harmony between Greek tenses indicated above. This suggests that we have here, a reiteration of Matt.28:19. The relationship between REPENTANCE and forgiveness is the key. Luke’s writing (Lk.24:47; Acts 3:19, 5:31, 8:22, 11:18, 26:18-20) is clearly in support of this connection. Only in 2:38, & 22:16 is baptism even mentioned, and in these texts the link with forgiveness is not compelling.

ACTS 22:16 “And now why do you delay? {Arise (participle), and be baptized (imperative)} {and wash away (imperative) your sins, calling (participle) on His name.}”

This verse is thought to link "baptized" with “wash away your sins”. The verse, however, can be divided into two clauses that point to a different connection. The baptism can just as well be linked to “Arise” as "wash away your sins". Baptism is however, a picture of God's inner work of washing away sin (I Cor. 6:11 “And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.”). "Calling on His name” is the key (not baptism) to the removal of sin as Rom.10:9-14, Acts 2:21, & Joel 2:32 indicate.

GAL. 3:27 “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

Some, have suggested that “baptized” here is a reference to water baptism and that it is the act of clothing oneself with Christ. While it may be said that water baptism does picture our union with Christ it is not clear that water baptism is in view here. This is more likely the “baptism of or in the Holy Spirit” which according to Paul, unites all believers to Christ & His church (I Cor.12:12-13 “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks,---”. See also Titus 3:5 with Ezek.36:25-27). This is the baptism referred to in Rom.6:3-4 “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

EPH. 5:26 “that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”

Does the “washing of water” here refer to Christian baptism? In this passage the metaphor of “washing of water” pictures the purification ritual of the Old Covenant (Ezek.36:25-27 above) which is accomplished here by the effectual (faith quickening) preaching of the word. In other texts it is attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. Look at Titus 3:5 “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,” Heb. 10:22 “let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” The references to O.T. CEREMONIAL CLEANSING (sprinkled, pure water) in this text are hard to escape.

COL.2:11-12 “--- and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”

This text is used by the Church of Christ to teach that AT THE MOMENT of water baptism the believer is united with Christ's death and resurrection. It is my sense that baptism pictures our union with Christ's death and resurrection just as circumcision pictures an Israelite's union with the covenant community. In Rom.4:9-13 & Gal.5:1-6, Paul makes it very clear that Abraham was saved BEFORE he was circumcised. So it is, I conclude with those who are baptized.

I PET. 3:21 “And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you - not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

This text, we are told, clearly teaches that baptism saves. I would respond by noting that two things are said about baptism in this passage: (1) It corresponds to the salvation (separation) of Noah from his sinful generation via the flood - vs.20. The salvation in view here is not from sin or condemnation but from a wicked age or environment. (2) It is an appeal, by 1st century believers, to God for a good conscience. That is to say, it saves them (separating them, and giving them confidence through their union with Christ which baptism pictures) from their sinful generation.

7. Objections to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration.

a. Scriptural objections

1. The great emphasis in the Apostles teaching that salvation (justification, regeneration) was of:

REPENTANCE: “Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away,”
Acts 3:19.

See also Lk.24:47 “and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations,”; **Acts 5:31** “to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”; **Acts 11:18** “repentance that leads to life”; **Acts 26:18-20** “so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins ---”

FAITH: “If God therefore gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?” (to baptize) **Acts 11:17**

See also Jn.1:12 “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”; **Jn.3:14-16** “that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.”; **Jn.7:37-40** “that every one who beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life.”; **Acts 10:43** “that through His name every one who believes in Him has received forgiveness of sins.”; **Acts 13:38-39** “through Him every one who believes is freed”; **Acts 15:9** “cleansing their hearts by faith.”; **Rom.3:21-4:8** “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.”; **Rom.9:33** “and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed.”; **Rom.10:10** “for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses resulting in salvation.”; **I Cor.1:21** “to save those who believe”; **Gal.2:16** “a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus”; **Gal.3:2** “Did you receive the

Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?"; **Gal.3:26** "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."; **Eph.1:13** "having also believed, you were sealed in Him"; **Eph.2:8-10** "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God"; **I Tim.1:16** "for those who would believe in Him for eternal life."; **I Jn.5:1** "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God"; **I Jn.5:13** "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life."

NOTE: In not one of the above texts is baptism mentioned as instrumental to salvation while the repeated and clear reference is to "repentance" and "faith" as the key issue. If water baptism was essential to salvation it is inconceivable that it would not be mentioned.

2. **The testimony of Paul's ministry in I Cor.1:14-16** where, in preaching the gospel, he demphasized baptism "I thank God that I baptized none of you, --- For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel,". If baptism was the point at which sins were removed, Paul seems to have left a lot of people in their sins. Is this plausible?
 3. **The experience of Cornelius in Acts 10:43-47, 11:13-18** where believers were baptized AFTER receiving the Spirit. This would be impossible if baptism were necessary to bring salvation.
 4. **The obedience of faith:** "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." **Jn. 6:29**. Outward acts of obedience do not satisfy the demand of the gospel while inner faith does. See also **Jn.3:36; Acts 6:7; Rom.10:16, 16:26; II Thess.1:8; I Pet.1:22, 2:7-8, 4:17**.
 5. **The testimony of Jesus against the Pharisees in Matt.15:11** "Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth,". The Pharisees insisted that the outward form of faith (in this case the washing of hands) be the mark of a person's "right standing" with God while Jesus drew attention to the inner heart as the real issue.
 6. **The testimony of Paul concerning circumcision and faith in Rom.4:9-13**. In this passage Paul argues that circumcision came after saving faith and that Abraham was justified by faith BEFORE he outwardly obeyed the law. NOTE ALSO **Gal.5:1-6, 6:15**. These passages are so clear and fundamental to Paul's teaching about God's grace that it is hard to imagine how anyone could miss the point - INNER FAITH NOT OUTER CEREMONY OR CONFORMITY TO THE LAW BRINGS SALVATION.
 7. **The many exhortations to unity in Christ on basic doctrine and tolerance in areas of sectarian differences - I Cor.1-3:** While I can respect my brothers and sisters in the Church of Christ as a part of God's family even though we may have a different view of the Biblical teaching on some issues; I am not able to respect their stand of excluding from fellowship (recognition as fellow Christians) those who disagree with them on this issue.
- b. **Common sense objections**
1. **Is it plausible** that only those who have been baptized "for the forgiveness of their sins" (as the Church of Christ understands that phrase) are saved? This means that only people in the Church of Christ (which had its origin in the late 1800s) are true Christians.

2. Is it credible for a fellowship of believers to claim to:

- **have no creed**, when they hold so strictly and dogmatically to unique interpretations of Scripture? The concept that there is to be "no creed but Christ" flies in the face of the narrow interpretations of much of the N.T. which became something of an informal (unwritten) creed along side Christ.
- **be committed to unity**, when their own history is riddled with divisions over trivia and when they exclude all others as non-Christians on the basis of a narrow understanding of baptism? NOTE: The Churches of Christ split from the Disciples of Christ in 1906. Subsequently there have been many more splits over relatively trivial matters. At least 6 groups can be identified:
 1. Church of Christ - Non-Instrumental.
 2. Church of Christ - Non-Instrumental - Liberal.
 3. Church of Christ - Non-Instrumental - One Cup.
 4. Church of Christ - Non-Instrumental - Premillennial.
 5. Church of Christ - Non-Instrumental - Non-Sunday School.
 6. Church of Christ - Non-Instrumental - Conservative.

Conclusions

1. MY SENSE IS THAT MANY PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST HAVE AN INADEQUATE UNDERSTANDING AND EMPHASIS UPON GOD'S GRACE & THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Outward obedience to the "letter of the law" of Scripture is stressed in a way that reminds one of the Old Covenant creating anxiety and fear, not joy and peace. In order to sense that a person is in good standing with God, obedience is centered on outward superficial issues that can be more easily controlled (church attendance, confessional standards, etc.) while ignoring the struggles of the heart (sectarian spirit, pride, etc.). The believer's salvation is secured only by continued perseverance in faith that is expressed through obedience with little if any emphasis upon the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. SOME ANALOGIES MAY HELP US UNDERSTAND CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

What the "ALTAR CALL" became to early American revivalists, water baptism was to the first century church. It was the way in which a believer expressed his or her entrance into the faith. People came to the altar to express faith, not to get it; so it was with baptism as well.

Water baptism can also be compared to a MARRIAGE CEREMONY. The marriage ceremony is not the place where two people really decided to commit their lives to each other, nor is it the place where they consummated their union (though it could and often is spoken of as such). Likewise, water baptism is not the point where saving faith comes, but rather the public and official celebration / initiation of the person into the visible church (body of believers). It is understandable that water baptism would be spoken of (in Scripture & culture) as the point of initiation (like the marriage ceremony).

Another analogy might be CIRCUMCISION (Col.2:11-12). In this case, water baptism, like circumcision, is an outward sign of one's identification with the covenant community. Under the Old Covenant this was a national community. Under the New Covenant it is a spiritual community of faith.

Another analogy can be made with our Lord’s reference to the BREAD & CUP - “This is my body / blood”. The bread and cup were NOT His body & blood, yet it was not an inappropriate use of language to refer to these symbols as such. In the same way it is not strange for the Biblical writers to refer to “baptism” and “washing away of sins” when describing the justification of faith.

In saying this, I am maintaining a distinction between SAVING FAITH (justification, regeneration by the Holy Spirit) and WATER BAPTISM (the official expression of that faith). It is the INNER FAITH not the OUTER EXPRESSION that unites a person with Christ. This was the gist of Jesus conflict with the Pharisees who insisted that nothing really counted before God until the outer demands of the law were satisfied. The outer expression of faith is very important however, in that it identifies a person outwardly with the church (the body of Christ). Many evangelical groups have not respected the important role of water baptism and the need to correctly emphasize it. This neglect does not however justify the distorted emphasis brought by the CHURCH OF CHRIST.

F. The Conversion / Initiation View of Baptism and Salvation

Three views of water baptism compared

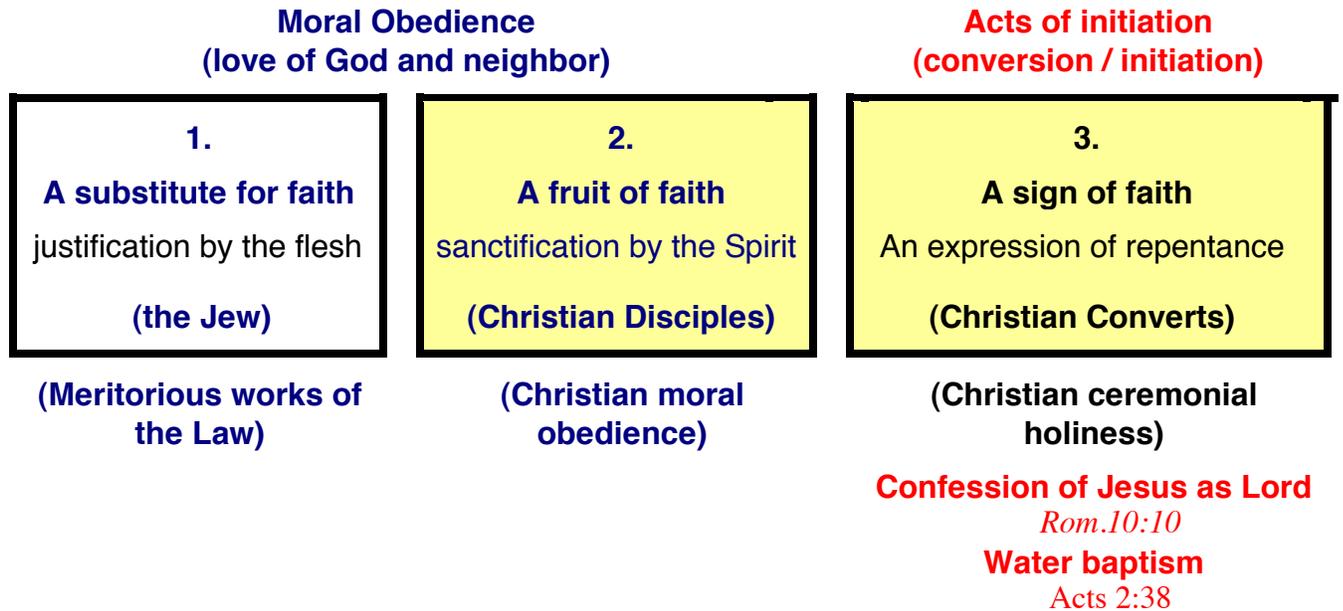
<i>Sacrament</i>	<i>Seal</i>	<i>Sign</i>
Essential for salvation	Initiation rite of salvation	Optional to Salvation
It is the actual means of imparting grace.	It is the formal introduction to our new life in Christ.	It is a way of testifying to our new life in Christ.

1. This is a view expressed by F.F. Bruce, James D.G. Dunn, and Richard Longnecker. It is also my own view.
2. In essence, this position holds that a person becomes a Christian (i.e., receives the Holy Spirit) by a complicated process composed of three elements: faith, water baptism, and the reception of the Spirit. However, the reception of the Spirit may come before or after water baptism. While faith and the reception of the Spirit work an inner transformation called conversion, water baptism works at an objective and ritualistic level called initiation.
3. “Luke never mentions water-baptism by itself as the condition of or means to receiving forgiveness; he mentions it only in connection with some other attitude (repentance--Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38) or act (calling on his name--Acts 22:16). But whereas water-baptism is never spoken of as the sole prerequisite to receiving forgiveness, Luke on a number of occasions speaks of repentance or faith as the sole prerequisite (Luke 5:20; 24:47; Acts 3:19; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18; cf. 4:4; 9:35, 42; 11:21; 13:48; 14:1; 16:31; 17:12, 34). In other words, water-baptism is neither the sole preliminary nor in itself an essential preliminary to receiving forgiveness...The view which regards 2:38 as proof that water baptism is the vehicle of the Spirit is one which has no foundation except in the theology of later centuries. Baptism may be a necessary expression of faith, but God gives the Spirit directly to faith, as the case histories of the 120 and Cornelius make abundantly clear. The highly critical audience in 11:15-18 were not at all concerned with the issue of Cornelius's water-baptism. Only one baptism is mentioned-Spirit-baptism; God had baptized them, and that was all that mattered. If Luke is to be our guide, therefore, water-baptism can properly be described as the vehicle of faith: but *not* as the vehicle of the Spirit. It enables man to approach God, and represents what God has done for men and still does in men, but otherwise it is not the

channel of God’s grace or the means of his giving the Spirit, as Acts 8 makes clear.” (Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 96-97)

- The relationship of faith, works, and baptism may be expressed in the following chart.

Three kinds of “works”



G. Should I Be Re-Baptized?

- Many followers of Christ who come to personal faith after they have been baptized as infants ask the question, Should I be rebaptized? or Is infant baptism valid? These are good questions that are not easy to answer. In order to assist individuals in their understanding of the issue, we offer the following study helps. We start with the policy of CHBC and then give the arguments used to support two different positions.
- The official policy of CHBC:
 - “Since baptism is the outward testimony of an inward spiritual transformation, it shall be administered only to those who give evidence of having been born again by faith in Jesus Christ. The church shall accept as valid any regular form of water baptism if it is in agreement with the considered convictions of the individual believer, but the church shall practice believer's baptism.”
 - The convictions of Bible believing Christians run along two lines of thought. Many Christians believe that “infant baptism” is invalid and that true baptism can only take place after the new birth experience. Other, equally devout believers, feel that if a person has been baptized as an infant and then later comes to faith in Christ, there is no need for “re-baptism.” To aid you in clarifying your own “considered convictions” we outline for you the evidence for both positions.
- If you have not been baptized since you believed you should be.
 - The Biblical commands to baptize suggest that faith is a prerequisite. Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, 10:47-48, 22:16.

- b. All of the examples of baptism in Scripture involve individuals who have first professed faith in Christ. Acts 2:41, 8:12, 36-37, 9:17-18, 10:46-48, 16:14-15, 31-34, 18:8, 19:4-5, 22:16.
 - c. The description of baptism by Paul in Romans 6:1-11 suggests that it has significance only to born-again believers.
 - d. Infant baptism cannot be found in Scripture and does not appear in the history of the church until 100 years after the New Testament is completed.
 - e. Linking baptism with “circumcision” of the Old Testament is to ignore the basic distinction between (1) God's covenant with a nation of people (Israel), and (2) God's covenant with individual Jews and Gentiles (the Body of Christ).
4. If you have been baptized as an infant you need not be re-baptized.
- a. Immersion is not the only valid mode of Baptism: “Baptism” does not necessarily mean “immersion.”
 - 1. The Baptism with the spirit is always spoken of as an effusion, or outpouring, of the Holy Spirit upon people - Acts 1:5, 1:8, 2:2, 2:17 (quoting Joel 2:28), 10:44,45, 11:15-17.
 - 2. Jewish purificatory rites were normally done by effusion - John 2:6, Numbers 8:7 (the word in the LXX could also mean “sprinkle”). “Since the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus and His disciples were viewed as purifyings (cf. John 3:25, also Heb. 9:10), then they were by sprinkling.” (Dunkerley, “Baptism”)
 - 3. Going down into water does not necessarily imply immersion: early Christian literature and art portray two people in water, “one with a shell or a bowl pouring water over the head of the other.” (Dunkerley)
 - b. Baptism signifies Christ’s action for us (as well as our decision for him).
 - 1. We do not choose Christ unless He has chosen us - John 15:16
 - 2. Christ's death and resurrection for us, of which baptism is a sign, took place before, and independently of, our faith - Romans 6
 - 3. Regeneration, of which baptism is a sign (John 3:5-6), is the work of the sovereign Holy spirit who creates faith.
 - c. Infants may have been baptized in New Testament times.
 - 1. Circumcision, of which baptism is the New Testament analogy (Con. 2:11-12), was a sign of faith (Romans 4:11-12), and yet was administered to infants, who had the responsibility of living up to the meaning of their circumcision later (Deut. 10:16, Romans 2:28).
 - 2. Children of Christian parents are in some sense “holy” (1 Cor. 7:14).
 - 3. Peter extended the “promise” of the Holy Spirit not only to Jews at Pentecost, but to “both Jews and proselytes” (and to their children) (Acts 2:10, 38-39).
 - 4. The baptism of a household (Acts 16:33) may have included children, who rejoiced that their father had believed (Acts 16:34).
 - d. In at least one important case, re-baptism was not required of those who had been regenerated after their baptism. – Acts 8:5-24 narrates the preaching of Philip in Samaria, the assent which many Samaritans made to his message, their baptism, their subsequent reception of the Holy Spirit, without whom no one is regenerated (John 3:5) or saved (Romans 8:9). Apparently, their baptism before saving faith was considered valid, since its meaning was complete when they received the Holy Spirit.

- e. Re-baptism focuses attention upon our subjective feelings (do I really believe?) rather than upon God's objective actions toward us in fulfillment of His promises. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:44) "All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out" (John 6:37).

H. Key Texts of Scripture

The meaning and application of water baptism as a rite of initiation into the Christian church is not so clear as to eliminate serious debate among equally devout students of Scripture. Any inquiry into the subject must start with a reading of the Biblical texts that speak to the issue. Following is a fairly complete citation of Biblical texts where water baptism is addressed.

1. General Texts

- **Matt. 28:19** "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. . . "
- **Acts 2:38-39** "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.'"
- **Rom. 6:3-5** "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection."
- **Gal. 3:27-28** "All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
- **Eph. 4:4-6** "There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."
- **Titus 3:5** "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."

2. Believer's Baptism

According to this understanding of the nature of baptism, only those persons who show personal faith in Jesus Christ should be baptized. Those who hold this position point to the constant association of faith, repentance, and baptism in the New Testament.

- **Acts 2:38** "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven.'"
- **Acts 16:14-15** "One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home."
- **Acts 16:31-33** "They replied [to the Philipian jailer], "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him

and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.”

- **Acts 18:8** “Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.”
- **Rom. 6:4** “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”
- **I Peter 3:21** “. . . and this water [of the Flood] symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.”

3. Infant Baptism

According to this understanding, not only are adult converts to be baptized, but also the infant children of one or both believing parents. Baptism of the infant is understood as a sign of the covenant, signifying membership in the visible people of God. Baptism in the New Testament replaces circumcision in the Old Testament as the covenant sign. The promise of salvation which it symbolizes is to be personally appropriated, by faith, by the child when the age of accountability is reached. In the Lutheran understanding, it is the faith of the parents which supplies the faith associated with the sign of baptism in the New Testament.

- **Gen. 17:11-13** “You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant.”
- **Luke 18:15-17** “People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’”
- **Acts 2:39** “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”
- **Acts 16:15** “When she [Lydia] and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home.”
- **Acts 16:33** “At that hour of the night the [Philippian] jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.”
- **I Cor. 1:16** “Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.”
- **I Cor. 7:14** “For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.”
- **Gal. 3:14** “He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”

- **Col. 2:11-12** “In him [Christ] you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”

Questions that you should be able to answer.

1. Specific facts you should know.

- a. What is the meaning of the word “baptism”?
- b. How many types of baptism are there in the New Testament?
- c. What texts of Scripture mandate water baptism for believers?

2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.

- a. What are the best arguments for infant baptism?
- b. What are the best arguments for believer’s baptism?
- c. How would you respond to the texts that seem to equate salvation with water baptism?

3. Questions you should wrestle with.

- a. Why is there such a close association between water baptism and salvation in many New Testament texts?
- b. How important is water baptism to being recognized as a Christian?