

Baptism: Who, How, When, and Why?¹

1. Why is baptism so important?
 - Christ commanded it, cf. Matthew 28:19-20.
 - Christ submitted to baptism, as an example for us, cf. Matt. 3:13-16.
2. What is the Old Testament history of baptism?
 - The covenant people of God (Hebrews) were chosen by Him to be His people, and to be an evangelistic people who would spread the good news of a covenant keeping God throughout the earth. When a Gentile desired to become a worshiper of Jehovah, He would go through a three-stage ceremony.²
 - a. Melah. This was the painful part, circumcision, the unique sign of the people of God to demonstrate in symbol their identification with God's people. It was even more than that. They needed to demonstrate in circumcision that they were sinful. And listen carefully, there is no place on the human body in which the evidence of our sinfulness is more profound than in the reproductive area because if you ever question the sinfulness of man and woman, all you have to do is look at what they produce, nothing but more sinners. Circumcision, then, was a way to ceremonially demonstrate not only that you belong to the people of God, but that you needed a soul cleansing at a profound level. A Gentile would have to go through that. Not easy to say I want to belong to the people of God and worship the true God, melah.
 - b. Tebalaw. That was the second aspect of the ceremony, immersion in water. Why? To demonstrate they were dead as to the old life. It was a kind of water burial. They were dead to the old life, apart from God's Word, apart from God's truth, apart from God's promises, apart from God's people, and that old life was buried and they had risen into a new life and a new family.
 - c. Corban. An animal was sacrificed. The blood of that animal was sprinkled on the person, on the Gentile, symbolizing the need for forgiveness of sins, provided through the death of a substitute. That substitute would be eventually the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. What is the proper method of New Testament baptism?
 - Immersion, by definition *baptidzo* means to:
 - a. dip repeatedly,
 - b. immerse,
 - c. submerge,
 - d. overwhelm, cf. Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50

¹ Written by Ted C. Goodnough. December 16, 2012.

² John MacArthur, Baptism, available from <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/80-370/Believers-Baptism>. Internet accessed on October 4, 2012.

- e. John the Baptist, at the river where there was a plentiful supply of water, cf. Matthew 3:6, 16; John 3:23.
4. Why not sprinkling? There is a different word for “sprinkling” in the New Testament, and it is not used to describe “baptism” in any place that it is found.
 - Sprinkle, Greek: *rhantidzo, rhantidzomai*; Heb. 10:22, 12:24; Lev. 6:27; 1 Pet. 1:2.
 5. Who should be baptized?
 - Disciples, cf. Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 8:26-39.
 - Why not children? (There is no biblical record of child (paedo) baptism. Although the Roman Catholic Church and many of the Protestant churches, e.g., Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Methodists, practice it, there is no biblical example to offer to substantiate the practice. It is clear that the observance of child-baptism did not arise until after the first century.)
 - Then, why was paedo-baptism practiced? It was, and still is, considered a means of grace by those who practice it. That is to say, it is a means whereby salvation is received by the one being baptized.
 6. Does baptism save you? Absolutely not! It *follows* salvation. Conversion is followed by discipleship. What then is discipleship? Please take a few moments to read Paul’s description of the lifestyle of a disciple (Colossians 3:1-17).
 7. So again, why be baptized? Baptism is an indication that a person wishes to be obedient to Christ. That is germane to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). Note the sequence of events. “*Go therefore and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*” Jesus is speaking to His disciples immediately prior to His ascension. First “Go,” second, “make disciples,” and third, “baptize them.” First, the apostles were commanded to go and preach the gospel. Second, their goal was to make disciples. Third, they were to baptize the disciples. So then, a person becomes a believer by hearing the gospel message. They repent of their sins, ask Jesus to forgive them, and call Him Lord (Romans 10:9-10). Then, because He is now their Lord, they are baptized. None of these directives are made as suggestions. Each part of the Great Commission is in the imperative mode. That is to say, they are commands, and commands are non-negotiable.
 8. When should a person be baptized?
 - Immediately after conversion, Acts 2:38-41; 8:26-39. Again, note the sequence of events in these passages. First they heard the gospel. Second, they repented of their sin and confessed Jesus as their Lord. Third, they were baptized.
 9. What does baptism mean? It is representative of our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ and because of Christ. Cf. Romans 6:1-11 & Col.2:12

10. Consider this old confession of faith that was used in the church in years past.

“Someone would be baptized and they would say, ‘I hereby confess in my willing submission to this divinely appointed ordinance, my glad obedience to the command of my Lord and Savior. In this manner I show forth my identification with the one who bore my sins, took my place, died in my stead, was buried and rose again for my justification. As Christ went through the dreadful reality of suffering and death to secure my salvation, so by my immersion in water and emergence there from, I thus publicly declare my identification with my Lord in His death, burial and resurrection on my behalf, with the intention henceforth to walk with Him in newness of life.’”³

11. So, why wouldn't a person want to be baptized?

- They are saved, but
 - a. Rebellious, i.e. don't want to.
 - b. Unrepentant, i.e. don't care.
 - c. Ignorant, i.e. don't know any better.
- Or they are lost, confined to the limitations of a “natural” mind, cf., 1 Cor. 2:12-14.

12. So, in summary, baptism is what new believers do to proclaim their faith in their new-found Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is a proclamation of their trust in His vicarious suffering in their behalf. And it is a proclamation of their trust in His resurrection also. In effect, the new believer is saying by their action, “I am willing to be identified with the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ by being baptized by immersion (Rom 8:1–9). I realize baptism does not save me. Only Jesus can do that, and He did save me when I placed my trust in Him (Rom 10:9–10). Therefore, just as the New Testament believers were baptized, so I too want to be baptized, in obedience to the command of Jesus given in Scripture” (Matt 28:19–20).

³ Ibid.