

Believer's Baptism is Necessary for Spiritual Growth

The reason for including Believer's Baptism in our Back to the Basic Series is because when someone was saved in the New Testament, many times that person was immediately baptized by immersion.

There are several examples of new converts taking this first step of obedience and being baptized.

1. The first believers who made up the first church in the New Testament were baptized immediately after their conversion and joined the first church in Acts 2:41.

Peter preached "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" in 2:38. Baptism identifies a new convert with Christ. Baptism is a public *identification* to Christ and His church. One cannot be properly identified to Christ and not identified with His church.

The wedding ring is the outward symbol of our marriage. Can you be married without a wedding ring? Of course, but I am glad my wife wears her wedding rings to let everyone know she has identified with me.

2. The next example of new converts being baptized is in Acts 8:12.

The Samaritans first believed and then were baptized. That is always the order. That order is never reversed as in infant baptism. Infants cannot believe in Christ.

3. Another example is in Acts 8:26-40 where Philip leads the Ethiopian bachelor to the Lord. Once it is certain that the Ethiopian has believed, he is baptized.

4. Saul of Tarsus was converted and baptized three days later in Acts 9:9, 18.

In Acts 22:16, Ananias said to Paul, "And now why do you tarry? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Paul had already called on the name of the Lord three days earlier and so now he was to be baptized which symbolized his sins were washed away. So baptism not only speaks of identification but also *purification*. Only those whose sins have been washed away can be baptized. Titus used similar language. Titus said a person is saved "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Baptism pictures that washing.

Why Should Believers be Baptized?

1. Because Christ was baptized (Mt. 3:15-17).

This was Christ's first public act (1 Pet. 2:21). This was the righteous thing to do (Mt. 3:15). I know a pastor who was discussing the need of baptism with a believer who responded, "Well D. L. Moody was not baptized." The pastor replied, "Well Jesus was!"

2. Because Christ commanded the Church to baptize (Mt. 28:19-20; 1 John 2:3).

Baptism is not optional, just as discipleship is not optional. Baptism is not just getting the believer all wet. Baptism is immersing the believer into the life of the church in learning, growing and serving.

Part of the discipleship process is baptism. Baptism is a public *commitment* to discipleship. Most of you have already been baptized so thinking about baptism can be like attending a wedding where you hear again the vows you made to your mate and in your heart you renew those vows.

Some people today are saying, "I love Jesus but not the church." You cannot love Jesus and not love what He loves. "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25).

Some people think they cannot be committed to the church because it is not perfect. They say there are hypocrites in the church. If Jesus had one hypocrite, Judas, among His twelve apostles why should we be surprised if we have some hypocrites in the church?

Is your mate perfect? That is like saying, "I was committed to my mate when we got married but since then I found out that she is not perfect. I mean when we wake up in the morning she has bad breathe." Do you not have bad breathe in the mornings?

Baptism pictures our commitment to discipleship which happens in and through the church.

3. Because the early Church practiced baptism (Acts 2:38-41; 8:12; 36, 38; 9:18; 10:47; 16:33).

HYPERLINK "<http://drtimwhite.wordpress.com/wp-admin/F.%20F.%20Bruce>" \t "_blank" [F. F. Bruce](#) said "The idea of an unbaptized Christian is simply not entertained in the N.T." Baptism is not necessary for salvation because salvation is by grace through faith in Christ. But salvation is soon evidenced in water baptism. Look at the order in the last two examples. In Acts 10:44-48, the people "heard the word" then they "received the Holy Spirit" that is, they were converted, and then they were "baptized." In Acts 16:25, the Philippian jailor "heard" Paul and Silas, then he believed (16:31) and having believed, he and all his family who believed were baptized (16:33-34).

How Should Believers be Baptized?

1. The first reason to baptize by immersion is the meaning of the word.

The word "baptize" means to immerse. Lexicons define the Greek word *baptizo* to mean to dip, immerge, submerge.

Secular writers used the Greek word to describe a sinking ship. This is how the word is used in Scripture (Lk.16:24). There is a word for sprinkling in Scripture: *rantidzo* (1 Pet. 1:2). There is also a word of pouring in Scripture: *ekcheo* (Acts 2:17). But neither of these

words is used for baptism.

“Consider also the testimonies of three non-Baptist who led the Protestant Reformation. John Calvin, founder of Presbyterianism, declared, ‘The word baptize itself signifies immerse, and it is certain that the rite of immersion was observed by the ancient church.’ In commenting on Romans 6:3-5, John Wesley, founder of Methodism, said, ‘Buried with Him, alluding to the ancient manner of baptism by immersion.’ In speaking of the meaning of baptism, Martin Luther, founder of Lutheranism, said, ‘They ought to be entirely immersed, and immediately drawn out. For this the etymology of the name seems to demand.’ I have always appreciated Luther's practical theology when he advised the pastor to immediately draw out the person being immersed.

2. Another reason for baptism by immersion is the examples in Scripture.

John in Mt. 3:6 was baptizing “in” the Jordan River, not “beside” or “by” or “near” or “with.” Berkhof objected: “Was John the Baptist capable of the enormous task of immersing the multitudes that flocked unto him at the river Jordan” (p. 630). Grudem responded: “Certainly over a period of several days he would have been capable of immersing many hundreds of people, but it is also possible that his disciples (Mt. 9:14) assisted him with some of the baptism” (p. 967). John 3:23 says there was “much water” where John was baptizing. Much water is needed only for baptism by immersion. When Philip lead the Ethiopian bachelor to the Lord and they proceeded on their way, just as soon as they came to a body of water, the new convert wanted to be immersed (Acts 8:35-39). They needed a body of water to immerse. If they could have baptized by sprinkling or pouring they could have used the canteens of water they were carrying.

3. The final reason for baptism by immersion is the symbolism of baptism.

Baptism does have a symbolical meaning (Acts 22:16). Baptism pictures the believer's identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection in Romans 6. At salvation we were identified with Christ's death (6:3). Our obligation to live in sin is dead; not our capacity. At salvation we were identified with Christ's burial (6:4a). Our old way of life was buried at salvation (1 Pet. 3:18-22). Baptism pictures a complete break with one's past life. Noah was delivered from the old sinful world by water. For believers, baptism marks the transition to a new life, a new fellowship of friends. At salvation we were identified with Christ's resurrection (6:4b).

This point goes back to the symbolism of purification in baptism. Not only does baptism symbolize that our sins have been washed away, but we have also been empowered not to sin in our union with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

I was baptized twice before I was saved. Once after VBS I was baptized. The next time I was baptized after a revival when I went forward just because some of my friends went forward at the invitation. The next day after each of these baptisms I knew nothing had

changed. But when I was 18, and trusted Christ, I knew I was saved because my life, desires, and interests were changed and my baptism was not a mechanical ritual but a meaningful act of obedience.

These are three powerful reasons to baptize by immersion.