

Palisades Community Bible Church

Online Sunday School

What Is Baptism?

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Were you baptized? When? How was it done? Do you understand the purpose of Baptism? Depending upon who you talk with, there can be some confusion about this very important topic.

And, why not? Satan is the “Father of Lies” and he foments confusion around every key component of the Christian faith. Baptism is no different. God instituted baptism for a specific reason, and it is to be done in a specific way. Satan has seen to it that almost every denomination, every sect, every cult, has modified baptism to accomplish their own ends; which may actually conflict with God’s plan. Let’s study how God wants it done....and WHY...and see if we come away with a better understanding.

Whisper Down The Lane

Have you ever played the party game: “Whisper Down the Lane”? You give a simple message to one person in the group and they whisper it to the next. That person whispers it to the next, until everyone in the room has received the message. The last person who gets the message has received something that does not, in any way, resemble the original message! It’s great for a laugh, but NOT good for a church.

Far too many well-intentioned congregations have started with something instituted by God and “whisper down the lane,” it morphs over time until it does not resemble God’s original intent. This is why God took such great and miraculous steps to record and preserve His Word, the Bible...so we can always refer to His standard. We’ll do that here.

The Utopia Of RULES

David Graeber, authored “[The Utopia of Rules](#)” which is a study into how the making of rules is a compulsion of committees and governing groups. The

collectivist thinking is that, if enough of the right kinds of rules are made, utopia will result. He is quoted: **“A camel is a horse designed by committee.”** In other words, if you want something ridiculous, put a committee in charge of it! Such has been the evolution of many denominations, sects and religious cults. They may have started with a great inspiration, but the steady departure from God’s word has produced self-serving, rather than God-serving, practices.

We see this very clearly in the Jewish leadership of Jesus’ day. Judaism had morphed over the decades, driven by this “utopia of rules” to the point that it barely resembled what God had established for His “chosen people.”

Acts 15:10 “Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?”

Matthew 23:4 “They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”

Matthew 23:15 ““Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You cross land and sea to make one convert, and when you get one, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves!”

Jesus directly confronted the Jewish leaders for changing the intent and the letter of the Jewish faith as prescribed by God. In effect, they had made themselves the objects of worship, in place of God. They made many rules that nobody could follow. They did not even know the very Scriptures God had tasked them with faithfully teaching – so, they did not know the long-promised Messiah when He was standing before them! Rather, they perceived Jesus as a political threat to their power, and purposed to kill Him. Nowhere in the Bible is it recorded that these religious leaders ever inquired of their own Scriptures, or through God, the truth of Jesus’ authenticity.

Titus 1:16 “They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.”

Matthew 15:3 “And He answered and said to them, “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”

Even as the first century Church was being established in various regions, most of the Apostle Paul's letters to the churches began with warnings. He cautions Christians about false teachers and exhorts them to remain strong in their faith in Christ.

Colossians 2: 8 "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ."

1 Tim. 6:3-5 "If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain."

Just What Is Baptism?

Webster's defines baptism: the religious rite of sprinkling water onto a person's forehead or of immersion in water, symbolizing purification or regeneration and admission to the Christian Church. In many denominations, baptism is performed on young children and is accompanied by name-giving.

Normally, I rely heavily on Webster's for definitions, but this one is mostly off the rails. This definition has almost nothing to do with the Biblical definition of Baptism. I share this with you to emphasize how critical it is that each of us be mature in our understanding, and interpretation of, God's word.

Baptism is but one of the practices of Christianity that has been morphed and perverted through the centuries. Sometimes, we can gain clarity into what something IS by studying what it IS NOT:

Baptism is NOT the giving of a name to a child. That may be a "christening," but it is not baptism. Even though Webster's defines "Christening" as the baptizing of a child and giving him/her a name, that is but a secular perspective based on the practices of certain religions and cults..

Baptism is NOT salvation: Salvation is when a person realizes that they are a sinner in need of a savior. When that person receives Jesus as his/her savior –

that is salvation. Baptism FOLLOWS salvation. A child who goes through a christening, or a 'baptism ritual' is NOT SAVED by that process. Until that person reaches an age of understanding, and chooses Jesus as the only remedy for their sin, they are not saved.

Baptism is NOT church membership. Some people feel they have been "baptized into the XXXXX church." Church membership is entirely different, and unrelated to biblical baptism. If a person was sprinkled, christened, or taken through any other religious exercise to gain church membership, it has nothing to do with Biblical baptism....and, vice versa. While we are on this topic; church membership is not, salvation, either. Anything other than intentionally receiving Jesus Christ as one's savior is NOT salvation.

Baptism is NOT the forgiveness, or cleansing, of sin. The waters of baptism do not wash sin away. That is accomplished through a relationship with Jesus, and His work on the cross. Baptism follows salvation.

Baptism is NOT required for salvation. Salvation is apart, and different, from baptism. Salvation is identifying with Christ, trusting in Him for forgiveness of one's sins. Baptism is the public profession of one's decision to identify as a follower of Christ.

Baptism is not a condition for eternal life. Eternal life comes through your relationship with Christ, and that is THE ONLY WAY. Whether you are ever baptized is separate from that. Baptism is a public profession of your salvation and a physical way of identifying with Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. It is not mandatory for salvation or eternal life. A person who is saved, but never baptized is saved just the same.

John 14: 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

So, What Is Biblical Baptism?

Luke 3:3 "Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven."

Many Jews and Gentiles were coming to faith in Jesus, the Messiah, and Son of God. The next step was to go through water baptism. Baptism is identifying with Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. By FIRST accepting Jesus as the one and only remedy for personal sin, and putting one's faith in Him, baptism is an outward demonstration of one's new identity in Christ.

There is no actual practice of baptism in the old testament, but, as with the Messiah, and so many other elements of the New Testament, they were foreshadowed. There are instances in which God brought people through the waters of death into new life: Noah's family in the ark, The Hebrews crossing the Red Sea, and Jonah and the whale are examples of God's mercy and grace. Indeed, each of these events is deeply embedded into Jewish teachings and remembrances and the act of water Baptism as an outward symbol of God's salvation was an easy thing for them to understand.

It is a symbolic enactment of the death, burial and resurrection of our "old person" which is then raised up new in Christ. It is a public testimony of one's faith in Jesus and an identification as a Christian who has been 'reborn.'

1 Peter 3:21 "and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,"

Baptism does not cleanse your sin. It is a public profession that you have been cleansed of sin by Jesus' blood. Paul explained to the Ephesians our regeneration in Christ:

Ephesians 2: 1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the age of this world and according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among them we all also once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and we were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in sins, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and He raised us up and seated us together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, 9 not of works, so that no one should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them.

Acts 2:41 “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”

Acts 8:12 “But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”

How Is Baptism To Be Done?

Many religious organizations sprinkle water, or wet the forehead, or whatever, as their baptism ritual. This is not Biblical. The act of being immersed completely in water symbolizes the death and burial of one’s “old person.” This old person is then raised up out of the water symbolizing a new life begun as a disciple of Christ.

Luke 3:16 “John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John the Baptist was baptizing those who believed and trusted in the coming of Christ – Messiah. Once Jesus began His service as Messiah, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is now in effect for all.

Colossians 2:13 “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

Mark 16:16 “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Romans 10: 9 “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is

with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. 11 As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

The order of baptism is plain; First, repentance and acceptance of Jesus’s atonement for our sin. THEN, baptism – a public pronouncement of your new life in Jesus.

Acts 2:38 “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins”

Acts 2:41 “Those who received his word were baptized.”

Acts 8:12–13 “When they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip.”

The process is plain; Public confession of one’s identity in Christ, and then, full immersion in water.

Romans 6:3–4 “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 too might walk in newness of life.

In every example of baptism in the Bible, we see immersion in water AFTER acceptance of Jesus:

Acts 8: 26 “Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go south to the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” 27 So he started out, and on his way, he met an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official in charge of the entire treasury of Candace, a queen of the Ethiopians. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his return was sitting in his chariot reading Isaiah the prophet.

29 The Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to that chariot and stay by it.” 30 So Philip ran up and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what

you are reading?" Philip asked. 31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

32 The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so He did not open His mouth. 33 In His humiliation He was deprived of justice. Who can recount His descendants? For His life was removed from the earth."

34 "Tell me," said the eunuch, "who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35 Then Philip began with this very Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

36 As they traveled along the road and came to some water, the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is there to prevent me from being baptized?" 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him."

Finally, baptism is not something that only a person of the clergy performs. It is a fairly common practice for fathers to baptize their kids. Many a Christian has baptized those who have come to Christ and, as with the Ethiopian in the passage, above, requested it. Baptism is a public profession of having been saved by Jesus. Another Christian can perform the baptism.

I hope this study has helped you understand more about Baptism and God's will for it in our lives. God Bless!