

# BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

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THE SYMBOL | &  
THE SIGNIFICANCE

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JOSH FRANKLIN

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,  
for it is the power of God to salvation for  
everyone who believes, for the Jew first and  
also for the Greek. Romans 1:16*

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ISBN: 978-1-935256-42-7

**Ledge Press**

PO Box 1652

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# 1

## **The Significance of Believer's Baptism**

Baptism is the first step every believer should take in his or her walk with Christ. Over the years since the founding of the New Testament Church, much confusion has arisen over this issue of baptism: Is it really necessary for me to be baptized? What's the big deal? Is baptism necessary for salvation? Does a person have to be immersed, or can they be sprinkled or can someone pour water on them? Who should be baptized? What about the issue of infant baptism – is that Scriptural? These questions are some that believers have wrestled with for nearly two thousand years, and we want to answer those questions in light of the New Testament.

In the first place, consider the significance of water baptism. Is it really a big deal? David Platt tells a true story that highlights the importance of water baptism:

The significance of baptism was etched into my mind and heart during my time with

Asian brothers and sisters in underground house churches. I was teaching one day from Matthew 28 on making disciples, and I explained Jesus' command for Christians to be baptized. I emphasized how baptism is a critical, essential, and nonnegotiable step of obedience for a new follower of Christ because it symbolizes his or her fundamental identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus. After I finished, two of the men in the room, Li and Huan, shared that they had not yet been baptized, and they wanted to be... As I walked through passages like Romans 6, it suddenly hit me. I was sitting in a country where it was illegal for these two men to identify themselves as followers of Christ through baptism. This was a decisive turning point in their lives and a potentially dangerous decision for them to make... Everyone sat silently by as Li and Huan took their stand. Jiang looked at Li, a brother in his mid-twenties who had just recently come to faith in Christ, and asked him point-blank, "Li, are you willing to be baptized, knowing that it may cost you your life?" With unhesitating resolve, Li looked back at Jiang and said, "I have already sacrificed everything to follow Jesus. Yes, I want to be baptized." Huan was a teenager who had also recently come to faith in Christ. In front of the rest of this house church, Jiang asked

him, “Huan, are you willing to be baptized today, knowing that it may cost you your life?” With a slight quiver in his voice, Huan looked back at Jiang and said, “Jesus is my Lord. Whatever he says to do, I will do.” With that, Li and Huan were baptized – at the risk of their lives.<sup>1</sup>

Upon repentance from past sin and belief in the work of Christ, Li and Huan believed water baptism would be the next step in their obedience as new believers in Jesus Christ.

While teaching a missions class in seminary, a former missionary to Malawi told the story about his team's efforts to share the gospel with a tribe for about a year, but no converts. Finally, one of the leaders of the tribe trusted Christ. The other members of the tribe were disturbed that this man had abandoned the ancient religious beliefs of their people, but they became enraged when he told the other members of the tribe that he was going to meet one of the missionaries at a lake so he could be baptized. As the man was leaving the tribal village to be baptized, one of the men in the village took a spear and threw it into the back of this new Christian, killing him instantly. Some men then nailed the spear and the man's body to the gate of the village as a warning to others about forsaking their religious heritage to become a Christian.<sup>2</sup>

Adrian Rogers has said, “Baptism is not incidental; it is fundamental. Don’t ever minimize what God has so maximized.”<sup>3</sup> Is it really necessary for a person to be baptized? Well, it seems that Jesus thought so, because before His earthly ministry began, He submitted to water baptism.

### **Matthew 3:13-17**

**13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.**

**14 And John *tried to prevent Him*, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?”**

**15 But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit *it to be so now*, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him.**

**16 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.**

**17 And suddenly a voice *came from heaven*, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”**

Notice, first of all, that Jesus came to John from Galilee to be baptized. He went “to be baptized” by John. The distance was about sixty miles, one way. John was baptizing “*in Aenon near to Salim*,



***because there was much water there” (John 3:23, KJV).*** Incidentally, if John were “baptizing” by the method of sprinkling or pouring, he could accomplish this with ease in a smaller river, or drawing water from a well in town. No matter how inconvenient the trip would be, Jesus was determined to be water baptized by John.

Not only did Jesus make the long-distance journey to John specifically to be baptized, but also notice Jesus told John that this would ***“fulfill all righteousness.”*** What did he mean? Simply stated, Jesus meant that it would be the right thing to do. Why did Jesus get water baptized? John was baptizing people who had repented of their sins, but Jesus was sinless. Jesus was teaching, by example, what He would command of His disciples later on. Some of the same disciples that were with Jesus when He gave the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), would have been able to go back in their mind and say, “He’s not commanding anything He Himself did not also do. This must be important to Him.” Charles Swindoll has stated, “In my travels outside the United States, I have discovered that baptism is the most significant point of change in the eyes of the public.”<sup>4</sup> Baptism is usually a very public ceremony, and Jesus was able to do this as an example to all of His disciples, past and present.

Notice also that the heavenly Father was pleased. Certainly Jesus’ entire life had pleased the Father,

but He specifically speaks at this moment. Jesus, through submitting to water baptism, pleased the Father. Through the example of Jesus, we can see the priority of baptism.

We can also see the significance of baptism through the command of Jesus in the Great Commission. Jesus commanded, **“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” (Matthew 28:19)**. On this passage, the Greek structure of this verse enforces the idea of making disciples “as you are going” by baptizing and teaching.<sup>5</sup> One cannot simply make disciples by teaching. The Great Commission prioritizes water baptism for those who would be followers of Christ.

As Jesus commanded baptism for all of His would-be followers, the first disciples continued to tell others of the significance of baptism after His resurrection and ascension. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood and said, **“...Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...” (Acts 2:38)**. Philip knew the importance as he evangelized the Ethiopian, who said **“See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him’ ” (Acts 8:36-38)**.

Finally, Paul knew the importance of baptism, as he also gave significance to the symbolic meaning of the act, declaring, ***“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Romans 6:3-5).***

Not only do we see the significance of water baptism in the pages of the New Testament, we can see, as we will later, that baptism has played a significant role in the life of the Church since. Early Christians called baptism a “sacramentum,” which is the Latin word for the Roman soldier’s oath of absolute devotion and obedience to his General.

Tertullian, a third century theologian once observed a group of heretics and said, “They know full well how to destroy the little fishes...by taking them away from their water.” The fish was a symbol of the Christian church, and he was referring to these heretical teachers taking baptism away from the Church.

Though many denominations disagree on the issue of baptism, the importance of baptism is normally not in question. Actually, the fact that so many denominations care so deeply about their preferred doctrinal position proves the importance of water baptism.

Even in some countries where the underground church is heavily persecuted by the people living in that area, water baptism brings on a whole new level of hostility to those believers. Recently, in Malabar, India, a house-church was demolished by radicals because word leaked out that they had baptized eight children and six adults. In Bangladesh, muslims attempted to burn a 70-yr-old woman planning to be baptized. In England, a Pakistani girl was being pulled out of the baptismal pool by her mother, saying, “the punishment is death!”

### **Why Would Someone Choose Not To Be Baptized?**

***Ignorance*** — Some have not been sufficiently taught about the symbol and significance of baptism.

***Arrogance*** — Some have chosen to resist baptism because they are prideful – they don’t want to see the importance of baptism.

***Embarrassment*** — Some feel so embarrassed that they were not baptized when they were saved. They allow this to keep them from experiencing the joy of obeying God.

***Indifference*** — Even though they have been taught, some still feel that it is simply not important. They minimize the command to make their profession in Christ public.

***Disobedience*** — Some simply refuse to be baptized. Often times, they are holding on to un-confessed sin in one area or another, and they don't want to get in front of a congregation of believers and publicly acknowledge their submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

***Lack of regeneration*** — These individuals have never experienced salvation, even though they may have been involved in church all of their lives. Because of this, the Holy Spirit is not at work in their heart, prompting them to obey Christ in baptism. Though many come to church because they enjoy what the church has to offer, they will not make a public profession through baptism because they have never been saved.<sup>6</sup>



## 2

## The Symbolism of Believer's Baptism

Not only is there the significance, but also the symbolism of water baptism. The word “baptize” literally means “to immerse.” Baptism is so important because it is a picture of what Jesus did for us when He was crucified, buried in a tomb and raised from the dead. When we do it, we are symbolizing what He did for us and saying, “I want to identify with that.”

***Romans 6:4 says, “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”***

Baptism is a burial and a resurrection. We are buried with Christ in the likeness of His death and we are raised with Christ in the likeness of His resurrection. (Romans 6:23; Colossians 2:12; Galatians 3:27).



These three pictures<sup>7</sup> show you the purpose of going down into the water. The first picture symbolizes the death of Jesus on the Cross. The second picture symbolizes the burial of Jesus in the Tomb. The third picture symbolizes the resurrection of Jesus, when He rose from the dead! It conveys three things:

1. It portrays or pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.
2. It portrays or pictures our death to sin and our resurrection to a new life in Christ.
3. It proclaims our faith. Our faith is that if we die and are buried, we shall be raised from the dead by the power of the Lord.

When you go under the water, you are placed in a liquid tomb – just like Christ was in a tomb. We are buried with Christ by baptism. When we come out of the water - that pictures a resurrection. We are raised up to live new lives through Christ.

What is the gospel? ***“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day”***



**(1 Cor. 15:3-4).** The Gospel is pictured in water baptism. We are picturing and identifying with Christ and His saving gospel, saying to everyone who sees – “Look, Christ has saved me. The old has gone and the new has come!” ***Water baptism is an outward sign of an inward change.*** It symbolizes to the world that we are casting our lot with the people of God.

### **WHAT AM I SAYING WHEN I GET BAPTIZED?**

1. I am saying that I am now identified with Christ; that is, His death, burial and resurrection.
2. I am saying that my sins were washed away by the blood of Jesus.
3. I am saying that I have been placed into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit.
4. I am saying that I have decided to turn from my sins and turn to Christ.

Though some have not understood the importance of water baptism in the life of the believer, a couple of parallel examples may help. Would I say, though I am married, that wearing my wedding band is not important? Would I say, though I call myself a passionate fan, that wearing my team's colors is not important? Would I say, though I am proud to be an American, that displaying the United States Flag is not important? Well, something far more important, eternally speaking, is to get the symbol correct on our salvation. Once the symbol is correct, we must be

proud to publicly submit to that ordinance, as it is a picture of what our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ did when He died, was buried and rose from the dead on the third day.

***With a Wedding Ring, I'm saying, "I'm Proud to Be Married."*** The wedding couple have said their vows, and the minister says, *"These rings are an unending circle, which will symbolize the eternal love that they will have for one another."* The couple gives the rings, and then the minister usually says something like, *"The two of you doubtless will on occasion be separated from each other by time and/or distance. Those rings are going to be present with you always. May they serve as a simple, but significant reminder of the reality that the love which you two have for each other is indeed ever present with you."* The ring symbolizes to everyone publicly that they belong to someone else. We do not dare change the symbol to something else, say, like a pendant or a rose, because that would destroy the significance of the symbol.

When I married my wife, I didn't *HAVE* to wear a wedding ring on my finger, I *WANTED TO!* I wear this wedding ring on my finger to symbolize the commitments I made to my wife on our wedding day. It is a powerful testimony that the world will see and know of our love and devotion to each other. That is exactly what Christ wants you to do by being water baptized. You don't have to – *YOU WANT TO!*

***With Team Colors, I'm saying, "I'm Proud of My Sports Team."*** Donald Whitney has aptly stated, "I've seen football fans who've painted themselves purple to match the color of their team, shaved the name of their team into their haircuts, worn silly rubber mascot masks, tattooed the team logo onto their shoulders, and even shortened their honeymoons, all in the name of loyalty... But if you ask many Christians to publicly identify themselves with the Son of God in an unusual way which He Himself specified, they will think it strange [and] cultlike... That's the response of many to the idea of Christian baptism."<sup>8</sup>

***With the American Flag, I'm saying, "I'm Proud to Live in the United States of America."*** I know a few are ashamed of our country, but the majority of us are proud to live in the best country on earth. We are proud of the red, white and blue. We have flags that we raise at ball games, we have songs we sing, we put our hands over our hearts and salute our troops – all because of what those things represent. The flag itself is a representation of the 13 original colonies (the 13 stripes) and the 50 states (the 50 stars). If someone were to say, "I can display this other flag that only has 5 stripes and 25 stars," it simply would not be the correct symbol. **The symbol maintains the significance.** Being immersed in a liquid tomb maintains the significance of the gospel that Jesus died, was buried and rose again the third day!<sup>9</sup>

## Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?

Some well-intentioned believers misinterpret verses like Acts 2:38, which reads, “...**Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...**” They would say, “See there, it says to be baptized for the remission of sins. Therefore, baptism washes sins away.” This is an incorrect interpretation of the word “for.”

One man illustrated it this way: “When you see a poster that says: ‘**WANTED: John Doe FOR Murder,**’ that doesn’t mean John Doe is wanted for the purpose of murdering someone, but he is wanted because **he already has murdered someone.** Likewise, the Bible teaches here that those who have repented of their sin and believed in Jesus Christ for the remission of sins should be baptized because their sins are now forgiven.”<sup>10</sup>

No. Baptism shows others that you are saved, but it does not make you saved. My wedding ring shows others that I am married to my wife and I am not ashamed of being called her husband, but it does not make me married. I could take the wedding band off, but I am still married. Some wear a wedding band, even though they are not married. We must never confuse the symbol with the reality.

A West Coast pastor was conducting a baptism service in the Pacific Ocean when a woman with her

daughter came and asked him if he would baptize the nine-year-old girl. He wanted to know if this girl knew about the reality vs. the symbol of baptism. As he was talking to her, he noticed the shadow of his hand on the sand, and said to the girl, “Do you see the shadow of my hand on the sand? Now that is just the shadow; the hand is the real thing. And when you came to Jesus, when you believed in Jesus, that was the real baptism. You were joined to him, and what happened to him happened to you. Jesus was alive; then he died, was buried, and then he arose from the dead. And that is what happened to you when you believed in him.”

He pointed to the shadow on the sand and said, “When you go down in the water and are raised up again, that is a picture of what has already happened.” The girl immediately caught on and said, “*Yes, that is what I want to do because Jesus has come into my life.*”<sup>11</sup>

### **Why Baptize by Immersion?**

This brings the all important issue of the method of water baptism. Does it matter whether you are baptized by immersion, or by some other method, like sprinkling or pouring?

A Presbyterian and a Baptist minister were discussing baptism. After a beautiful dissertation on the subject by the Baptist minister, the Presbyterian minister asked if the Baptist considered a person

baptized if he was immersed in water up to his chin. “No,” said the Baptist.

“Is he considered baptized if he is immersed up to his nose?” asked the Presbyterian.

Again the Baptist’s answer was “No.”

“Well, if you immerse him up to his eyebrows do you consider him baptized?” queried the Presbyterian.

“You don’t seem to understand,” said the Baptist. “He must be immersed completely in water—until his head is covered.”

“That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you all along,” said the Presbyterian, **“it’s only a little water on the top of the head that counts.”**

Well, some denominations have attempted to change the symbol to that of sprinkling or pouring, rather than immersion. However, several arguments have been made that would lead one to the conclusion that baptism should be performed through immersion in a body of water:

(1) It is argued that the word *baptizein* means “to immerse,” and therefore the command to baptize is itself a command to immerse. *Baptizein* in classical usage generally meant “to dip,”... Immersionists maintain that this meaning continues unaltered in NT usage

and that this is confirmed by the use of the prepositions “in” and “into” with *baptizein* and by certain circumstantial references to baptism being administered in places where large supplies of water could be found (Luke 3:3; John 3:23); (2) Because baptism signifies union with Christ in his burial and resurrection (Romans 6:4; Col 2:12), immersionists contend that only sinking under and coming up out of the water adequately express the symbolism of the sacrament; (3) Immersionists lay claim to the testimony of the early church, for which immersion was the primary mode.<sup>12</sup>

Adrian Rogers says, “The word [baptism] was used in ordinary language, not as a religious word. A woman doing dishes would baptize her dishes, or immerse them. If two little boys were out playing in the water, instead of saying, ‘I’m going to dunk you,’ one of them would say, ‘I’m going to baptize you.’”<sup>1</sup>

#### **THE METHOD OF BAPTISM IN THE BIBLE:**

- 1) It always involved water. (Matthew 3:5-6)
- 2) It involved “much” water. (John 3:23)
- 3) It involved “going down into the water”. (Acts 8:38)
- 4) It involved a “burial” beneath the water. (Romans 6:5)
- 5) It involved a “coming back up out of the water”. (Matthew 3:16)

Additionally, even founders of evangelical denominations who do not necessarily practice immersion today made statements supporting baptism through immersion.

**Martin Luther (Lutheran)** himself wrote, “On this account...I could wish that such as are to be baptized should be completely immersed into the water, according to the meaning of the word, and to the significance of the ordinance, not because I think it necessary, but because it would be beautiful to have a full and perfect sign of so perfect a thing; as also, without doubt, it was instituted by Christ.”<sup>14</sup>

**John Calvin (Presbyterian)** wrote that “... it is evident that the term baptize means to immerse, and that this was the form used by the primitive church.”<sup>15</sup>

**John Wesley (Methodist)** said, “We are buried with him - alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion,”<sup>16</sup> and also, “I believe (myself) it is a duty to observe, so far as I can...to baptize by immersion.”<sup>17</sup>

**James Cardinal Gibbons (Roman Catholic)**, though not a founder, said, “For several centuries after the establishment of



Christianity, baptism was usually conferred by immersion, but since the 12<sup>th</sup> century the practice of baptizing by affusion has prevailed in the Catholic Church, as this manner is attended with less inconvenience than baptism by immersion.”<sup>18</sup>

The testimonies of men who have helped found whole denominations that now practice differently from their doctrine underscores how often the Church has veered from her foundational roots. However, this does not mean that the doctrine of believer's baptism by immersion is any less significant, simply because followers have taught otherwise.

Two Congregational missionaries by the names of Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice bring to light the importance of believer's baptism. As they journeyed on different ships to India, Judson and Rice studied the New Testament in order to defend the practice of infant baptism to William Carey, a prominent British Baptist, whom they would find once they landed on shore. In mid-ocean both became convinced that the Baptists were right and that the Bible taught **baptism by immersion for believers only**. When they landed in India, they submitted to water baptism, and sent letters back to their mission-sending agency.

When those sending Rice and Judson found out their belief in Believer's baptism by immersion, they pulled the funding for their missionary activities. Rice and Luther felt so compelled from Scripture that only professing believers should submit to baptism by immersion, they began finding support for their missionary activities elsewhere.<sup>19</sup>

Luther and Judson were convicted that being baptized by immersion, as a believer, was essential for their obedience to the Lordship of Christ.

### 3

## The Subjects of Believer's Baptism

Not only should we sense the significance and see the symbolism. We must define the subjects that should be baptized. By definition, believer's baptism refers to "where the gospel is first preached or Christian profession has lapsed, baptism is always administered on confession of penitence and faith."<sup>20</sup>

In the New Testament, the proper subjects for baptism are those who have first repented of sin, and placed their faith in the finished work of Christ. It is never found in reverse order. Notice the following<sup>21</sup>:

1. Philip preaches in Samaria. **Acts 8:12-13 says, "But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip."** First belief, then baptism.

2. Philip meets the Ethiopian eunuch and explains how the Old Testament is pointing to Jesus as the Messiah. After Philip shares the gospel, the eunuch sees water and asked what would hinder him from being baptized. ***“Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him’ ” (Acts 8:37-38).*** First belief, then baptism.

3. After Saul of Tarsus was converted to Christ on the Damascus Road, he was baptized by Ananias (***see Acts 9:1-19***). First belief, then baptism.

4. After Peter preached to them at Cornelius’ house, those who trusted in Christ were baptized (***see Acts 10:47***). First belief, then baptism.

5. Paul baptized those who trusted in Christ after the earthquake in the Philippian jail (***see Acts 16:25-34***). First belief, then baptism.

6. When Paul was in Corinth sharing the Gospel ***“Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with***

***all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).*** First belief, then baptism.

The *Didache*, which was a church manual written after the turn of the second century explained some of the details for the ordinance of water baptism. This manual is widely accepted as the teaching of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, and included several helps concerning baptism, which included, “Baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in running water; but if thou hast not running water, baptize in some other water... But before the baptism, let him who baptizeth and him who is baptized fast previously, and any others who may be able. And thou shalt command him who is baptized to fast one or two days before.”<sup>22</sup>

Notice that the one who is baptized should fast. Only one old enough could fast for a few days. This significant teaching expresses the attitude of the early church to baptize only believers, as opposed to infant baptism. After arguing that the word “infant” could not make its way in “baptism” passages such as Galatians 3:27, Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12, Wayne Grudem asserts, “The New Testament authors wrote as though they clearly assumed that everyone who was baptized had also personally trusted in Christ and experienced salvation.”<sup>23</sup>

In Scripture, baptism always came after a personal commitment of the individual to the work of Christ, and, “to be baptized before you believe would be like having your funeral before you die.”<sup>24</sup>

The wedding ring comes *after* the ceremony.

The graduation ceremony and diploma come *after* the education and hard work.

The baptism should come *after* one has made a personal decision to follow Christ, and has come to a point of repentance, turning from their sin and toward Christ.

### **What About Infant Baptism?**

Some churches practice a “baptism of confirmation” for children. This ceremony is intended to be a covenant between the parents and God on behalf of the child. The parents promise to raise their child in the faith until the child is old enough to make his own personal confession of Christ. This tradition began about 300 years AFTER the Bible was completed.

By the time of the Reformation, infant baptism was the mode by which a person not only entered the community of faith, but was also deemed a citizen, as the religious and political structures were fused together. Though the Magisterial Reformers (Luther, Calvin, Zwingli) greatly helped the church break free from a religion based upon works (demanding that salvation was by faith alone), they refused to move

in the New Testament direction of water baptism for believers. Bob Pearle notes:

The Magisterial Reformers during the Reformation were moving away from the Roman Catholic Church doctrinally. The supremacy of Holy Scripture once again was elevated to its rightful place and the biblical doctrine of salvation in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone was rediscovered. These doctrines began to take hold in the churches and changed the face of Christianity throughout Europe.

The Achilles' heel of the Magisterial Reformers was their doctrine of the church, which also impacted their view of church and state. Like the Roman Catholic Church, these Reformers connected the visible church to society as a whole. Their theological reform movement was supported by the government magistrates. Whoever ruled, whether Catholic or Protestant, used the power of the government to mandate conformity to their theology. Both Catholic and Protestant leaders agreed with infant baptism, because to be a citizen of the state was to be part of the church as well. They viewed baptism not only as a religious issue but a civil issue as well. Baptism then helped to create a seamless Christian

society. Whoever disagreed with this view was seen as a transgressor receiving the condemnation from the Church using the power of the State. Therefore, those in the Radical Reformation, which included the Anabaptists, were persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants.

The leaders in the Radical Reformation went deeper in reform and put into practice the theology of the Reformation and rediscovered a believer's church. Where the Reformers wanted to reform the Roman Catholic Church, the Radical Reformers wanted to actually restore the church to her initial purity and practice. This is what led them to the position that baptism had to be understood and applied biblically - thus a believers'-only church...<sup>25</sup>

Pearle gives a true account of the intense persecution facing Anabaptists in that day:

Because of their insistence on the authority of the Bible to guide them in matters of faith and practice, they were greatly persecuted and even put to death. An illustration of the animosity toward those that insisted on practicing the teachings of the New Testament is Balthasar Hubmaier (1480-1528), a 16<sup>th</sup> century reformer and Anabaptist leader. He



met Ulrich Zwingli on a trip to Zurich in 1523. Zwingli organized a group of young men to study the Greek New Testament together. After much study a sense grew in the group that the established church teachings were not true to the New Testament text. Zwingli began to press the government leaders to replace the Roman Catholic Church with a Reformed church. After his success, a schism began to develop within the group. Hubmaier and some others wanted to press for further reforms in stopping the practice of baptizing infants and only baptize those adults who were old enough to understand the commitment they were making to Christ.

The city officials were troubled with all that was happening and prohibited the group from meeting. Hubmaier then moved to Austria and began to be pastor of the church at Waldshut. He continued to follow the practices of the New Testament and went against the established church teaching. The Austrian Army captured the city in 1525. Hubmaier fled back to Zurich and hoped for help from Zwingli but instead was arrested. Hubmaier was tortured and partially recanted his beliefs, which he later regretted and retracted, and left Switzerland.

In 1527 he and his wife were arrested by King Ferdinand's men and extradited to Vienna, where he was tried as a heretic and condemned. He was burned at the stake in Vienna on March 10, 1528. Three days after his execution, a stone was tied around his wife's neck; she was thrown into the Danube River to drown.

Many of our Baptist forefathers were martyred by drowning. This was an insidious way by the established church to ridicule their biblical view of baptism and to rid the church of so-called heretics. One particular method of drowning was described by attaching an iron chain to a heavy stone. Both the person and the weight to which the individual was fastened were then laid on a plank. The ends of the plank were placed on two boats, which were rowed out on the water. Then the boats separated; the weight of the martyr sank to the bottom.<sup>26</sup>

Do you think our Baptist forefathers, many of whom were martyred by drowning, simply because they wanted to return to the New Testament pattern of baptizing only believers, would consider this issue incidental? Hardly.

Yet, today, some Baptist churches are compromising on this issue, allowing into their

membership those who have not been baptized by immersion as believers. One notable Baptist led his church to adopt this into his church's documents, "Christians who have not been baptized by immersion as believers, but, as they believe, by some other method or before they believed, may, under some circumstances, be members of this church."<sup>27</sup>

A short tract has made its way around to several Baptist pastors. The tract is entitled "What the Bible Says about Infant Baptism." As one opens the tract, **there is nothing inside!** On the back of this tract the reader can find this quote from a Presbyterian: *"If some intelligent being from Mars should visit...and we hand him our Bible...he would learn of the great doctrine and practices of the Christian religion without any other aid. He would find the Lord's Supper, the organization of the church, with elders and deacons, and ADULT BAPTISM, but it is safe to say he would never get it into his head that little children are to be baptized. He would not find infant baptism in the Bible because it is not there and cannot be gotten out of the Bible."* Now, this came from a Presbyterian, not a Baptist.

Long-time pastor, John Bisagno, comments, "One of the recurring problems with which I have had to deal through the years is confusion over persons who were sprinkled as infants. Some of my best pastor friends in other denominations observe this practice

and do not believe that the child is being saved or that his sins are being washed away. They believe this is simply an act of commitment by the parents. But I have often found this to be confusing to people when they grow up and make their own decisions to receive Christ as Savior.”<sup>28</sup>

The tradition of infant baptism really speaks of the faith of the parents rather than the personal faith of the individual. Though we praise God for the faith of the parents, and their commitment to raise the child in the ways of the Lord, since this practice is simply not found in Scripture, we feel to practice this brings confusion to people who genuinely want to follow the Lord’s command to be baptized as an outward sign of an inward faith.

Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes explain, “Baptist and other baptistic groups insist on believers’ baptism only, whereas the Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and some others baptize infants. Pedobaptists (literally, child-baptizers) argue that infants should be baptized. Anabaptists (literally, rebaptizers) argue that a person should not be baptized until after he or she becomes a believer. For this reason, their practice is to rebaptize those who were baptized in infancy.”<sup>29</sup>

This explains why when a person has been raised in a church where they were baptized as an infant, normally through sprinkling or pouring, as

they come over to a church that practices believer's baptism through immersion simply says, "you must be baptized by immersion to join this fellowship." It is not discrediting the tradition you were raised in, or the faith of your parents, but rather, endeavoring to make sure your faith is personal and public.

### **How Old Should a Child Be To Be Baptized?**

Wayne Grudem has answered, "The most direct answer is that they should be old enough to give a **believable profession of faith**. It is impossible to set a precise age that will apply to every child, but when parents see convincing evidence of genuine spiritual life, and also some degree of understanding regarding the meaning of trusting in Christ, then baptism is appropriate... The exact age for baptism will vary from child to child, and somewhat from church to church as well."<sup>30</sup> There should be a great deal of care from both parents and the church to discern when the child is truly ready to be baptized.

### **Should I Consider Being Baptized Again?**

Charles Stanley states that there are many reasons why someone should consider being baptized again, depending upon the circumstances:

If you were sprinkled as a child or christened, you have not been scripturally baptized. If you were immersed as an adult but had no intention of following Christ, you were not scripturally baptized. If you were sprinkled

and have followed Christ since that time, you have not been scripturally baptized. If you were immersed and became a Christian later, you have not been scripturally baptized. Does that mean that Christ does not accept you or loves you less? Absolutely not. Does that mean that you are not saved if you haven't been baptized? No. It means that as a believer, you need to be obedient and be scripturally baptized.<sup>31</sup>

However there are a few reasons one should not consider being baptized again. First, a person should not consider getting baptized again if he or she was immersed after making a public profession of faith. Sometimes a believer has gone through a backslidden state and wants to profess his or her faith again to those around. He or she has made such a dramatic rededication of life and feels as though re-baptism is needed. However, this is not a reason to discredit one's first baptism, which was valid. Baptism does not forgive sins. It does not "wash sins away". Baptism symbolizes ones decision to become a follower of Christ. Though a backslider has fallen, he or she has never stopped being a child of God.

Secondly, sometimes a believer gains a deeper understanding of what water baptism means. Perhaps you have read this book and say, "I didn't know that's what baptism really meant." Though many feel this way when they are exposed to New Testament teaching on

the subject, it does not invalidate a previous baptism which occurred after one's salvation. It simply means a greater understanding has taken place. Jokingly, sometimes a couple who have been married for some time will say, "25 years ago, I said, 'I do,' and ever since I've been figuring out what I did!" To this person, I simply would tell them to praise the Lord that they understand how significant their baptism really is. Re-baptism should not be recommended to this person.

### **Can My Family Be Baptized Together?**

Yes! If each family member understands fully the meaning of baptism, and each one has personally placed his/her trust in Christ for salvation, we encourage families to be baptized at the same time. It is a wonderful expression of commitment.





## 4

# The Supervision of Believer's Baptism

The final area to consider is who is to administer such an ordinance? I believe the weight of the New Testament shows the ordinance of water baptism is to be under the authority of the local church. Bob Pearle gives great insight at this point:

The question debated among evangelicals is whether the authority to baptize is individual or congregational. Is baptism an individual Christian ordinance? Can any Christian without any connection or direction from a local church baptize whomever they deem acceptable? Or is baptism a local-church ordinance to be administered by a believer under the authority and direction of the local church?

Those that advocate baptism to be an individual Christian ordinance believe that Jesus gave the Great Commission to individual believers. They affirm that the directives in the Commission to “go, preach,

baptize and teach” are to be done by every believer under the mandate of Christ. This position also points to Philip baptizing the Ethiopian without any outside authority other than the believing Ethiopian needed to be baptized...

The question is whether any believer can indiscriminately baptize on his own... When a believer baptizes someone independently of the local church, to whom is the person accountable? If any baptized believer can baptize another person apart from the local church, what would hinder a 10-year-old from baptizing an 8-year-old? Or vice versa? The end result would be chaotic, with many lone-ranger Christians running around.

The Great Commission was given by Jesus to the church. The disciples gathered together in one locale to receive the Commission would constitute a church. In Matthew’s gospel the Commission was given to the eleven disciples, in Mark’s gospel it was given to the eleven, in Luke’s gospel it was given to the eleven and those who were with them, in John’s gospel the Commission was given to the disciples...

The directives within the Great Commission were to the church, including baptism...

Baptism is performed under the authority of the local church and is a prerequisite to membership in the local church.<sup>32</sup>

I am encouraged to note that though famous evangelist Billy Graham has led countless people to faith in Christ, his organization does not baptize anyone. They direct the new believers back to a local church where they will be publicly recognized and baptized at a later date. Even Campus Crusade for Christ believes baptism to be an ordinance of the local church, and thus, refuses to baptize those who may come to Christ in one of their meetings.

I remember when I took a group of teenagers to a youth camp one year, and by God's grace, several had made decisions to follow Christ. After thorough examination, I felt they were ready to be baptized, and they were there with all of their friends. I called my senior pastor, and asked him if it would be appropriate for me to baptize them in the swimming pool, video record the ceremony, and project it for the church later that month for everyone else to see and rejoice. He heartily agreed.

Was this appropriate? I believe because I informed my senior pastor of my intentions, and requested his permission, I was acting under the authority of the local church. Honestly, before I was ordained into the ministry, I personally never thought of baptizing another individual on my own. One of the

main reasons I considered it that year was because I had publicly been ordained by my local church earlier that year.

### ***Conclusion: Implications for Today's Church***

The implications for water baptism in today's church should return the symbol to its significance. If baptism symbolically points to the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, that symbol must paint the significance clearly. Other methods that men have created, whether sprinkling or pouring, should be discontinued in favor of the more biblical picture of full body immersion.

Additionally, consideration must be made for the readiness of the candidate baptized. As the New Testament suggests, those who were baptized were first believers, making a profession in the work of Christ. Only children who know the saving faith and repentance necessary for salvation should pursue water baptism by immersion. This would certainly exclude infants and babies.

Those who are candidates should pursue following obediently the commands of Christ by allowing immersion as the method to be baptized. Followers of Christ must not dilute the method, or the message will also be diluted. As believers should seek to follow accurately the Great Commission of

Jesus Christ, this must include the preferred method and candidate for the ordinance of water baptism, holding the symbol and significance close to the reality found within.

Once understanding the significance, the symbol and the subjects, the only thing to do is to submit to being water baptized. If you desire to be baptized, don't hesitate. Call your pastor or your church office and make an appointment to talk with someone about this. Most churches will have proper information about what they require, and what they provide, and when they schedule, and what they will ask you to say, or not say.



## ***Appendix One:***

### ***Helping Your Child Prepare to be Baptized (for Parents)***

Hopefully this book has been helpful to show you the importance of water baptism. It is appropriate to take the concepts found within this book, and help your child, on an age-appropriate level, to answer the questions they may have, and to help prepare them for the ceremony of water baptism. Though a book can be helpful, it is better for you, or a Sunday School teacher, a children's worker or a pastor to help guide a discussion about water baptism. In considering whether your child should be water baptized, you should ask yourself:

**Does your child understand what it means to be saved?** I consider a few crucial concepts important for salvation in the life of a child:

- 1) Did they understand that they have sinned?
- 2) Did they understand that their sin was against God, not simply against Mommy or Daddy?

3) Did they understand and make the decision to turn from their sin and turn to Jesus? *(That's the recognition that they need a Savior, and repentance)*

4) Did they understand and make the decision to believe that Jesus died on the cross for their sins? *(That's calling Him Savior)*

5) Did they understand and make the decision to place Jesus in charge of their lives? *(That's making Him Lord)*

**Does your child understand the difference between salvation and water baptism?** You should really make certain that the child understands that salvation does not come from a baptism, but from a decision to follow Christ.

I explain the difference between salvation and water baptism by the illustration of the wedding ring. I take my wedding ring off my hand, and ask, *"Am I still married?"* They usually answer yes, and I go on to explain that the wedding ring shows others that I am married and I am not ashamed of my wife. The wedding ceremony made me married, not the ring. I then transition and tell the child, *"You were saved when you trusted what Jesus did on the cross. You were saved when you said you no longer want to live for sin, but you want to live for Jesus. You were saved when you said, 'Jesus, come into my life.' When you get baptized, you are telling everyone in the audience that you are not ashamed of this."*



## **Your Child's Readiness for Baptism**

Readiness can be measured when:

- Your child understands what it means to be saved, has personally accepted Jesus into his heart, and shows a desire to love and obey Jesus.
- Your child is physically and psychologically mature enough for baptism to be a positive expression of his Christian faith.
  - Can your child stand before a crowd of people without being intimidated to the point of tears or loss of composure?
  - Is your child afraid of water or uncomfortable with anything that might take place during baptism?
- If you have any doubts about your child's readiness, talk to your church leadership. Their experience with other families will prove helpful.

## **Getting Ready for Baptism**

- Allow your child to witness others being baptized. If other children their age are being baptized, help them realize that they should only desire to be baptized when they are ready, not simply because their friends are being baptized.
- Share your own testimony of being baptized. Help them realize its importance in showing the world that we are not ashamed to be a Christ follower.
- Seek the spiritual guidance of your church leadership, which in most cases, would be one of the pastors. If they tell you that your child may not be ready, understand their experience and heed their counsel.

## **When Your Child is Baptized**

- Be prepared with a towel and a change of clothes for your child. Towels may be provided by the church.
- Invite relatives and special friends to witness the baptism.
- Record the baptism. If your child is young, he may not clearly remember his baptism when he is older. By reviewing the pictures or video periodically, their memory will stay fresh.
- Put the date on your calendar and remember your child's baptism once a year. The significance and meaning of baptism will not be forgotten.

## **Caution**

- Be careful about pressuring your child to be baptized. Nurture him or her to a decision.
- Waiting is okay. God is patient. He sees your child's desire and wants to help him or her overcome any fears.

**FURTHER QUESTIONS TO GUIDE A DISCUSSION  
WITH A CHILD ABOUT SALVATION AND/  
OR BAPTISM:**

- Is Jesus in your life? How did it happen?
- How do you know Jesus is in your life? When did it happen?
- Why do you want to be baptized?
- What does it mean to be baptized?

## ***Appendix Two:***

### ***What Do You Know About Baptism<sup>33</sup>? (for Children)***

**MULTIPLE CHOICE:** Answer the questions as best as you can without help from anyone else.

1. Being baptized is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. something all children do.
  - b. only for children whose parents go to church.
  - c. for anyone who has chosen to follow Christ.
  
2. Baptism means \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. like when my Sunday school teacher is speaking.
  - b. a special event when someone is put under water.
  - c. to pray for a friend.
  
3. Jesus said that a person should be baptized \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. to be saved.
  - b. to obey our parents.
  - c. to go to heaven.
  - d. to show others that we are Christians.

4. Jesus will come into a person's life

\_\_\_\_\_.

- a. when a person goes to church.
- b. when a person asks Jesus to come into his/her life.
- c. when a person reads the Bible.
- d. when a person gets baptized.

**TRUE / FALSE:** Write T for true or F for false.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. People are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. One reason people get baptized is to show that their sins have been washed away.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. Jesus said being baptized is important.

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. The Bible teaches that a person should be baptized to show others that Jesus is in his or her life.

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. People are baptized by being immersed in water.

## ***Appendix Three:***

### ***Confessions Made During the Ceremony of Water Baptism (for Pastors)***

Have you turned from your sins and accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior? (“Yes.”)

Will you do your best to be a faithful follower of Jesus and obey the teachings of Holy Scripture? (“Yes.”)

If you should move from our community, will you promise to join a church in the place where you live and serve Christ faithfully there? (“Yes.”)

\_\_\_\_\_, in obedience to the command of Christ and upon your public profession of faith, I baptize you my brother/sister in Christ, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

+++

Are you now trusting in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of your sins and the fulfillment of all God's promises to you, even eternal life? ("Yes.")

Do you renounce the devil and all his empty promises?' ("Yes.")

Do you intend with God's help to obey Jesus' teaching and follow him as your Lord? ("Yes")

\_\_\_\_\_, in obedience to the command of Christ and upon your public profession of faith, I baptize you my brother/sister in Christ, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

+++

I believe that Jesus is the Christ...  
The Son of the Living God...  
My Lord and My Savior.

\_\_\_\_\_, because you have put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

+++

I take God as my Father...  
Jesus as my Savior...  
The Holy Spirit as my Guide...  
This I do freely...  
Completely...  
And forever...  
Amen.

\_\_\_\_\_, in obedience to the  
command of Christ and upon your public  
profession of faith, I baptize you my brother/  
sister in Christ, in the name of the Father,  
the Son and the Holy Ghost.

+++

I take God to be my chief end and highest  
good...  
I take God the Son to be my Prince and  
Savior...  
I take God the Holy Spirit to be my sanctifier,  
teacher, guide, and comforter...  
I take the Word of God to be my rule in all my  
actions and all the people of God to be my  
people under all conditions...  
I do hereby dedicate and devote to the Lord all I  
am, all I have, and all I can do...

And this I do deliberately, freely, and forever.

\_\_\_\_\_, in obedience to the command of Christ and upon your public profession of faith, I baptize you my brother/sister in Christ, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.



## ***Becoming a Follower of Christ***

Perhaps you have found this book, and you have never turned from your sins and placed your faith in what Jesus did on the Cross. Perhaps you are just not certain that you are saved. Salvation means being rescued from your sin. In order to be rescued from your sins, you must understand a few Bible facts:

**1. *God Loves You.*** - “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

**2. *Your Sin Separated You From a Loving God.***  
- “Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.” (Isaiah 59:1-2)

**3. *God Sent Jesus To Take Care of the Sin Barrier Between You and Him.*** - “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that

while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”  
(Romans 5:8)

**4. We Respond To God by Receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.** - “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”  
(John 1:12-13)

Once You believe these four facts, you must make a few decisions:

**1. You are a hopeless sinner, and you need Jesus.** - “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

**2. You must be willing to turn completely from the sins that have held you captive.** - “I tell you, No; but unless you repent (change your mind for the better and heartily amend your ways, with abhorrence of your past sins), you will all likewise perish and be lost eternally.” (Luke 13:3, AMP)

**3. You must believe that Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, actually died for you on the cross and rose from the grave.** - “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in

your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Romans 10:9-10)

**4. Through prayer, you must invite Jesus Christ to come in and control your life, making Him Lord.**

*“Dear God, I know that You loved me, and I know that You want to save me. Jesus, You died to save me. You promised to save me if I would trust You. I do trust you. By faith I receive You as my Lord and Savior. Forgive my sin. Cleanse me. Save me, Lord Jesus. Thank You for doing it. I receive it by faith like a child, and that settles it. Now begin to make me the person You want me to be, and help me, Lord Jesus, never to be ashamed of You. In Your name I pray, Amen.”*

You may have read this and said, “I did not do this,” then, my friend, today is the day that you can come to Christ for the first time. You can read this again, pray that prayer and Jesus will save you from your sin! You, too, will be a child of God! The prayer does not save you, but praying a prayer like this one, from your heart to God, is the way Jesus will enter your life and you will be completely changed! Do it today! Make your salvation sure!

**Today I have given my life to Jesus Christ!**

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(sign)

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(date)

*\* please contact Josh at [inferno4god@hotmail.com](mailto:inferno4god@hotmail.com) to receive more information about beginning your journey with Jesus Christ.*

## About The Author



### **PASTOR JOSH FRANKLIN**

has been serving in local church ministry since 2001, and is now proudly serving as Pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in North Carolina ([www.antiochnc.net](http://www.antiochnc.net)). Josh began His journey with Christ in 1995, surrendering to

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Josh has two earned degrees, including his Masters of Divinity from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, where he is also currently pursuing doctoral studies in expository preaching. Josh has written three books: ***Starting Strong***, ***Believer's Baptism*** and ***Pathway to Power***.

Josh's passion is to empower Christians everywhere to have minds full of the Word of God and hearts full of the Spirit of God. He and His lovely wife Lydia, along with their two sons, Josiah and Caleb, reside in North Carolina.

For more information and to access other tools for discipleship, go to [www.joshfranklin.org](http://www.joshfranklin.org).



## End Notes:

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- 2 Taken from *Fuel2: Owning Your Faith*, Volume 6 (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Press, 2007), Session 68.
- 3 Adrian Rogers, *What Every Christian Ought to Know* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2005), 112.
- 4 Charles Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life* (Portland, Or.: Multnomah Press, 1986), 363.
- 5 The aorist participle “go” modifies the aorist imperative “make disciples” as an auxiliary reinforcing the action of the main verb. Jesus’ followers must “go” in order to make disciples. The two present participles “baptizing” and “teaching” specify the manner in which disciples are to be made.
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- 18 James Gibbons, *The Faith of Our Fathers* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co, 1877), 275, as quoted in *The Vanishing Church* (Garland, TX: Hannibal Books, 2009), 66.
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- 25 Bob Pearle, *The Vanishing Church*, 60-61
- 26 Bob Pearle, *The Vanishing Church*, 109-110.
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