

Furthermore, immersion best illustrates the symbolism of our old self dying and being raised to a new life in Christ. Paul tells the Roman church, "or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (Romans 6:3,4) Immersion allows everyone to see our complete commitment to follow Jesus Christ.

Is baptism optional?

Some ask the question, "Do I really have to be baptized? The thief on the cross wasn't baptized. Maybe it's not important." The real question should be, is obedience to Christ optional? No, it's not. Jesus told his disciples, "if you love me, you'll obey my commands." Jesus fully expected that because they loved him so much, they would do what he asked. The thief on the cross was an exceptional situation, and was prior to the resurrection. He wasn't the norm. We have an opportunity to fully obey, and to disobey would be rejection of Jesus' commands.

Some may be concerned that a deceased relative was never immersed, or that many have been incorrectly taught baptism over the years. It is true that this has happened, and unfortunate. But we can take comfort in knowing that God measures the heart and knows what has been taught, and is the final authority on each person's commitment. Our job is to obey the Bible and follow Jesus' commands now, and let the grace of God take care of others who may have been unaware.

What if a believer wants to wait until later to be baptized?

Nowhere in the New Testament is there any delay in a person being baptized after coming to a saving faith. When Philip shared the good news with the Ethiopian, the Bible says, "As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the Ethiopian said, 'Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?' And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the Ethiopian went down into the water and Philip baptized him." (Acts 8:36-38)

Baptism isn't a second work of grace once they feel ready, it is an ordained rite of passage into God's family. Having it mark the beginning of our faith in Christ not only shows our true belief in Christ, but it gives us a stake in the ground when tempted to fall away. If you're delaying in that decision,

I encourage you not to put it off any longer.

If a person is sprinkled as an infant, should they be immersed to accept Jesus as Savior?

According to the Scriptures, faith in Jesus is required before baptism. The only baptism evident in the Bible is the believer's baptism. Infants aren't able to accept Christ or know what saving faith is, so the sprinkling of infants doesn't fulfill the Lord's command to "be baptized". The child should decide to follow Christ and be baptized when they understand the significance and are ready to obey God.

It is Biblical for parents to dedicate their children to the Lord, and raise them up under Christian values. Hannah is a good example of that in the Old Testament, when she dedicated Samuel to the Lord.

Conclusion

Salvation and eternity with Christ is the **greatest gift** we could ever receive. Our lives on earth are quite short, and we only have a limited number of days to choose our eternity. Don't let someone else decide your eternity, look at the Scriptures and listen to Jesus, and act on His command. You'll never regret for a minute in eternity the choice you make.

I will also add my own personal story. I was raised in a Christian home and was sprinkled by my parents as a baby. After growing up and discovering through a Bible-teaching church the facts, it was my desire to be baptized and fulfill the commands of Christ. It has changed my life dramatically, and God has become more real and personal every day as a result of making that decision. Let me encourage you to let God take you on the greatest journey of all, the journey with Jesus.

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The Blessing of Baptism



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Baptism

Baptism is an issue that has divided the church for centuries. And it still creates problems. It creates tension among families as people move from one church to another, and between friends as they try to discern what gives a person salvation. I won't pretend to know all the answers to such a deep issue, but will share with you what the Bible has taught me over the years regarding baptism.

However, before we consider this crucial subject, there are two ground rules that should be set. Journey Christian Church contains people from a wide variety of backgrounds, and each one has been taught in different ways over the years. Because of this, I want to respect each person and be conscious of the emotions that this issue can stir up.

Rule #1 – Love and Grace must cover all discussions.

Many will have different views on the issue of baptism. If the Church has been arguing about baptism for the last several centuries, there's not much likelihood it will be resolved in a small pamphlet. So when we speak about baptism or any other issue, it's important to keep Jesus' words in focus: *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* (John 13:34-35). The ultimate proof to the world that we are Jesus' disciples is our love for one another, not the form of baptism we practice.

Rule #2 – We must base our convictions only on the Bible.

There are many opinions and traditions about baptism. Often, what we believe about it has been handed down to us by our family. But what matters most is what God teaches through His Word. Jesus said, *"If you love me, you'll obey my commands."* (John 14:15) And Psalm 119:105 says that the Word is *"a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."* God promises to guide us through the Scriptures. (And I believe He has made it very clear through the New Testament about baptism.)

How do I receive eternal life?

Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 *"that whoever believes in him (Jesus) shall have eternal life."* We receive the gift of eternal life by having faith in Jesus Christ. *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."* (Ephesians 2:8,9) So it is only by believing and having faith in Jesus Christ that we can receive eternal life. Romans 10:9 says, *"If you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* Faith is proven in our confession and belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus for our sins. God looks at the heart, and knows our motives.

So when this happens, then I'm saved?

It seems too easy. Many think there must be more to it than believing in Christ. But salvation cannot be earned through good works. No matter how many good things I do in life, it will not cover over my sins. The only way is to either live a sinless life, or have a substitute pay the price for our sins. Enter Jesus! Two thousand years ago, he died on a cross as a sinless substitute for us, taking on the guilt and punishment for our sins so that we can be saved. So by having a genuine faith in Christ, we can be fully forgiven and receive eternal life with God. That's the beginning of your life with Christ.

What does genuine faith in Christ look like?

Good works and obedience are not what save us. We can never be good enough or obedient enough to get into heaven. However, it is God's grace that gives us new life, so that we can live a life of obedience to Christ. Jesus said, *"take up your cross and follow me."* (Matt. 16:24) Genuine faith means placing our priorities on serving God and investing in eternity over the desire for selfish gain in this life. Jesus told his disciples, *"every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit."* (Matthew 7:17,18) This means that in receiving the gift of God, we become good fruit-bearers, sharing the grace of Christ with those around us and reproducing His Spirit in us. If our lives are not growing in fruitfulness, then we have reason to question our genuineness as a believer.

So where does baptism fit in?

The mission statement of every Christian was given to us by Jesus as his last command. *"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."* (Matthew 28:19,20) Every person who came to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior was baptized. It is the method and the moment of re-

ceiving salvation and confirming publicly that you have made the decision to follow Christ.

Jesus was not only the authority on salvation, he gave us the model. In Matthew 3, Jesus had John baptize him, *"to fulfill all righteousness"* (verse 15), and then the Spirit of God descended on him. Jesus and his disciples baptized many people, even more than John, and it was Jesus who gave us the command to go make disciples, baptizing them.

But even more important than being obedient to Christ in baptism is the special gift that it gives the new believer. Jesus knew that we would need help to live an obedient life, so he sent the Holy Spirit to teach us and lead us in the truth. This special gift was the mark of a Christian, and always accompanied baptism in the book of Acts. It gave the believer new spiritual gifts, and opened their eyes to the truth of Scripture.

The bottom line is that baptism represented the entrance gate to a life of faith, and became the physical representation of the death, burial and resurrection of every believer as a new creation. Baptism is not a work we do, but is something done to us, as we receive the gift of God. Peter preached his first sermon on the day of Pentecost, and thousands were moved to know what to do to be saved. Peter replied to them, *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* (Acts 2:38) Repentance simply means turning around, changing our direction. By changing our direction away from sin and self-centered living, we put our focus on Christ, and receive the gift of God through baptism. Other cases in Acts that show the story of salvation include:

- Acts 2:41 – 3000 believers were baptized
- Acts 8:12 – Philip baptized the believers in Samaria
- Acts 8:36 – Philip baptized the Ethiopian when he believed
- Acts 9:18 – Saul (Paul) was baptized after receiving Christ
- Acts 16:15 – Lydia and her family were baptized
- Acts 16:31 – The Philippian jailer and family were baptized

Why do we baptize by immersion rather than sprinkling or pouring?

Simply put, we practice baptism by immersion because every example in the Bible was done through immersion. The New Testament word for baptism is baptize, which translated means to dip, immerse or submerge. For hundreds of years, this was the standard practice in the Church. Sprinkling or other methods were brought into being much later in history as a substitute for the normal practice of immersion.