

Questions About Baptism

What is baptism?

Baptism is an act that Jesus commands His followers to participate in. (*Matthew 28:19 NKJV*) "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*"

The Bible also teaches us that baptism represents the pledge of a good conscience before God (1 Peter 3:21). In other words, baptism is something that Christians outwardly do in order to show what God has inwardly done. Jesus Christ gives new life to all who place their faith in Him. And in this process, there is a death to the former self, and a new resurrected life that follows. This is what Jesus referred to as being 'born again' (John 3:3), and what the Apostle Paul describes when he writes that believers in Christ are 'new creatures, the old has gone and the new has come' (2 Corinthians 5:17).

When people are submerged underwater as they're baptized, it represents the death and burial of their old life. When they are brought up out of the water, it represents the new resurrected life that God has given to them (Romans 6:4). In other words, water baptism is a physical depiction of the spiritual work that God does within a person's heart when they place their faith in Him. The only requirements for a person to be baptized are that he or she believes in Jesus Christ and understands what baptism represents. Read Acts 8:36-37

What is the purpose of baptism?

This is an excellent question, and I'm surprised it doesn't get asked more often. According to the book of Romans, here's the exact purpose for water baptism: Read Romans 6:3-5

Baptism is a symbolic act by which we share in the death and life of Jesus Christ. Jesus died and was buried for the sake of our sins. The process of being submerged in the water represents the death and burial of our old life. But Jesus was also raised from the dead in order to give us eternal life. As we're raised out of the water, it represents our newfound life in Christ. By being baptized, we're essentially saying that we identify with what Jesus went through for us.

In a way, baptism is a funeral and a birthday celebration rolled into one. As we go down, we recognize the death of the old us, and as we come up, we celebrate the birth of the new us. God gave us this rite as a physical reminder of the spiritual decision that we've made. Baptism is also a way for us to practically put our faith into action and demonstrate to the world that we've died to our old selves and desires, and have received a new resurrection life in Christ. It keeps us accountable and mindful that the world is watching us and expects to see some sort of change in our lives. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17

Is baptism necessary for salvation?

The teaching that water baptism is necessary for salvation is known as the doctrine of "Baptismal Regeneration." In examining the following references, our hope is to give clear and concise reasons why Calvary Chapel does not agree with this teaching.

1) The thief on the cross was given the promise of eternal life without being baptized as a Christian (Luke 23:40-43). This indicates that water baptism isn't a necessary precedent in order to go to Heaven.

2) In Acts 9, Saul of Tarsus is converted on the road to Damascus, three days before he was water baptized. The fact that he was saved before he was baptized is evidenced by his reference to Jesus as his Lord (v.5), God's testimony to Ananias that Saul had been praying to Him (v.11), and Ananias' calling Saul his "brother" (v.17). All of this points to the fact that Saul was converted and saved before he was water baptized.

3) In Acts 10, those of the house of Cornelius are saved and baptized with the Holy Spirit before they are ever baptized in water (10:44-48). This would have been impossible if water baptism were required for salvation.

4) In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 Paul declares the gospel "by which also you are saved" (Jesus' substitutionary death, burial, & resurrection). But take note that he does not mention water baptism in connection with the gospel of salvation.

5) Both Jesus and Paul demonstrated less of an emphasis on water baptism than on the proclamation of the gospel in their public ministries (John 4:2, 1 Corinthians 1:14). They prioritized the preaching of the gospel over baptizing because it's the gospel that saves, not the act of baptism.

6) The book of 1 John was specifically written to provide assurance for Christians of their salvation (5:13). Yet it never mentions water baptism, much less its necessity or pre-requisite for salvation. If baptism were necessary for salvation, don't you think John would have taught this, or at the very least mentioned it in passing? How else could John have assured believers in their salvation unless baptism weren't required?

7) But the most fundamental reason why the act of water baptism must be unnecessary for salvation is that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ and not through any single work of man (Ephesians 2:8-9, 2 Timothy 1:9, Titus 3:5). This is such an ingrained principle found throughout the New Testament that I find it amazing that many who uphold baptismal regeneration overlook this. We believe that baptism is a good work-but a work nonetheless. We diminish God's grace when we teach that grace plus something equals salvation. From the earliest days, man has sought to add to God's grace in order to be made righteous. This is essentially what baptismal regeneration does, even if those who teach and believe it have the very best of intentions.

On the other hand, there are really only three passages that seem to support baptismal regeneration at first read. Each of them can be easily explained when we take a closer look at the original grammar and context of these passages.

1) *Mark 16:16: He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.* At first read, this seems to be saying that baptism and belief go hand and hand in being saved. But notice that the negative truth of damnation is conditional upon unbelief only. The only way to be damned is to not believe, and the only way to be saved is to believe. Baptism is the natural act of following through with the salvation that God has already given you. Furthermore, according to the leading Greek scholar Spiros Zodhiates, "The word 'believe' is an aorist participle referring to one who has believed at some point in time in the past. But 'is baptized' is in the passive voice. This form refers to an act of outward obedience, in this case, baptism. The correct translation should be stated, 'he who believed and who was baptized shall be saved.' But this does not necessitate baptism for salvation."

2) *Acts 2:38: Then Peter said to them, "Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of the Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* Again, the command to repent is the focus of this verse. The verb translated "be baptized" is in the indirect passive imperative which means that it does not have the same force as the direct command of "repent." A more literal translation would read, "repent and be baptized because of the forgiveness of sin" (that you've already received).

3) *1 Peter 3:21: There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism. This really isn't a problem because Peter goes on to clarify his statement: ...baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.* Peter is saying that baptism itself doesn't remove your filth. Instead it indicates that you have been saved by virtue of the resurrection of Christ.

In the case of John 3:1-8, the context shows that the birth by water is a reference to physical birth from the womb, not water baptism. Anyone who has witnessed labor understands the role that water plays. As for Romans 6:1-7, this passage is teaching us that baptism represents our identification with Christ's death and resurrection. It does not go on to state that baptism accomplishes or completes our salvation experience.

Can I be baptized again?

There is no biblical prohibition against a Christian being baptized more than once. The only thing that I would mention, however, is that a person should truly examine their heart and make sure that they're being re-baptized for the right reasons. I say this because we would never want something so special as baptism to become something that people flippantly take part in. But as long as water baptism is accompanied by the proper spirit of reverence and adoration for the Lord, Christians are free to be baptized as often as they choose or as often as the Lord leads them.

What is Calvary's position on infant baptism?

Before we address this question, it would be beneficial to examine God's Word when it comes to this issue. The fact of the matter is that there are no examples of infants or small children being baptized in the Bible. Furthermore, the Bible lays out certain requirements for baptism that no infant or young child could possibly meet. As Philip evangelized the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts chapter 8, the eunuch asked "What hinders me from being baptized?" In other words, "What do I need to do before I can be baptized?" Philip's answer to this question is very important because it sets a precedent for Christian doctrine: Read Acts 8:37-38.

Here we see that personal belief and faith in Jesus Christ is a pre-requisite for baptism. The Bible also tells us that we ought to recognize and appreciate the significance of what baptism represents. It depicts the burial of the old life and the hope of the new resurrected life in Christ. Read Romans 6:3-5.

According to the Apostle Paul, every person who gets baptized is expected to understand and appreciate this wonderful truth. Therefore, when we baptize someone here at Calvary Chapel, they must first of all be a believer in Jesus Christ (Acts 8), and they should also understand what baptism means and represents (Romans 6). Before we begin our baptisms, we have a short Bible study that thoroughly explains all of this for the benefit of those who have a desire to be baptized.

Of course, this brings us to the issue of baptizing infants and small children. We don't baptize infants or small children because it's impossible for them to consciously place their faith in Christ and understand what baptism represents (this begins to change when a child is about 8-10 years old). Although the outward act of baptism would be accomplished, the inward significance of baptism would be completely void and ritualistic. Furthermore, the biblical model is always that of infant and child dedication, never baptism (Exodus 13:2, 12-15, 1 Samuel 1:26-28, Luke 2:22, 27, 18:15-17, Matthew 19:13-15, Mark 10:13-16).

"But what about those families that were baptized on the behalf of a parent's profession of faith?" There are only two instances (that I'm aware of) where this even remotely appears to take place, in the

households of Cornelius and the Philippian jailer. In both cases, all who are baptized also heard and believed the Word of God that was preached to them. Read Acts 10:44-48

In this case, it is pretty clear that those who heard the Gospel believed in it since they were immediately baptized by the Holy Spirit. The next logical step was for them to be water baptized, having already demonstrated that they were believers. The case of the Philippian jailer's family is a bit more challenging, but becomes clear nonetheless. Read Acts 16:27-34

If you stop at verse 33 it appears as though the entire family was baptized on the basis of the jailer. But when you read on it clearly says that the entire household had believed, making it acceptable for all of them to be baptized. Some confuse the statement "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" as meaning that the entire family would be saved by virtue of the jailer's belief. But the correct way of understanding this is that the same opportunity to be saved through believing was extended to the jailer's family and not just him: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household [will be saved through believing]," which they evidently did. In any event, there is no evidence of infants or small children being baptized in this family, only those "having believed in God."

Should I be baptized again?

As one reads the New Testament, it becomes fairly clear that a person should be baptized with an awareness of what they're actually doing. Here are some key passages on this point:

The Bible indicates that baptism is something that you need to fully comprehend in order for it to have any true significance in your life. Based on this, once you are fully aware and have an understanding of what baptism is and what it represents, you should be baptized again. Please check our schedule for upcoming baptisms.

IF BAPTIZED AS AN INFANT:

In order to see the answer to this question, we need to recognize that the Bible never teaches or demonstrates infant baptism. As a matter of fact, the Bible teaches just the opposite, that baptism should be something experienced only by those who consciously place their faith in Jesus Christ:

In your case, we would definitely encourage you to be baptized now that you're an adult, since your baptism as an infant was really irrelevant from a biblical standpoint. Remember, the value in baptism is that it's an outward reflection of an inward commitment (Romans 6:4-5). Your commitment to bury the past and follow after Jesus will be powerfully expressed and demonstrated as you take the step to be water baptized now that you're a believing adult.

Need more clarity?

Pastor Louie would love to be able to bring clarity in this incredible area of Water Baptism. If you have further questions please reach out to pastor Louie via email, over the phone or at church on a Sunday morning.

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