

Baptism – What We Believe

Is it really necessary?

In an ever changing world where what was relevant yesterday is out of date today, people are asking the question, "Do we really need to be baptised"? after all it doesn't matter for Salvation. At Ballee Baptist Church we have strong views on the subject of baptism and I would like to take the opportunity to share with you the reader not just what we believe, but more importantly, what God's Word says about the doctrine of baptism.

Lets look at the subject by asking 3 simple questions about baptism.

1. Why should we baptise at all?

2. Who should we baptise, and how; adults or babies, sprinkling or immersion?

3. When is the right time to be baptised?

Could I begin by correcting an often over looked problem in the Church today, that is that God's Word never changes. I know that all around us the world and society are rapidly changing, but there is something about a changing world that worries me. When society changes, so usually does values, and when values changes, so does morals. What am I trying to say, well, I believe we need something stable, we need something that remains a constant, so that we can retain a right standard for daily living. (Agree so far?). Well the something stable, the right standard I'm talking about is The Bible (God's Word). If we stay close to it, we can be sure of the right values, the right standard, indeed the truth, but you believe that too, don't you?

1. Why should we baptise at all?

It was Commanded by Christ

In Matthew's Gospel ch: 28v19 The Lord Jesus commanded his disciples "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:" this command was given after his death, burial, and resurrection, so it was, - it is, - a command for His Church today. (See also Mark 16v16).

It was Demonstrated by the Disciples

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Acts 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Acts 8:38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. Acts 10:47-48 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days. Acts 16:33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. Acts 18:8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

Acts 19:5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. These are just a few that I found in the book of Act's. Surely the Disciples of the Lord (Peter-Phillip-Paul-etc.) wouldn't baptise people if they thought that is wasn't necessary, and surely God's Word wouldn't record it, if it thought it was not necessary.

It was Explained in the Epistles

Gal 3:27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Rom 6:3-4 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Col 2:12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

Simply: Baptism is the BELIEVERS identification with Christ, His burial and His resurrection. (It is the public demonstration of the Christian's desire to follow Christ.)

2. Who should we baptise, and how; adults or babies, sprinkling or immersion?

The Meaning of baptism (why not babies)

If you looked up some of the above scriptures on WHY should we baptised, you will maybe have noticed that all of the candidates who were baptised were all of the age of understanding, that is, they were not babies. In fact there is no were in scripture were we see any disciple baptising a baby or any baby being baptised. This might, to some people seem insignificant but we can only look to the scriptures for our guideline for baptism. If there is no mention of Children being baptised, then there must be a reason for this. On further investigation of the passages of scripture that we have looked at, we notice that all the instances of baptism are preceded by the individual's salvation. Let's look at 4 instances from scripture to see if this is confirmed...

Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost

Acts 2:37-38

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.(KJV)

Notice their QUESTION v37 "What shall we do" and notice the ANSWER, - first Peter tells them to repent, (Repentance is to confess to God that you are a sinner and to turn from your sinful ways and trust Jesus Christ as your Saviour) - then, Peter commands them to be baptised. (So the order here is salvation then baptism).

Philip preaching in Samaria

Acts 8:12

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.(KJV)

Notice again here, the order is: they believe first, then they were baptised. (salvation then baptism)

Philip preaching to the Ethiopian Eunuch

Acts 8:35-37

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. (KJV)

Again the order is the same, first he (The Eunuch) believes then he is baptised.

Paul and Silas and the Philippian Jailor

Acts 16:30-33

30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.(KJV)

Here is two instances, first the Phillippian Jailor believes, then his house, then both were baptised

The order we can now see is :- SALVATION - BAPTISM

This order shows us that the person who is being baptised has first understood and believed the Gospel. If this is true, how then can new born babies be baptised?

The candidate of baptism, has to firstly have believed the Gospel and to do this they must have reached an age of understanding.

The Method of baptism (why total immersion)

Secondly then, in what physical manner should we baptise. Again turning to the Bible and looking at the instances where baptism is mentioned we notice one in particular that shows us the true method of baptising. In the account of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch, we read how that the Eunuch himself, after listening to Philip preach the Gospel and believing in what he said, comes across water and asks Phillip to baptise him. Here are some important verses for us to look at, they are:

Acts 8:36-39

36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.(KJV)

Notice in v38 it records the words "...and they went both down into the water". If baptism was by sprinkling then Philip needed only to pour water upon the Eunuch's head, but instead of pouring water upon him, he brings him DOWN into the water. Then again in v39 it records the words "and when they were come up out of the water". Surely Philip would know the correct method of baptism, and that is why the Bible records this account for us, that we too will follow Philip's example.

Turning again the Bible we read in Romans 6v4:

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life".(KJV) Here the Apostle Paul compares baptism to the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, this again gives us in a symbolic form, the physical method of baptism. To be buried surely means to be cover and to cover in baptism surely must mean to immerse.

Again Paul writing to the Colossian's writes:

Colossians 2:12 "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead". (KJV) Here again the Apostle Paul symbolizes baptism in Christ's death, burial and resurrection, in fact here Paul says that we are buried in baptism. I say again how can we bury someone unless we completely cover them, or to put it another way how can we bury someone by just sprinkling them.

As the Ethiopian Eunuch went down into the water to be baptised, it symbolized Christ's Death and Burial, and as the Eunuch came up out of the water, it symbolized Christ's Resurrection from the grave.

3. When is the right time to be baptised?

Although there is no actual command about the WHEN to baptise, we can look at the accounts given to us in the Bible, and from each one we can see a pattern of the time each person was baptised.

In Acts 8:36-39, in the account of the Ethiopian Eunuch we notice: 1st came the Eunuch's conversion 2nd came the Eunuch's baptism. (notice the time gap between the two, almost immediately)

In Acts 16:30-33, the account of the Phillippian jailer, again 1st came the man's salvation, and then 2nd that same night, the jailor was baptised. (and so we could go on and list each one again, but I think you've got the picture)

All the accounts of baptism in the New Testament, follow on the footsteps of the individuals conversion to Christ, so I believe that the right time to be baptised from the scriptures is as close to the individuals conversion as possible.

I think sometimes we try to read too much into the scriptures and confuse ourselves, but I hope that this simplistic view of baptism will help you to notice that sometimes the answers to our questions are staring us in the face.

Summary

1. Why should we baptise at all?

It was a command of Christ

2. Who should we baptise, and how; adults or babies, sprinkling or immersion?

Believers (over the age of understanding) and By immersion

3. When is the right time to be baptised?

Salvation 1st then Baptism 2nd (the first step after our conversion)