



# REDEEMING HOPE

## Water Baptism An Overview + Explanation

[Updated: January, 2020]

### OVERVIEW

*"So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls"*  
(Acts 2:41 ESV)

God created us as visual and physical people. Because of this, visual symbols and physical engagement hold powerful meaning and significance in our lives, often representing something deeper. Consider sports team logos that represent an entire organization or a presidential seal that represents the authority of a nation. Physical engagement such as a salute to a nation's flag or rising in respect when a person of authority walks into the room also demonstrate a deeper truth. Scientists have even shown that we are more apt to recall memories when they are associated with sound and taste rather than simply mental stimuli. This is because we were designed to experience life, memories, and even spiritual experiences with more than just our minds, but our entire body.

Throughout the ministry of Jesus, he uses the visual and physical to demonstrate spiritual truths. In fact, Jesus' ministry is bookended by two important visual and physical analogies of His life: **water baptism** at the beginning of his ministry and **The Lord's Supper** (also known as 'communion' or 'Eucharist') at the end of His ministry. For over two thousand years, Christians have affirmed that the Scriptures indicate these two events should be replicated in the life of a believer in order to follow in the way of Jesus. Collectively, they are called "the sacraments".

With regards to the sacrament of water baptism, we long to see this beautiful, one-time event in the life of a new Christian practiced with joy in loving obedience to Jesus and aligned with his Word. We want to address any questions or misconceptions about baptism by looking at the Bible directly, seeing what God Himself says about these symbols and then ensuring our behavior is in line with His intention and design. This document is created to both (1) help new followers of Jesus understand the basics of baptism and (2) train followers of Jesus who will be baptizing others to know how to do that well. The format is as follows:

- What is water baptism?
- Why baptize?
- When do we baptize?
- Who can baptize?
- How is a baptism done?

## WHAT IS WATER BAPTISM?

The Greek word for baptize (*baptizo*) literally means to dip or immerse. The concept is that someone would be immersed in water in a public event as an outward sign that they have been inwardly changed. For the Christian, this means that they have given their lives to Jesus and they are going public with that decision. Baptism marks a transformative experience in their life and an entry into a new community and a new way of living. This is a visual sign to others that a person has committed their life to Jesus. We see this explained in Romans 6:

*"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" (Romans 6:4 ESV)*

The physical act of going under the water and coming back up again also has major significance and meaning. It actually reenacts the key redeeming moments of Jesus in His death and resurrection. Going down into the water represents Jesus' death on the cross. Being fully submerged under the water represents Jesus' burial in the earth for three days. The emerging back up from the water represents Jesus resurrection from the tomb and subsequent resurrection life.

*"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" (Colossians 2:12 ESV)*

When someone is baptized, he or she makes a public profession of being forgiven, renouncing their old life under sin and death, and now embracing life with God by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit through the redemptive work of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> It is the living God in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – that we now share life with and whose names we identify with in water baptism.<sup>2</sup>

## WHY BAPTIZE?

We baptize new believers by immersion for three primary reasons: (1) Jesus instructs us to baptize new believers, (2) Jesus was baptized to model baptism for us, and (3) there is a consistent record of the church baptizing new followers of Jesus by immersion both in the Scriptures and throughout church history.

### **Jesus Clearly Instructs Us to Baptize**

After Jesus died and rose again, He gave parting words and instructions to His disciples before ascending back into heaven. The pinnacle of these instructions is called "The Great Commission" and in it baptism is prominent and important:

*"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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20 ESV)<sup>3</sup>*

In the original text, the central command of the passage is to "make disciples". The three key elements of making disciples are going, baptizing, and teaching. None of these were limited to one cultural context, but they were all instructed to be done in all nations, carrying the name of Jesus. Of important note here is that baptism is given additional instructions to baptize in the name of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Under the "How is a Baptism Done" section, this is why we expressly address the Trinity immediately before immersion in the water.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:1-11; Acts 2:38

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>3</sup> bold and underline added for emphasis

## Jesus Was Baptized

All four Gospels describe Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist at the beginning of His public ministry.<sup>4</sup> Matthew's account expressly states that Jesus traveled to the Jordan river to be baptized to "fulfill all righteousness", meaning that there is a special purpose, intention, and significance to Jesus Himself being baptized.<sup>5</sup> He demonstrated humility and obedience to the will of His Father, and more importantly He modeled for us that we should take this step at the beginning of our new life with Him as He took this step to begin His work of bringing us back to Himself.

## The Church Baptizes New Believers

The act of submersion was done since the very beginning of the church as a visual and physical portrayal of a believer being personally united with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection. At the very first public meeting of the church in Acts 2, we see that 3,000 people came to faith in Jesus in ONE DAY, and all of them were baptized:

*"So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41 ESV)*

Imagine, 3,000 people being baptized in one day! This is a logistical feat for the 120 or so followers of Jesus who were present, but at the foundation of the Church we see this happened. Additionally, when Paul was being converted, he recounted the words of Ananias to him:

*"And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing by me said to me...Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:12-13, 16 ESV)*

Additionally, we see Paul compelling the Ephesian people to believe and be baptized:

*"And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:4-5 ESV)*

We practice the sacrament of baptism because we see Jesus clearly instruct it in the Great Commission, Jesus models obedience to His Father through being baptized, and the early church consistently practices baptism as the Gospel is spread throughout the world.

## WHEN DO WE BAPTIZE?

This has been a topic of much debate amongst the Christian church. Within this document, we have specifically identified baptism as something that happens when someone professes faith in Jesus. We believe the Scriptures indicate clearly that baptism occurs after an individual personally repents and trusts in the person and work of Jesus. This is not the view of some, but we want to point to Scripture and then address some of the confusion with infant baptism and sprinkling.<sup>6</sup>

Here are just a few biblical examples of baptism being performed after a person has personally repented and believed in the person and work of Jesus:

*"And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:38-41 ESV)*

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 3:15

<sup>6</sup> There are many godly, Bible-believing churches that differ on how to interpret the focus and point of baptism. This is a secondary issue that has been debated for centuries, and we want to clearly state our position while also honoring our brothers and sisters who believe differently. You can have a different view on this and still be a healthy follower of Jesus and a part of our church family.

*"And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family" (Acts 16:31-33 ESV)*

*"Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8 ESV)*

### **What about infant baptism?**

God has always saved us by grace through faith apart from any meritorious works or ceremonies we attempt to do.<sup>7</sup> This was true throughout the Old Testament as well as the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> But, when should a person receive the outward sign of faith? For us to address the questions surrounding this, we have to compare and contrast the work of God in the Old Testament and how He now works in the New Testament.

In the Old Testament, we see visual and physical signs of faith that *precede* a personal belief in the work of God. For instance, Abraham is instructed to circumcise every male baby in his household and the practice of circumcision was subsequently instituted for the entire nation of Israel.<sup>9</sup> This was a marker of God's covenant to bless the people of Israel.

Arguments for infant baptism refer to baptism replacing circumcision as a means to dedicate a child to the Lord. This means that infant baptism indicates that they are a part of the church family and the church community. At certain places in the New Testament the Bible describes that a person and "their entire family" were baptized, but in no case does it expressly describe infants.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, we believe the Old Testament promises a new covenant through Christ to replace and complete the old one.<sup>11</sup> We would argue that infant baptism as a dedication to the Lord is not clearly stated in the Bible, but baptism by immersion after an individual personally repents and trusts in the person and work of Jesus is clear. That is why we teach that infants of believing parents should wait to be baptized until they come to personally repent and trust Jesus.

### **The Importance of Parent and Child Dedications as an Alternative to Infant Baptism**

If infant children are not to receive the outward sign of baptism until they personally repent and believe in Jesus, then a question still remains: How are the children of believing parents in the covenant community to be viewed? Certainly they are not to be viewed as pagan children.

Scripture gives us some clues to help us. Jesus welcomed and blessed small children when parents brought them to him.<sup>12</sup> Paul instructs the Corinthians about an issue they faced and gave some insight about children of believers. When at least one of the parents in a family comes to faith in Jesus, that marriage and family is no longer a spiritually "unclean" family with a believer in it, but rather it is a believing household with unbelievers still in it:

*"To the rest I say...that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy" (1 Corinthians 7:12-14 ESV)*

When someone within a household is a follower of Jesus, that family is now holy, or in the original usage of the term, 'set apart'. While each unbelieving person will still need to exercise personal faith, there does appear to be an acknowledgement that children are under the blessings of a parent who is standing in grace by faith in Jesus. Therefore, rather than baptizing infant children of believing parents, we practice parent-child dedication as a church community. This allows believing parents to publically dedicate themselves and their child unto the Lord for his purposes in front of their church family. This

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<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5

<sup>8</sup> Romans 4:2-3

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 17:7-13

<sup>10</sup> See Acts 16:33 for an example of this inclusive language that does not expressly indicate infants were baptized. We assume Paul followed the predominant practice and all persons in the family were old enough to believe the Gospel and thus be baptized. This makes the most sense in the context and in alignment with the rest of the Biblical pattern.

<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah 31:31-34; John 1:12-13; Galatians 3:23-29

<sup>12</sup> Mark 10:13-16

also gives the church family an opportunity to hear this public dedication and to affirm their commitment to support and stand with these parents in the weeks, months, and years to come as they raise their children to believe and follow Jesus.

### **What about adults sprinkled as infants who now personally believe in Jesus?**

We encourage every person who repents and believes in the finished work of Jesus to be baptized as a follower of Jesus. For the reasons listed above, we believe this is a significant moment in a believer's journey of faith, and is an outward sign of an inward change. Remember, when someone is baptized, they make a public profession of being forgiven, renouncing their old life under sin and death, and now embracing life with God by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit through the redemptive work of Jesus and through no merit of their own. This can only truly be done after someone personally repents and chooses to follow Jesus.

However, we recognize that there are differing views on this. If a person has searched the Scriptures and does not align with our view, they can still be a fully functioning part of our church family as long as that individual professes that their salvation is by grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone.<sup>13</sup> We hold this position because Scripture is much clearer about practicing love and unity among believers in Jesus and his gospel than it is about the timing of water baptism.<sup>14</sup> In this same spirit of unity, we ask that these friends in Christ refrain from teaching infant baptism among us to help protect the unity of this body.

## WHO CAN BAPTIZE?

We empower all believers to participate in baptizing their friends and family once someone professes faith in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>13</sup> Romans 5:1-5; Ephesians 1:13-14; 2:8-9

<sup>14</sup> John 13:31-35; 17:20-23; Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 2:11-22; 4:1-6; Philippians 1:27

## HOW IS A BAPTISM DONE?

There is great freedom to personalize each baptism for the person or persons being baptized. However, many of us feel better prepared by having guidelines that help us capture the essence of biblical teaching in simple ways when baptizing another. Here are recommendations for before, during, and after water baptism.

### Before a baptism:

- Read Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:29-47; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 6:1-11 that...
  - you are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone
  - you are NOT saved by your own good works or ceremonies, including water baptism
  - you will be personally and publicly identifying with Jesus in baptism as an outward sign of the inward reality of your faith in him alone for salvation
  - you will be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit (i.e. one God in three persons)

### During a baptism:

- The person being baptized shares part of your salvation story & why you want to be baptized<sup>15</sup>
- The pastor presiding over the baptism gives a concise summary explaining baptism
- The person baptizing does the following :
  - [While standing in the water the dialogue goes like...]
    - “Are you trusting Jesus Christ alone for your salvation?”
    - “Based on the profession of your faith in Jesus Christ, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
    - [Now immersed backwards under the water, while holding your nose; then it is proclaimed when back up from the water...]
    - “Buried in the likeness of Jesus’ death, raised in the likeness of his resurrection.”

### After a baptism:

- Celebrate!

### Things remember before a baptism:

- Prepare to share part of your story about your faith in Jesus<sup>16</sup>
- Bring a towel & change of clothes
- Be sure to wear dark clothing. Remember, shirts cling to your skin and undergarments after getting out of the water.
- You might want to arrange for someone to photograph or videotape your baptism.
- Arrive early

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<sup>15</sup> You may prefer to have someone else read or tell their story on your behalf. This is perfectly acceptable since public speaking should not become a barrier for those desiring to be baptized. Your story can be concise and simple so those listening are encouraged in the Gospel transformation in your life.

<sup>16</sup> Reference the My Story/God's Story worksheet