

Baptism: The New Birth Experience

Baptism is a crucial part of the Christian life. Not only was Jesus baptized as an example to us, but He also strongly admonished His people to be baptized and to baptize others.

In one of Jesus' last conversations before He ascended into heaven, He told his friends to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them to obey" (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV).

And later, the apostle Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and [preached a gripping message](#) to thousands of bystanders. The crux of his sermon was this:

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 (Acts 2:38).

So what is baptism?

Baptism is an Act of Obedience

Christ said this:

*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. **He who believes and is baptized, will be saved**; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15-16 NKJV, emphasis added).*

It is not enough to just believe the Gospel. We must live it, as we can see in Matthew 7:21-23 NKJV:

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and in Your name done many wonders?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Those referred to in the above passage profess faith in Jesus. They preached in His name, and even claim to have done great works in His name, but they don't keep the law. Lawlessness is the only definition of sin in Scripture:

Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4 NKJV).

Obedience is the fruit of a relationship with God. Understanding the character of God, His love, and His care for all creation is vital if we wish to understand the demands of the law.

If we love God, we will wish to keep the law because God's love for us is embodied in the law:

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward (Psalm 19:7-11).

It is not enough to have a theoretical knowledge of the law. Keeping the law just because we know it is right is legalism. The law must be kept from the heart. It must become part of our character. Only then will we be able to reflect the love of Christ to a world in need.

For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified (Romans 2:13).

If ye love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15).

Returning to Mark 16:16—"He who believes and is baptized, will be saved"—we can now understand the full significance of the word "baptized." Baptism is the symbol of the changed life. It is the symbol of rebirth, a demonstration of the death of the old sinful person and the resurrection of the transformed person, who lives in harmony with the law of God. Baptism is the symbol of restoration.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Romans 12:2).

Until we are touched by God's grace and the workings of His Spirit, it is impossible to obey Him. It is the Spirit of God that enables us to live in harmony with the will of God.

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:7-8).

In John 3, Jesus discusses the nature of the spiritual rebirth with Nicodemus. In verse 5 He says this:

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5, NKJV).

The Holy Spirit works inside us to transform us into people who reflect the character of Jesus. The water—baptism—is the outward symbol of our willingness to accept the transformation process. Obedience to God comes as a gift from God.

Baptism is the Ceremony Proving our Committed Relationship with God

Both justification and sanctification are gifts we receive through faith in the Son of God. Justification is the legal side of our relationship with God. We are declared innocent, even though we are guilty, because Christ paid the penalty for our sins. Sanctification is the active side of our relationship with God. It is the little-by-little, daily process of the Holy Spirit making us more like Him.

We did nothing to deserve either of these gifts. Our job is to accept them.
...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 (Titus 3:5 NIV).

Justification and sanctification are a package deal. Refusal to accept sanctification is a demonstration of false justification:

Wherefore by their fruits, ye shall know them (Matthew 7:20).

Baptism is the outward sign that we accept God's offer of justification and sanctification. We accept the invitation into a covenant relationship with God, the new covenant that God promised to spiritual Israel:

*Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which My covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord. But **this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people** (Jeremiah 31:31-33 emphasis added).*

Baptism is the Acknowledgment of our Entry into the Body of Christ

Baptism is the outward symbol of rebirth, but is also the outward sign of entrance into the body of Christ—His Church.

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit...ye are the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13,27).

Those who accept Jesus are not just choosing to follow Him by themselves. Following Christ means becoming part of the Church.

If by being baptized we demonstrate our acceptance of the covenant relationship with God, then we also become a part of the covenant people of God.

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another (Romans 12:5, see also [1 Corinthians 10:17](#); [Colossians 3:15](#)).

For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body...For the body is not one member by many. But now are they many members, yea but one body (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 20).

There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling (Ephesians 4:4).

The true body of Christ teaches obedience to God's commands and has faith in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. One cannot be baptized and live apart from the Church. That would be like an organ trying to exist outside the body.

God has always worked through His organized Body, the Church. Even Christ worked within the organized Body of that era: the people of Israel.

Baptism is the Mark of Receiving the Holy Spirit

When we are baptized, we enter into a covenant relationship with God. The promises He made to His people become applicable to us. One of those promises is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus—who Himself had the Holy Spirit descend on Him upon baptism (see [Matthew 3:16-17](#) and [Mark 1:4-12](#))—promised that we would receive the Holy Spirit to comfort and to guide us:

If ye love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another comforter, that He may abide with you forever - the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him; but ye know Him, for He dwells with you, and shall be in you (John 14:15-17).

And Peter, after receiving the Holy Spirit himself, reminded the people of God's promise:

Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call (Acts 2:38-39 NKJV).

The promise of the Holy Spirit is given to those who believe and are baptized. It is conditional to repentance and obedience.

*...the Holy Spirit whom God hath given to them **that obey Him** (Acts 5:32 emphasis added).*

*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 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** (Romans 6:3-4 emphasis added).*

Even the ability to repent and obey is a gift from God. It is the Holy Spirit Himself who is sent to "convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8 NKJV).

So baptism is not just accepting the forgiveness of Jesus, it is accepting the transforming power of Jesus to help us repent and obey in the first place. In baptism, "our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Romans 6:6).

Baptism is the Symbolic Death to Self and Birth into a New Life and Purpose

Baptism is the sign of the death of our selfish, sinful nature. That old, worldly person is buried in the waters of baptism.

And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:24-25 NKJV).

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 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...Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Romans 6:3-6).

Baptism is the beginning of a new life with God. The Holy Spirit makes us clean and gives us a new identity and purpose:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5 NKJV).

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:17,22-23 NIV).

The Holy Spirit prepares us for our new occupation as His servant and new identity as His child (see [John 14:17, 26 and 1 John 3:1-3](#)). He imparts His gifts of service that we are to use to spread the Gospel. These gifts are listed in [Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-11,28,31; and Ephesians 4:11-12](#). [Read more about the spiritual gifts](#)

Baptism is the Celebration of Christ's Resurrection

Some say that we should take Sunday as our day of worship in order to celebrate Christ's resurrection. However, we already have such a celebration: baptism.

The [seventh-day Sabbath](#) was instituted to commemorate Creation ([Exodus 20:8-11; 31:17](#)). It also served as a reminder of God's restoring and saving work in our lives—a reminder that these things cannot be accomplished through our own works ([Exodus 31:13; Hebrews 4:10](#)). We rest on the [seventh day](#) to honor our [Creator](#) and our Saviour. However, many Christians defend [Sunday as the day for worship](#) on the grounds that they are celebrating Christ's resurrection from the grave after His death on the cross.

When we consider Christ's resurrection from the dead, we must realize that it was possible only because of His sinless life. Because He had not sinned once during his entire life on this earth, Christ was not defeated by Satan, and was able to rise again from the death on the cross. Death could not hold Him because He was unconquered by the Enemy. The way we celebrate Christ's resurrection is by participating in the rite of baptism.

Baptism is, among other things, our own participation in Christ's death, and our own resurrection to a new life in Christ. When we are [submersed](#) under the water, it is a sign that we are choosing to let our old life die. And when we rise from the water that symbolizes a watery grave, we are choosing and receiving on a daily basis a [new life in Christ](#)—trusting in the merits of Christ to save us, and choosing to daily slay the old selfish desires that fight against Christ's principles. The new birth experience celebrates Christ's resurrection by applying the power of His resurrection to our lives through our own choice.

When Christ was baptized by John the Baptist, He was not declaring Himself a sinner that needed to be saved. He was baptized as an example for us to follow, and as a substitute for those who have, for one reason or another, been unable to demonstrate their choice to follow Jesus through the rite of baptism. Perhaps they were invalid, on their deathbed, or simply far away from any other Christian that could assist them in this rite. In those cases, Jesus Christ was baptized on their behalf. But for us who are able to freely make the decision to live for Christ it is a privilege and a duty.

Modes of Baptism

Are there right and wrong ways to baptize? As with all things, Christ should be our example.

Scripture Teaches Immersion

When Jesus was baptized, He was baptized by immersion in the river:

And Jesus when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him; and lo, a voice from Heaven saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Matthew 3:16-17)

John baptized in the river because he needed water that was deep enough:

Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there (John 3:23 NIV).

A further example of the mode of baptism given in the Scriptures is that of the baptism of the eunuch by Philip.

And he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Phillip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Phillip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:38-39 NKJV).

Note that they went into the water and then came up out of the water. This baptism was total immersion.

The Reformers Advocated Immersion

The reformers also understood that baptism should take place by immersion. Martin Luther defined baptism in this way:

The Greek baptizo means "I immerse", and baptisma means "immersion". For this reason I would have the candidate for baptism totally immersed in water as the word "baptisma" signifies. Thus it was also doubtless instituted by Christ.ⁱ

John Calvin wrote this:

The very word "baptize", however, signifies "to immerse", and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient Church.ⁱⁱ

And John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, agreed:

I believe it is a duty to observe, so far as I can, to baptize by immersion.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Meaning of Baptism by Immersion

Besides being a symbol of our willingness to accept [the Gospel of justification and sanctification](#), and [entrance into the body of Christ](#), baptism by immersion conveys deep spiritual truths. Paul discusses these truths:

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 (Colossians 2:12).

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin (Romans 6:3-6 NKJV).

These verses point out that the old life of sin is buried by baptism. The candidate for baptism should be immersed beneath the surface of the water in order to bury the old life of sin in the watery grave.

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27).

Only baptism by immersion can rightly symbolize the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The apostle Peter ties in baptism with salvation by using these words. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21 NKJV).

The other modes of baptism, such as sprinkling and pouring, rob the ordinance of its meaning.

Is Infant Baptism Biblical?

[Baptism is a symbol of our willingness to accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ.](#) It is a conscious decision and proclamation.

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:16).

Infants cannot make a conscious decision. Therefore, to baptize them defeats the whole purpose of the ceremony. Also, infant baptism is never taught in the Scriptures.

The doctrine of infant baptism is of pagan origin and was brought into the Church by Roman Catholicism. As with most Catholic doctrines, infant baptism has its origins in the Babylonian mysteries. [Read about other Catholic doctrines that originated in ancient Babylon](#)

In Babylon, new birth was conferred by baptism of infants. European pagans sprinkled their newborns or immersed them, and to this day the "holy water" used for baptism in some circles is still prepared according to the pagan custom of plunging a torch from the altar into the water. Having introduced infant baptism, the Roman Catholic Church was opposed to adults being baptized and even issued the following decree:

Let him be accursed who says adults must be baptized.^{iv}

Some modern Bible translations are also written in such a way as to leave leeway for subversive doctrines. The King James Version of the Bible was translated from the Greek *Textus Receptus* in 1611, but modern Bibles also make use of other texts of which the context may be dubious.

Origen was one of the first Biblical scholars (200 AD) to corrupt Biblical manuscripts to accommodate his humanistic and allegorical ideas. Throughout the ages, many of these manuscripts have been tampered with to create a highway for pagan philosophies.

In Acts 8, the King James Version gives a full description of the baptism of the eunuch. The eunuch was a high official from Ethiopia ([Acts 8:27](#)) and had come to worship in Jerusalem. He was reading the book of Isaiah when Philip was sent to him and explained to him the passages pertaining to the Messiah.

When he had grasped their significance and recognized Jesus Christ in these verses, he was ready to be baptized ([Acts 8:27-35](#)). The KJV continues with the following verses:

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What doth hinder me to be baptized?' And Philip said, 'If thou believest with all thine heart, thou may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' And he commanded the chariot to stand still. And they went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him (Acts 8:36-38).

The question of the eunuch, "What doth hinder me to be baptized?" is answered by

Phillip in verse 37:

If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.

Modern translations leave out verse 37, and the eunuch is thus denied his answer. It is stated in these translations that certain manuscripts do not contain this verse, and therefore the verse should not be included.

However, these modern translations do not do justice to the chiasmic structure of the passage in question. The passage is written in question-answer chiasm and leaving out verse 37 would destroy this literary structure.

Omission of the verse is however convenient for those who propagate infant baptism, because the condition for baptism mentioned in this verse—believing with one's whole heart—cannot be met by infants. Both infant baptism and baptism by pouring have been introduced by Roman Catholicism into the Church, but they find no support in the Scriptures.

Is there a Precedent for Baptism by Immersion?

Jesus was baptized by immersion when He started His ministry ([Luke 3:23](#)). The early Church continued to practice adult baptism by immersion. But are there other examples of this style of baptism?

Immersion in Art

Baptism by immersion has been portrayed in art through the centuries. Johannes Warns says this in his book on baptism:

*The so called baptisteries or baptismal chapels in the oldest Catholic churches are further proof that all churches for centuries performed baptisms by immersion. They contain great baptismal basins, (with descending steps), and often, in addition, a room for baptismal instruction...In the Italian work *Il Battistero di Parma*, by Michaele Lopez, no fewer than sixty six such baptisteries in Italy are named, the construction of which falls between the fourth and fourteenth centuries.^v*

According to historian Philip Schaff, the catacomb of St. Calixtus held pictures of immersion baptisms from the second century.^{vi}

On the baptismal font of Verona is a picture of the baptism of Christ:
The water of the Jordan is raised into a hillock, and our Saviour is being immersed in it.^{vii}

And the baptistry of Pisa has a scene of Jesus in the Jordan with water up to His neck.^{viii}

Immersion in History

Archaeology tells us that early Byzantine churches were equipped with **baptismal fonts**, designed for baptizing men and women by immersion (see the parallel in **Acts 8:12**). Even Roman Catholic sources admit to this fact, as can be seen by the writings of Catholic Cardinal James Gibbons:

For several centuries after the establishment of Christianity, baptism was usually conferred by immersion; but since the twelfth century, the practice of baptizing by infusion has prevailed in the Catholic Church, as this manner is attended with less inconvenience than baptism by immersion.^{ix}

Through the centuries, baptism by immersion has been practiced by various religious groups. Anabaptists, Mennonites, and eventually the great Baptist movement spread the doctrine of Biblical baptism.

In the early 1600s, John Smyth, a pastor in the Church of England joined the separatists who emigrated to Holland to escape the persecution of James the First: [He] formed the first Church composed of Englishmen that is known to have stood for the baptism of believers only.^x

From this humble beginning, the Baptist movement has spread over the world and become one of the strongest forces in Protestantism.

If you are considering baptism and would like to discuss this with someone, speak to your pastor, or contact us at info@amazingdiscoveries.org with the subject line "I am considering baptism."

i. *Works of Martin Luther* volume 2: 226.

ii. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* book 4, chapter 15, section 9, volume 2: 434.

iii. J. H. Blunt, *Dictionary of Sects, Heresies, Ecclesiastical Parties and Schools of Religious Thought*: 320.

iv. *History of Romanism*: 510.

v. Johannes Warns, *Baptism* (London: The Paternoster Press, 1957): 327-328.

vi. Philip Schaff, *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1885): 36.

- vii. Wolfred N. Cote, *The Archaeology of Baptism* (London: Yates and Alexander, 1876): 195.
- viii. Martiru, *Theatrum Basilicae Pisanae*: Appendix. As quoted in Wolfred N. Cote, *The Archaeology of Baptism* (London: Yates and Alexander, 1876): 203.
- ix. Cardinal James Gibbons, *Faith of Our Fathers* 76th edition: 266.
- x. Henry C. Vedder, *Short History of the Baptists* (BiblioBazaar, LLC, 2009).