

Terranova Church's Teaching on Baptism

1. Jesus commands us to be/make disciples and that includes baptism.

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The imperative (command) here is "make disciples" and the three participles that go along with it are "going, baptizing, teaching." Water baptism is an act of obedience and important part of the discipleship process.

2. The biblical word means to immerse.

In the Greek, the original language of the New Testament, the word for baptism is "baptizo", a verb which literally means "to dip, immerse, submerge, baptize." Further, in multiple cases, the biblical language describing someone's baptism points to immersion such as Philip baptizing the Ethiopian in [Acts 8:39](#), "And when they came up out of the water..." Finally, immersion is a vivid portrayal of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ as well as of our death to ourselves and new life in Christ. [Romans 6:4](#) states, "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." Baptism by immersion paints this picture beautifully. But does the mode really matter? While there are things that matter more, we believe that for the sake of obedience to Scripture and for unity in our church, it does matter.

3. Baptism is similar to and different from Old Testament circumcision.

[Colossians 2:11-12](#) "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead."

[Romans 9:7-8](#) "Not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants. . . it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God"

[Galatians 3:7](#) "So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham."

Like circumcision, baptism is an outward symbol of an inward reality. Also, like circumcision, baptism doesn't save. The Scriptures above point to the necessity of faith. Unlike circumcision where children were/are circumcised, baptism is a choice by those who have placed their faith in Christ. It is a conscious decision to embrace the New Covenant of Christ.

4. Baptism does not save a person.

In the Bible, once Jesus starts his ministry, every person who is baptized is first a believer in Jesus. Think about that. The biblical pattern is that they believe and then are baptized. The "household baptisms" mentioned in [Acts 16:15, 33](#) and [1 Corinthians 1:16](#) are exceptions to this only if one assumes that the "household" included infants. However, no infants are mentioned. And Luke steers us away from this assumption in [Act 16:32](#) by saying that Paul first "spoke the word of the Lord. . .to all that were in his [the jailer's] house," and then baptized them. The emphasis is on a person hearing the gospel, placing their faith in Jesus, and then being baptized. Peter boldly told the crowd, "Repent, and be baptized" ([Acts 2:38](#)) and that is the order we see in Scripture. Some read a verse like [Mark 16:16](#), "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned," and say that the Bible teaches that baptism saves. It does not. In this very verse, the second phrase shows that condemnation doesn't come from lack of baptism, but because of refusal to believe in Jesus. Further, as the thief was being crucified next to Christ, "And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And [Jesus] said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'" ([Luke 23:42-43](#)) Clearly, Jesus didn't view baptism as essential to salvation.

One may ask, "But what about what Peter writes in [1 Peter 3:21](#)?" "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..." "Doesn't that plainly say that baptism saves you?" Actually, it is Peter's way of emphasizing that baptism does in fact, **not** save a person. He is quick to clarify that he is emphasizing not what happens outwardly with water, but inwardly when we put our faith in Christ. Regarding this text, John Piper writes...

For as J.D.G. Dunn says, this is the closest thing we have to a definition which includes faith. Baptism is "an appeal to God." That is, baptism is the cry of faith to God. In that sense and to that degree, it is part of God's means of salvation. This should not scare us off any more than the sentence, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord. . . you will be saved." The movement of the lips in the air and the movement of the body in water save only in the sense that they express the appeal and faith of the heart toward God.

[Romans 10:9-10](#) "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."

[Ephesians 2:8-9](#) "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

Baptism is obedience so it is a good thing to do, but there is no good work—including baptism—and no combination of good deeds that can enable us to earn our salvation. Salvation is a gift of God that we receive as we trust Jesus Christ.

Concerning Jesus, [John 1:12](#) says, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." Believing, not baptism, is the key to belonging to Jesus. And baptism is a sign that we do indeed believe.

5. How many times should I be baptized?

Unlike the Lord's Supper which a believer may take many times before Jesus returns, baptism is something that is only needed once, after the person has placed their faith in Jesus. If you were baptized and then later placed your faith in Jesus, we would encourage you to be baptized now that you are a believer and thus be in line with the Bible.

6. When should I get baptized?

Acts 8:26-39

²⁶Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. ²⁷And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." ³⁰So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³²Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. ³³In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." ³⁴And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" ³⁸And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing."

It is interesting that Philip tells the man about Jesus and even, while riding in the chariot, explains baptism enough that when the man sees water, he is eager to be baptized. It shows Philip's heart for discipleship which includes baptism.

While we do recognize in Scripture the close proximity between a person believing in Jesus and their baptism, nevertheless we do not rush this process. We have one primary goal and that is that the person be very clear on the gospel. So, when someone desires to be baptized, we first want to meet with them and make sure there is an accurate understanding of the gospel and when they have that, and based on their profession of faith in Jesus, we proceed with baptism. Our main motivation for taking appropriate time on this is to protect people, especially children, from false assurance and later doubts about their salvation.

If you have repented of your sin and are trusting in Jesus alone for your salvation, we enthusiastically encourage you to step further into obedience by being baptized, publicly saying that you are not ashamed to be counted a follower of Jesus and to be connected to His people. How awesome that through this act of worship you will paint a picture of the cross and resurrection as well as of how you have died to yourself and have been given new life in Jesus!

[Baptism in the Bible: Immersion or Sprinkling?](#)

- ❖ **The English word “baptism” is transliterated from the Greek word *baptisma*, which signifies dipping or immersion.** (*Thayer, 1958, p. 94; Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, 1979, p. 132*)
- ❖ **Immersion and sprinkling are two very different things, and the Greek language bears that out.** (*Jackson, 2002a, p. 31*)
- ❖ **Forms of the word *baptisma* appear in various extra-biblical Greek writings, where it consistently carries with it the meaning of immersion.**

Aristotle, Polybius, Plutarch, Strabo, Diodorus, and Josephus all wrote of things that were “immersed” in water, and they all used forms of *baptizo*. (*Martin, 1991, pp. 208-210*)

- ❖ **In the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, there is a passage that plainly shows the clear distinction between the concepts of sprinkling and baptism.**

Leviticus 4:17 reads: “Then the priest shall dip [*baptizo*] his finger in the blood and sprinkle [*rhantizo*] it several times before the Lord, in front of the veil.”

In this verse, the word translated “baptize” (or “dip”) is mentioned in the same sentence with the word rightly translated “sprinkle,” so it is clear that in the Old Testament, sprinkling is not baptism.

- ❖ **The same holds true in the New Testament.**

In John 13:16, Jesus “dipped” (Greek *bapto*) a bread morsel and passed it to Judas.

Every time “baptism” is mentioned in the New Testament, it means immersion, never sprinkling.

- ❖ **In fact, the practice of substituting sprinkling for baptism was unheard of until A.D. 253.** (*Thompson and Jackson, 1984, p. 11*)
- ❖ **The baptism Jesus authorized and commanded is precisely what is indicated by the Greek word *baptizo*: immersion.**

The book of Acts contains multiple accounts of baptism, and in every instance, the candidate for baptism was immersed. In every instance, that immersion was sufficient (see Acts 10:48; Acts 16:31-33; Acts 22:16).

For a more full treatment of this topic, see
<https://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=1181>